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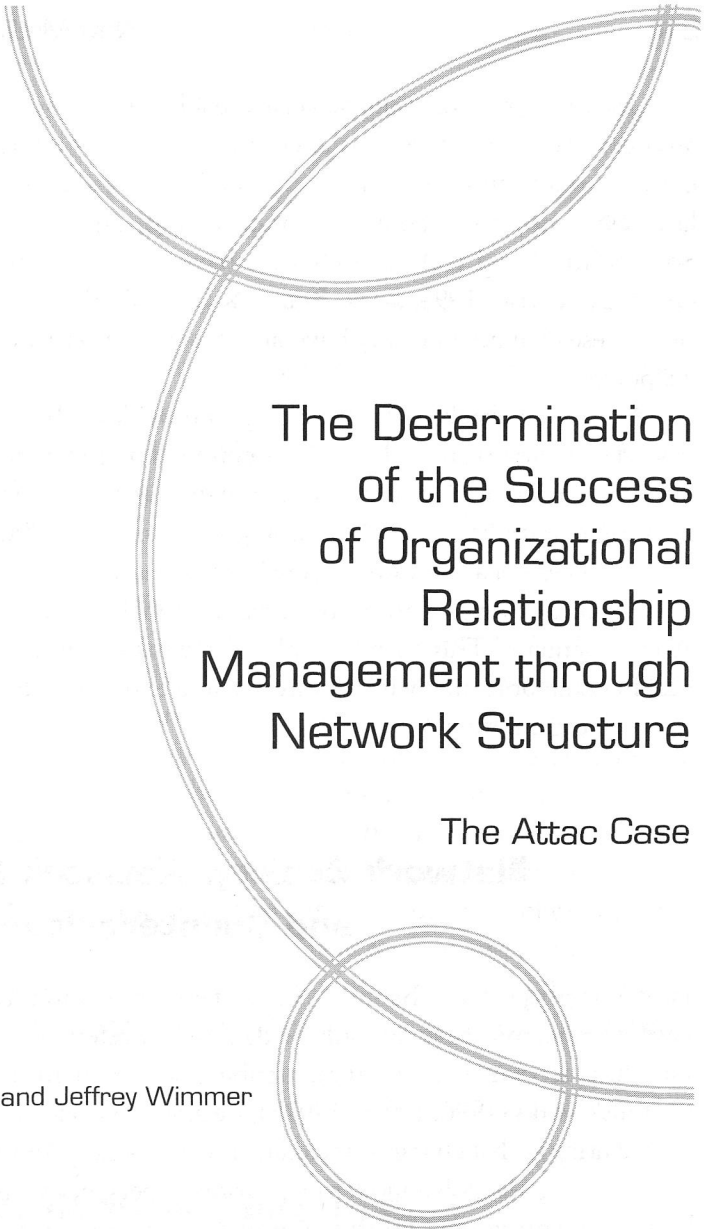
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# The Determination of the Success of Organizational Relationship Management through Network Structure

The Attac Case

Romy Fröhlich and Jeffrey Wimmer

*Upon analyzing previous research in the fields of organizational communication and public relations, one gap can clearly be identified: It is the correlation between networks and the success of organizational relationship management, about which we still know very little. This chapter aims at making a contribution toward answering this question. Firstly, we will define a theoretical framework for the analysis of the requirements of organizational relationship management in the context of sociopolitical and technical change. In connection with that, Castells's concept of the network society plays a key role. Secondly, a concrete case study will be presented: The success in organizational relationship management of Attac—an organization from the field of the so-called counterculture—is analyzed in terms of its very specific network attributes. Our findings show that, in spite of the lack of classic resources, non-established organizations like Attac are capable of achieving successful long-term communication in the political public sphere if they take advantage of sociopolitical and technical change by implementing their own communication strategy and by relying on the advantages of a network organization.*

Organizational communication and public relations constitute the connection between an organization and its environment by addressing the relevant groups of an organization both internally and externally, thus establishing a successful network. However, over the last few years, the operating conditions of organizations have radically changed. Sociopolitical and technical changes have played key roles within this process (Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994; Beck, Bonss, & Lau, 2003). From the viewpoint of communication, these changes not only have an impact on *external* publics, but also influence *internal* publics.

