Marion Näser-Lather

How sustainable can a movement be? Structural conditions and contexts of engagement

Abstract

My paper sheds light on influential factors regarding sustainability of activism on three levels: political and societal preconditions, movement structures and practices as well as individual resources and attitudes of activists related to socialization and living conditions. Drawing on approaches like resource mobilization theory, political opportunities, structural strains and emotions research, I show what factors facilitate and which hinder sustainability of activism.

Keywords: Sustainability, Movements, Activism, Longevity, Endurance

Introduction

It is a hot Monday in the summer of 2016. I'm standing in front of the train station at Stuttgart, a town in the south-western part of Germany. About one hundred activists are here with me, mainly older people, holding up signs and shouting. 'Oben bleiben, oben bleiben!' ('Stay above! Stay above!'). They are, like every week since 2010, protesting against 'Stuttgart 21' or 'S21', the plans of German national railway company 'Deutsche Bahn AG' to build an underground train station in order to substitute the old overground terminal station. At a corner, in a small kiosk, activists have collected elaborate information about the negative ecological impact of the project, as well as its technical and economical disadvantages. The kiosk is open 24 hours 7 days a week, always manned by activists eager to explain their goals to interested citizens.

In June 2024, I'm sitting in front of the TV, watching the news about the still not finished construction of Stuttgart 21. The activists of the movement against S21 are still there, protesting relentlessly every Monday, as they have for the last 15 years, with the movement already existing twice the time, its beginnings dating back to 1996.

This longevity stands in contrast to another movement I've researched: In a reaction to continuous sexism, masculinism, discrimination of women and gender-based violence in Italy, in 2011, a new

feminist movement was founded – Se Non Ora Quando (SNOQ). Yet, despite said problems continuing to be a major issue, the temporarily very successful movement (with over 150 local groups and nationwide campaigns) in 2016 has nearly ceased to exist (see Näser-Lather 2019). Other feminist initiatives with a different orientation such as Non Una Di Meno have replaced SNOQ.

What distinguishes those two protest movements? What makes activism sustainable, and what hinders sustainability? In my contribution, I want to explore this question based on approaches like resource mobilization theory, political opportunities, structural strains and emotions research as well as on current papers dealing with the question of sustainability of activism. Using these sources, I will deduce preconditions for rendering activism sustainable and constraints which hinder sustainable activism, illustrating those preconditions with examples from the movement against S21 and SNOQ, but also other movements.

For the purpose of this paper, I define sustainability of activism as continuity of engagement of activists as well as movements. Sustainability, understood in this way, includes the ability of activists for long-term engagement and of movements for longevity and reproduction by ensuring that their needs are met and by preserving their accordant regenerative capacities. In my contribution I will look only at activism within movements although of course, other forms of activism exist, e.g., in form of daily acts of resistance or, in the sense of professions which have the goal to help persons and effect change. As I will show, sustainability of activism is the product of an interaction of influence factors on three intertwined levels: Socio-political context, inner movement dynamics and individual participation.

Political and societal preconditions for continuous activism

Societal conditions determine whether movements can exist at all and whether they strive. In dictatorships it is less likely for non-governmental, politically independent movements to emerge, apart from clandestine resistance. The chance to bring about change depends very much on political opportunities, especially the openness vs. closedness of the political system (Eisinger 1973), i.e. the extent to which it is possible to introduce new interests and perspectives into political and societal decision-making processes.

Legal preconditions enable protest, such as freedom from state violence and repression as well as the right to free speech and a free press which facilitate public attention and the chances of movements to articulate themselves and make demands. Under authoritarian rule, protest against the system is not likely to be sustainable, as the reactions of the Chinese state to the democracy movement of Hong Kong show – which led to the demise of said movement. Resources like state support for activist engagement foster sustainability of movements, e.g., the possibility of donations or tax relief. Low state control of movement activities strengthens horizontal relationships between activists (Huang 2017: 239, Atwal 2009: 754).

These conditions make *independent* agency of movements possible. However, in repressive regimes, apart from clandestine resistance, activisms can exist in the open and be supported by a positive relationship or connection with the regime, as Dongya Huang (2017: 239) points out regarding activism in China. Similarly, Maya Atwal, referring to her research on the Nashi youth movement in Russia, traces its longevity back to the fact that it remains useful for the state and that positions of power are being occupied by activists, e.g. in federal political institutions (Atwal 2009: 753f.). The latter has proven to be a useful strategy also in non-repressive systems as the example of the German feminist cooperative WeiberWirtschaft shows whose members according to Silke Roth (2016: 48) had gained political positions and in this role supported the project. However, if the trust in politics is shaken – because of corruption or because it is associated with characteristics that are incompatible with the movements' values – rising to political power might even be perceived as compromising and counterproductive to social cohesion inside the movement, as was the case with the Italian feminist movement Se Non Ora Quando.