Against this background, this chapter provides a theoretical framework to serve as the basis for an empirical analysis of the connection between success in organizational communication and organizational structure. In our case, we refer specifically to the structure of an organizational network. In doing so, Castells's (1996, 1997a, 1997b) general sociological analysis of a "network society" is introduced and, by example, transferred to the specific subject of investigation: the organizational communication and public relations of Attac<sup>1</sup> Germany. This chapter explores to what extent Attac Germany has achieved success in communicating with its internal and external publics, particularly as a result of its network organization.

## **Network Society, Network Structure, and Counterculture**

From our perspective, the interrelation between organizational communication and successful communication can only be deduced by referring to theories of social change that take into account the structural attributes inherent in modern society. On the basis of Castells's works (1996, 1997a, 1997b), we argue that societal change and the preconditions contributing to that change—including the role of new communication technologies—point to a new stage of global modernity. Castells's perspective is based on the realization that, by implementing new information and communication technologies (ICTs), society's material basis has fundamentally changed. Instead of labor, land, and capital, nowadays, information and communication are vital factors in the process of creating value.

Castells's main hypothesis states that our modern society is situated around the opposing terms of the "net" and the "self" (1996) to an ever-increasing extent. This means the (Inter)net reflects the fact that the most powerful processes in our economic, political, and media systems are increasingly organized within flexible networks, thereby becoming more and more independent of local and localized realities. To put it in other words, the logic of networks, the "space of flows," is growing in its dominance of the "space of places," which describes the physical reality in which we live (Castells, 1996, p. 412). The space of flows can be thought of as having at least three layers, which Castells uses as his three dimensions of analysis:

1. *Technical*: the circuit of electronic devices that forms the technological infrastructure of the networks.
2. *Geographical*: the topology of the space formed by its nodes and hubs. Hubs are defined by the networks but link them to specific places with specific social and cultural conditions.
3. *Social*: the spatial organization of the people using the network.

This “faceless” functional logic simultaneously undermines the growing number of institutions that have significantly contributed to the development of identity and meaning (Giddens, 1991; Castells, 1997b). In particular, for political organizations, this fact leads to further requirements, since the changed lifestyle of its members makes it necessary to have a different (organizational) policy on identification and non-hierarchical structures (e.g., Bennett, 2003).

What are the repercussions of this change on the political systems? Developments in the field of ICTs, as well as the global and social dominance of capitalism, have led to a kind of new “counterculture” in this area (Castells, 1996). Counterculture is a collective name that includes most nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), new social movements (NSMs)—the best example being the anti-globalization movement—and media (i.e., blog) activists. Counterculture has its roots in the NSMs of the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., student, peace, and environmental movements) from which many organizations have since distanced themselves. At the same time, the traditional differentiation between politics (i.e., state) and non-politics (i.e., all the rest of societal areas) is becoming more blurred (Beck, 1992). Consequently, the political public sphere and its actors are increasingly being decentralized and diversified. For this reason, single collective actors within the counterculture are more capable of participating in the modulation of society outside the official stage of political communication.

## **Counterculture and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)**

Castells focuses on the revolution of new technologies, that is, the emergence of ICTs and computer-mediated communication: intranet and Internet, e-mail, mailing lists, community networks, Internet telephony, videoconferences, virtual communities, etc. These technologies have contributed to the development and maintenance of the political public sphere and political actors (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999). Counterculture organizations (CCOs) rely heavily on Internet communication. One well-known example is the protest against the 1999 World Trade Organization conference in Seattle, which had worldwide media repercussions. New media, in particular, were used to organize the protest (Smith, 2001; Wall, 2002). Besides having the ability to mobilize the masses (Coudry & Curran, 2003), ICTs also provide new venues of articulation for the counterculture (cf. Keck & Sicking, 1998; Siapera, 2004).

ICTs are fundamentally different from classic mass media and internal organizational media (Jenkins & Thorburn, 2003). The new characteristics are based on the fact that communication can be transmitted on a network basis (hypertext). Moreover, it can be combined with a multitude of media (multimedia), and, furthermore, recipients are capable of changing it in any way (interactivity). Digital applications provide a way of reducing distance and time in cyberspace. On a theoretical basis, they enable a nearly limitless amplification of internal and external publics connected to an organization and thereby combine connectivity with interactivity. In this manner, organizational use of the Internet offers possibilities for increasing information.