In addition to political, cultural opportunities can foster sustainability of activism on the individual level, e.g. if social expectations are in favor of voluntary work and movement participation. Strong religious values as well as class or political ethics can strengthen activists´ emotional sustainability (Cox 2009: 58). Socio-cultural and economic conditions undermining sustainable activism concern general living conditions and the feeling of having to live and act in a capitalist or patriarchal system, which can reduce hope of activists (Junge 2018: 44).

These societal framework conditions build the background of movement-related factors related to sustainability.

Development conditions, structures and practices on the movement level

Whether a movement is sustainable or not is, firstly, influenced by the reason for its existence, i.e. whether its foundation is related to a concrete occasion and whether said issue is resolved. In that case, movements often fade away. If, however, a movement deals with an ongoing problem, like the movement against S21, or with structural strains – problems inherent in the structure of society itself, like discriminations because of race, gender etc. (Smelser 1962) – the movement is more likely to survive for a longer time. The more a topic is connected to the identity of protesters, the more they should be compelled to continue their engagement. Identitarian movements therefore are more likely to last than the recently increasingly emerging project-based protest activities described by Schönberger (2014). In addition, social movements survive through diversification of topics. Different protest projects can make a movement relatable to diverse groups of activists in the long term (Atwal 2009: 754). An example are anti vaccination activists who after the end of the pandemic have resorted to other topics which are not related to health issues (Näser-Lather 2023).

Continuity of protest is facilitated secondly by availability of resources. Movement-relevant resources are financial funds, time, access to the various means of communication and transport (Cox 2009: 58). Other resources of movements named by resource mobilization theory (McCarthy and Zald 1977, Edwards/McCarthy/Mataic 2019) that are presumably relevant for sustainability are the qualifications of movement members, the division of tasks, access to information and relationship capital, i.e. access to influential stakeholders such as political and economic elites, moral capital – the ability to present one's own goals as relevant – as well as solidarity and ideological affiliation. However, each of these resources is neither necessary nor sufficient; instead, they add up, with existing resources compensating for a lack of others. Goldstein (in this volume) points out that some movements have been active for decades without donor funding.

Thirdly, collective identity seems to be important for sustaining movements because it strengthens social cohesion and helps to maintain activism. Collective identity creates 'powerful bonds between participants necessary to outweigh the potential costs of taking part in collective action.' (Brown/Pickerill Art 25). Collective identity is based on homogeneous traits and convictions distinguishing move-

ment members from outsiders such as similar interests. Homogeneity reduces difficulties in communication, coordination and organization (Huang 2017: 237, 255). Thus, heterogeneity could be detrimental to movement sustainability – while different experiences and perspectives can be a great contribution and richness for a movement, as feminist intersectional approaches propagate (see Naples 2013), there must be an underlying minimal unity of convictions and goals. Within the movement against S21, those activists who persist are relatively homogenous regarding age and the goal of their protest although the anti-S21 movement is an alliance of different movements (Staden 2020: 66f.). In SNOQ, different attitudes towards feminist theory and positioning towards political parties led to conflicts, outplaying similarities in age and education.

A strong *issue-related* identity is likely to uphold the will to protest. In this context, shared frames including common goals and values (Taylor/Whittier 1992) are important. Framing describes how individuals and groups organize, perceive and communicate about reality through interpretation, attribution and social construction of meaning. A strong explanatory frame, as well as congruency of frames, and connectivity of frames to life experiences as well as relevance for life worlds of activists should support collective identity and thus, sustainability of protest. According to Snow and Benford (1988), the amount of fulfilment of framing tasks – diagnosis, prognosis and motivation – determines mobilization and therefore should help to uphold activism. Frame extension and frame bridging, i.e., connection of different frames, serves to bridge movement internal conflicts, to attract new members and to forge alliances with other movements (Snow et al., 1986: 472) and therefore, help movements to reproduce themselves.

The necessary modification of frames, in turn, requires flexibility. The latter, understood as the ability to learn, to make compromises, to reflect success and failure of past actions and change forms of activism accordingly and to put effort into the development of movements is another pillar for ensuring their longevity, as Roth states using the example of the already mentioned feminist cooperative Weiber-Wirtschaft which was founded in the late 1980s and in 2024 still exists. At the same time, rigor – sticking to values and convictions – is necessary (Roth 2016: 42). This could be related to its being a precondition for forging collective identity.

Collective identity is created and maintained not only by frames, but by discourses and social practices which make the collective experienceable, through behavior, language, rituals, symbols, narrations like founding myths, or songs (Giesen/Seyfert 2013; Della Porta and Diani 1999). Through these elements, emotional bonds, cohesion and identity are created and being upheld. Within SNOQ, a remembrance culture existed celebrating successes of the movement, like its ability to bring hundreds of thousands of women to the streets or the resignation of Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi which SNOQ traces back, in part, to their work (Näser-Lather 2019: 11, 322).

Local SNOQ groups also engaged in community building measures like spending their spare time together and organizing social events as well as retreats for joint reflection and feminist development. Community building measures promote and maintain a network of active relationships between activists which has a liaison and mobilization function (Huang 2017: 238). In addition, SNOQ activists supported each other in situations of need (e.g., with childcare) and developed strong friendship ties over time.[1] Positive affects towards other activists can make participating in movements pleasurable in itself (Jasper 1998: 415). In addition to interpersonal relations, a sense of community can also be obtained through a felt connection to an imagined community (Anderson 1983; Naples 2013: 665) which in the case of SNOQ, was supported by a common visual corporate identity and an iconic song that was often played during demonstrations.

A rich movement culture thus supports the continuity of a movement's existence. However, a movement culture with a distinct habitus and strong personal ties can also lead to the movement not being sufficiently open to new members (also see Brown/Pickerill 2009b: 29), therefore complicating its reproduction. This was also the case in SNOQ: According to activists of SNOQ Reggio Calabria it was difficult

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1 This seems to work better with analog communication than with online communication. Bennet and Segerberg (2012) differentiate between classical movements (collective action) and movements which mainly use online communication to (inter-)act (connective action). The latter movements are said to be more fluid and not create a strong social cohesion and identity – therefore, it can be concluded that they are less likely to be sustainable. Huang found that online communication helped initiation of participation but lacked power to 'maintain the momentum'. Online communities can expand existing networks (Huang 2017: 237). Within SNOQ, online networks formed as a result of offline/analogue interactions between activists.

for new members to enter into the local operative core group because of its specificity regarding attitudes and habitus (Näser-Lather 2019: 242f.).

This leads to the fourth movement-internal factor impacting sustainability: the question of movement structure and professionalization. Flexibility, low-threshold access and a structure which allows people to participate easily and to use the movement to pursue their own interests at a micro level seem to be desirable for supporting continuous activism. This can be obtained by a minimal coordination and a national amorphous structure (Atwal 2009: 754–756). SNOQ leaders on the national level tried the opposite: to establish a hierarchical structure which was one of the main reasons for conflict and eventually, the division of the movement and the withdrawal of many local groups.

Yet, on the other hand, as mentioned above, one of the decisive factors for the longevity and success of social movements is the establishment of a strong organization that gives the social movement momentum and persistence. What movements seem to need are procedures to effectively organize protest, to cope with oppression, and, last but not least, to resolve internal conflicts. When mechanisms to cope with conflicts are not defined as in the case of SNOQ, conflicts get personal and can lead to the break-up of the movement.

Key figures within movements may be beneficial for their sustainability, because they facilitate connections between spheres of activism, assume diverse roles, and provide access to a range of resources, such as the 'broker' who participates in different NGOs, movements, and political institutions, and mediates between these different actors, or the 'knowledge producer', who supports the movement with expertise (Roth 2016: 40, 47). Within SNOQ groups, such key figures emerged in the form of local group leaders, but also as mediators of generational knowledge and memories. This role was fulfilled by older members who had been active in the feminist groups of the 1970s.

Yet, the impact of professionalization on movement sustainability seems to be ambiguous: on the one hand, continuity is strengthened by formalization and professional leadership as structures which facilitate gaining access to resources and decision processes, and provide movements with legitimacy (Staggenborg 1988, quoted from Roth 2016: 31). On the other hand, with professionalization often comes accountability to donors which can lead to a growing distance between NGOs and grassroot activists (Roth 2016: 30f.).