Though new technical possibilities create new communication frameworks for political organizations, the basis of this thinking is not a theory of technological determinism. That is, the complex communication process cannot be reduced to the exchange of data. Hence, in answering the question about implications and consequences of the *digitalization* of organizational communication and public relations, above all, the specific *context* of it has to be considered. In other words, what are the consequences of communication management in political organizations in light of the changes discussed thus far?

To answer this question, an analysis of CCOs is of special interest because, for various reasons, they have to prove themselves much more vehemently in the global market of opinions than do political actors who are already established, such as executive offices and political parties on national and international levels. Being actors outside of the political mainstream, CCOs have fewer resources at their disposal, including power, employees, and money. Moreover, their access to mass media is disadvantaged if, for example, they do not have a contact person for journalists. This was true for Attac Germany at the time of its foundation. On the other hand, by acting or communicating in a way that too obviously resembles established organizations, CCOs take the risk of losing the generally high moral bonus they enjoy with organizational members and the general public sphere.

All in all, ICTs influence the possibilities for organizational communication and public relations: firstly, by redefining channels and barriers of communication and, secondly, by allowing individuals to have broader reach through media use. Digitalization describes the process in which more and more people can be reached ever faster and easier. Therefore, publics linked to this development are theoretically becoming more open. For organizations, internal, as well as external, publics can be addressed faster. Ultimately, established and non-established political organizations reach more people than was imaginable a decade ago.

## Case Study: Attac Germany

Although it was founded in France, Attac has been conceived since its beginnings as an organisation from the counterculture, which is indicated by a number of structures. From this point of view, three aspects are constitutive: Attac enables political processes of learning and experiencing, consolidates various types of emancipatory politics in discussions and common actions, and, in turn, leads to the possibility of acting jointly in commonly defined political fields.

On the basis of the theoretical background presented, the question arises, *What impact do the new ICTs and a network-based organizational structure have on the success of both the internal and external communication of Attac as a prominent representative of the field of counterculture?*

In concrete terms, three organizational areas of Attac Germany have to be taken into account when answering our research question: its organizational structure, internal communication, and external communication.

Referring to the present cognition about the correlation between organizational structure and organizational communication processes, it is to be assumed that a decentralized organizational structure—as is the case with Attac—has a rather negative effect on smooth and effective internal and external communication (cf. Hall, 1997). Our study will show that, surprisingly, this is not the case with Attac. We also demonstrate ways in which modern ICTs are influencing this process.

According to Castells's (1996) three dimensions of analysis, our interpretation of the findings incorporates three contextual levels: (a) the *technical* context providing the real and virtual dimensions of organizational communication, (b) the *geographical* context referring to the spatial nodes of an organizational network, and (c) the *social* context of an organization, referring to the societal framework of an organization. In a network society, these three fundamental dimensions are subjected to powerful changes and therefore also pose sizeable challenges for the field of organizational research (cf. Hiebert, 2005).

*Design of the case study.* As mentioned, hardly any systematic studies dealing with this research question exist. Studies carried out to date have either focused on specific successes of mobilization in connection with ICTs from the viewpoint of social movement research (e.g., Couldry & Curran, 2003; Donk, Loader, Nixon, & Rucht, 2005) or on the basis of public relations theories dealing with external organizational relationships (e.g., Guiniven, 2002; Taylor, Gabriel, Vasquez, & Doorley, 2003). Thus, we are pursuing our scientific interest in this topic in an exploratory manner.

We chose a multi-step methodological approach: In analyzing Attac's organizational structure and internal communication, we primarily refer to already gathered facts about Attac's contextual dimensions and reinterpret them within the framework of the previously outlined theoretical background and the research question.

In order to measure the success of Attac's external communication, we first conducted a content analysis of German media coverage of the Group of Eight (G8) Summits over the years from 1975 to 2001, followed by an analysis of Attac's public relations materials for the media. In doing so, we took into account each time Attac was mentioned as the author of a statement and/or subject of a media topic.

Our research included two of the most respected national German newspapers: the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ) (the so-called newspaper of Southern Germany) and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) (the so-called general newspaper of Frankfurt), both of which are renowned within the German media landscape. The SZ is considered to be a liberal newspaper, and the FAZ is viewed as conservative.