Moreover, those forms of organization could reduce the positive sensual-emotional qualities of activism, not leaving enough space for feelings of joy and self-efficacy, because spontaneity, and the adventure- and event-character of protest, which are important for motivation, recede into the background. If protest becomes too much of a routine or a duty, it can become void of meaning. If activists are even given a financial compensation or are given an employment contract by movements, following the theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957), this could lead to a shift in self-attributions and explanatory patterns with regard to the motivation to participate: if people get paid for voluntary work, they attribute their participation to the external reward of money and not anymore to their intrinsic motivation, leading to them being motivated less and to movement values not being their primary source of motivation. This, in turn, could prove to be problematic for collective identity. Hämmerling (in this volume) points out that the blurring of work and leisure time and promoting the fun-aspects of the latter is used by NGO fundraising organizations as a strategy for obtaining social sustainability of their paid members – however with the effect that, in the long-term, hedonistic people stay in the job while idealists tend to drop out, changing membership structure. In addition, in the perception of outsiders, being paid seems to delegitimate protest, making it appear less authentic, as it has happened in the case of the Last Generation – again, because of cognitive dissonance also working from the outside perception.

However, expense allowances or payments for activists can alleviate stress induced by lack of financial resources. Paid campaigners can distance themselves from the campaign more easily and can work fewer hours, thereby preventing burnout (Gleeson 2016, quoted from Roth 2016: 35). This facilitates long-term engagement in time-consuming forms of activism, at least, in part: working conditions in social change organizations tend to be low paid and precarious, forcing activists to in part rely on savings or support of friends (Rodgers 2010).

The stressfulness of long-term activism can lead to exhaustion, cynicism, and to burnout. Movement-internal values which can increase or alleviate this danger are the fifth factor relevant for protest sustainability. While a common positive identity, e.g., a feeling of superiority and of belonging to a moral elite, can support activists, a self-image and behavior-expectation as 'hero' can be a double-edged sword. Combined with the ideal of nonstop commitment, devotion and self-sacrifice, it is exactly

this self-image which leads activists to boast about their ability to endure and, eventually, to self-exploitation and neglection of their psychological wellbeing (Junge 2018: 13, 17, 40). A movement culture which discourages talking about emotional needs and challenges can intensify this effect (Rodgers 2010). The foundations for these behavior imperatives are influenced by patriarchy which rewards traits such as strength and self-reliance; in movements, such values often result in a 'culture of martyrdom' (Bobel 2007). The unrealistic task of living up to these standards undermines sustainable activism (Brown/Pickerill 2009b: 27f.).

Further stressors can be tensions between activists, a workload that is too high, emotional labor (see Hochschild 1979) and time pressures, e.g. in form of a perceived window of opportunity regarding goals such as the short time left before the impeding apocalypse of unstoppable global warming for the climate movement. Burnout of activists can lead to a vicious circle: When activists burn out, the movement loses their experiences and competences, causing other activists to burn out or leave the movement more likely (Junge 2018: 15–18, 48).

In recent times, guidebooks have been written providing movements with techniques for strengthening individual resilience through the construction of supportive movement cultures (e.g., Luthmann 2019). It has proven to be helpful to allow for spaces for emotions and for reflection on emotional needs, and to develop accordant techniques of self-care, emotional management and mindfulness, like yoga, meditation or intersectional feminist practices fostering inclusion, empowerment, reflexivity and cooperation across differences (Brown/Pickerill 2009b: 25f.; Gorski 2015; Naples 2013: 657).

In order to uphold activism, emotion management is important. If goals are not achieved, putting concrete hopes into specific events might lead to frustration, decreasing motivation and to activists resigning or giving up. On august 6, 2024, the Austrian branch of the Last Generation announced their dissolution because they saw no chance anymore to convince the Austrian government and society to take measures against climate change. Yet, it is important to have, as Eva Junge (2018: 45) states, 'shared utopias that function as a compass for the movement and can give us the strength and patience that is needed for the perseverance that we need'.

Specific places can support processes of strengthening resilience, such as safe spaces, which allow for critical reflections on experiences and the planning of new actions, as well as places in which feelings of

solidarity and shared meaning are created or places where new possible worlds can emerge or be imagined (Brown/Pickerill 2009b: 26, 29; Naples 2013: 661). One example for the latter is the occupation of the Placa del Sol/Madrid by the 15-M movement: the protesters lived together, practicing non-capitalist forms of organization based on solidarity, and conducted basis-democratic group talks to show alternative modes of politics and society.

What is key is however, that organizational practices and structures (in relation to emotional support, but also to hierarchies, division of work and decision processes) are aligned with values respectively ideologies of the movement. Emotions have a different significance in movements and so, related support strategies are welcomed in one context and frowned upon in another. As SNOQ activists from Reggio Calabria narrated, in the movement 'No Ponte' (against the construction of a bridge between Calabria and Sicily) men did not want to give any space to emotion work, e.g. perceiving the open display of grief as weakness. These differences also apply to organizational issues like decisions. Whereas in some movements such as the movement against S21, the process of unanimous collective decision making has been seen as tiring and time-consuming (Staden 2002: 70; Junge 2018: 56), in SNOQ, it was an expression of feminist values and therefore, an imperative for many groups. The same goes for the attempt of the national promoting committee of SNOQ to establish a hierarchy. For many SNOQ members, organizational structure was a direct expression of feminist values and therefore very important: 'the method is substance: there is a relationship between the forms of organization and the content that you want to promote. The organization defines our identity and is defined by it', as one activist stated (Näser-Lather 2019: 171). Therefore, many movement members preferred fluidity, unanimous decisions, and horizontality although in the local groups, these principles were in part not implemented in practice (Näser-Lather 2019: 247–252). In the movement against S21, a more pragmatic approach probably has contributed to the acceptance of informal hierarchies, with strategies largely being decided by two subgroups – Aktionsbündnis and Aktive Park Schützer (Staden 2020: 70–72). One explanation for this different reaction of activists could be that the movement against S21's main goal is not practicing alternatives to hegemonic culture in every aspect of daily life (as it was

for some SNOQ members), but something very simple and concrete: to stop the underground-train station project.

Sustainability of protest may also depend on a sixth factor, action repertoires of movements (Roth 2016: 36). Van Laer and Van Elst (2010) distinguish 'high vs. low thresholds' actions. Consumer behavior, donating money or signing online petitions are protest forms with a low threshold, whereas occupations, hacktivism or transnational demonstrations can be regarded as high threshold. Also, action repertoires can be categorized regarding risks and efforts. Examples for low-risk actions are peaceful, approved demonstrations, whereas illegal occupations can be classified as high-risk. Online petitions are low-cost forms of protest, time-consuming grassroots discussions are high-cost forms of protest (Tarrow 1998; Taylor and Van Dyke 2007). Low-threshold, low-risk, and low-cost action repertoires should contribute to upholding protest.

Yet, some of those types of action could have the disadvantage of being less effective and therefore, less motivating. Protest should, firstly, convey the impression of self-efficacy. Successful actions and tangible results which can be perceived give long-lasting satisfaction. This was the case when SNOQ Reggio Calabria activists recalled their support of Anna Maria Scarfò, a girl who had repeatedly been raped by criminals of the 'ndrangheta, the Calabrian mafia. SNOQ members helped the girl to cope with her experiences (Näser-Lather 2019: 130f.).

Secondly, sensual and emotional qualities and fun at protest actions are important (Betz 2016; Brown/Pickerill 2009b: 26). A SNOQ-activist stated that passion during protest actions was strongly motivating them and important for their feeling of unity. Emotions inspire and sustain activism. Helen Flam (2005) explains that the emotions cemented in society must be replaced by subversive counter-emotions, managing fear and replacing shame with pride. Ongoing commitment can be created by movements by inducing motivating emotions such as indignation and outrage (Jasper 1998: 409). In emotion work, activists learn to reject and transform ideologies of domination and related feelings (Flam 2008) which enables them to continue their engagement over a longer period of time. These processes take place not only at the level of the movement, but also at the level of the individual activists.

Individual resources

Not only indignation and outrage can motivate activism. Instead, substituting negative by positive goals and respective emotions or, as Junge (2018: 79) says, 'a "fighting-for" instead of "fighting-against" approach', can be useful to counter long-term effects of activism like exhaustion and burnout. Further factors influencing resilience and thus, the ability to uphold activism on the individual level entail biographical and social circumstances as well as reactions to conditions within movements and skills which can be practiced.

As already mentioned, emotional sustainability partly depends on whether movement participation is perceived primarily as a job, an identity, or part of the activists´ everyday culture. Other biographical factors are physical and psychical energy and vulnerabilities of activists because of age, gender, class, race or disabilities. Individual traits such as perfectionism can be stressors; developing more realistic goals can help prevent burnout (Maslach/Gomes 2006). Personal values and other emotional resources such as religious faith or class identity and skills of emotional management can provide strength (Brown/Pickerill 2009a: 2). Ongoing grievances respectively pressure of suffering by societal or work conditions can motivate for long-term activism.

What hinders continuous engagement, however, are physical, social or financial dependence on others, caring and employment responsibilities, and non-supporting family and personal networks (Cox 2009: 53, 58). If activists are born into an existing movement tradition like the peace movement which has been alive for several decades, they should be more easily compelled not to give up on activism in comparison to movements whose values are not supported by the activists' family or social network (Cox 2009: 59). Passy and Giugni point to the fact that activists whose life-spheres (activism, work and family) are congruent are more likely to stay involved in a movement than those who experience an accordant disconnection (Passy and Giugni 2000, quoted after Roth 2016: 33).

For resilience and thus, for sustainability of activism it is important that activists ascribe a positive value to their activism and that their engagement is meaningful and a source of happiness for them (Junge 2018: 15). This can be the case if participation in a movement offers a solution to a personal problem such as isolation (Cox 2009: 53). After joining the movement, one SNOQ activist experienced a boost

of self-esteem stemming from self-efficacy, social contacts and intellectual exchange with other activists and the feeling to be appreciated (Näser-Lather 2019: 114).

Yet, sustainability on the activists´ level is not only influenced by traits, biographical circumstances or movement related factors, but it can also emerge and develop in the process of struggle (Cox 2009: 54). Personal sustainability can be learned and trained. Accordant strategies are proposed by handbooks on sustainable activism, like self-care, the fulfilment of one's personal potential, reflection on one's own passions and talents and the courage to stay true to one's own essence within a movement (Luthmann 2019).

Nevertheless, in some cases activist engagement is just one biographical phase, which starts processes of development and self-education, often during youth. When that phase is finished, activist engagement might cease. Moreover, if life circumstances change, phases of 'biographical availability' (McAdam 1986) can be followed by phases where activism might be constrained by family or work commitments. In other cases, a lifelong desire of being active in movements can survive the end of concrete movements: as Goldstein (in this volume) points out, the will to engage in activism can be transferred from one movement to others when a movement loses its attractiveness.

Conclusion

In short, the factors impacting sustainability of activism are, on the society level, political opportunities like legal enabling conditions in the form of a democratic constitutional state or, in authoritarian regimes, cooperation with the state, and cultural opportunities, such as social expectations promoting activism.

On the movement level, a whole number of influential factors seem to be relevant, be it current issues or structural strains, movement resources, a strong collective identity, a structure which is adapted to the movement's ideology, values supporting resilience, and action repertoires which counter costs with rewards and are meaningful to activists.

Besides this, on the individual level, resilience and emotion management as well as personal (financial and social) resources seem to be key.

Applying these considerations on factors that promote vs. hinder sustainability to specific movements, in the case of the movement against S21, it turns out that activists of the core group are mostly older people for whom their protest has become a central source of meaningfulness for their lives, as protesters told me when I was present at their demonstration in Stuttgart. Most of them being middle-class pensioners, they have time and money to sustain themselves and to continue their protest actions which are largely peaceful demonstrations. Their goal has unified them. The movement has positioned itself as part of climate justice activism, a frame bridging which has generated broad societal support. At the 700th demonstration against S21, on March 19 2024, not only 2000 protesters, but also influential persons such as the chairman of Environmental Action Germany, as well as union leaders, politicians and celebrities attended.

In contrast, whereas at the beginning the Italian feminist movement SNOQ was a beacon of hope for many women from different backgrounds and was supported by many prominent figures from unions, associations, and the media, increasing disputes over feminist concepts, the political orientation of the movement and its structure led to its split up and demise. In addition, pressing issues like the situation of LGBTQI*-persons were not addressed sufficiently by SNOQ – a gap which was then filled by Non Una Di Meno.

Therefore, although sustainability of social movements and protest is possible, a large number of factors are relevant, all of them interacting and influencing each other in complex ways. This interplay, in turn, moderates their importance: If one compelling respectively nudging factor is prominent enough for a movement or individual activists, the others do not need be present or become less important. Some of those factors can be influenced by appropriate knowledge, but others emerge and evolve through interactional dynamics that are not under the control of the activists, making the survival of a movement an effect of an entanglement of micro- meso- and macro-interactions.

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