We first used content analysis to measure established political actors. These included all organizations (and their representatives) that were named in media coverage as having

been *directly* involved in the political decision-making process, such as executive offices and political parties on a national and international level (e.g., the German Government, the Italian Foreign Ministry).

Secondly, we analyzed the frequency of CCOs mentioned in media coverage over the twenty-six-year time frame. These included organizations and individual representatives from the field of counterculture, such as NSMs, protest parties, NGOs, single activists, and, in particular, Attac itself.

As a third step, we carried out a more profound analysis, within the means of *framing analysis*, with open coding, to investigate the question of what influence the special kind of networking between Attac and journalism had on media coverage of the 2001 Genoa Summit. Our analysis included Attac's press releases as well as commentary articles within relevant media coverage of the summit. We selected commentary articles—instead of ordinary news and reports—because commentary is more capable of reflecting medial frames. That is, in this media genre, journalists are generally able to express their own opinions on political issues.

In addition to SZ and FAZ, the alternative daily newspaper *taz* was included in this framing analysis.<sup>2</sup> The *taz* is politically situated left of centre (even more so than SZ). It therefore provides unique (if not critical) angles and opinions on the issue of globalization.

## Results

*The network structure of Attac Germany and its internal communication.* Attac's organizational structures have been established on a national basis in over forty countries; it has been in Germany since 2000. Due to the fact that one of Attac's main characteristics is its conception as a movement, one of Attac's main aims is the development of a broad-based establishment within the population. Attac includes two different models of membership: individuals and organizations. In most European countries, members are not only individuals, but also organizations from other parts of societal politics (e.g., unions).

In Germany, initially, Attac mainly had the character of a network of organizations, which has many advantages. At present, Attac Germany consists of more than 250 local initiatives. In particular, Attac can rely to a large extent on the financial, human, and content resources of its members. In addition, the membership of big and well-established organizations—such as the German workers' union ver.di<sup>3</sup> or the ecological organization Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland (BUND, League for the Environment and Nature Conservation, Germany)—increases the political weight of the network organization.

Although founded in France, Attac has always been conceived as a *transnational* organization that is organized by a number of different structures. Attac has resisted the establishment of a centralized headquarters. Apart from an annual international meeting, a relatively loose form of exchange of experience and planning is assured through bimonthly European meetings. Although Attac is a global operator, its core clearly lies in Europe, where more than 80% of the associated members are established.

Attac describes its organizational philosophy as one that includes guiding principles of a pluralistic view; its conception as a movement; open, decentralized, participatory, and flexible organizational structures; plurality of methods and instruments; and, finally, its search for cooperation and alliances.<sup>4</sup> From an organizational communication and public relations standpoint, Attac's philosophy is normative. That is, Attac endeavors to build a platform that enables political communication while, at the same time, it provides a discussion forum for different political streams to find collaborate ways of acting in areas of shared political interest.

We examined the most vital organizational media for Attac's internal communication. Various mailing networks connect communications of Attac's 250 groups existing on local, national, and international levels. Its Web page, e-mails, and open (to everyone), as well as closed (available only to organizational members), mailing lists have also had an important impact on internal communication by structuring organizational communication.

The links, or connections, of the German Attac Web site to other Web sites reflected two findings: (a) a strong *international network structure* with other Attac organizations in, for example, France, Austria, and Italy and (b) a strong *national network structure* with German membership organizations such as *ver.di*, *World, Economy, Ecology & Development* (WEED),<sup>5</sup> and *Naturschutzbund Deutschland* (NABU).<sup>6</sup>

Le Grignou and Patou (2005) illustrate the prominent role of electronic media for Attac's organizational communication: "Anyone who wants to be committed to ATTAC [sic] has no choice but to be connected to the Internet" (p. 170). Bearing this in mind, it is not surprising that Attac's first employee in Germany was a Webmaster. Apparently, from its beginning, the organization was conscious of the importance of digitalized network communication for its existence and development.

However, the question arises of whether this emphasis on new media is also reflected at an organizational level; that is, is it shared by organizational members? In 2001, about 50% of the members and donors were generated via the Internet (Schewe, 2003). An analysis of the daily use of media by Attac's membership showed a very strong affinity toward use of the Internet (Guttenberg et al., 2002, pp. 67–71). Compared to other organizations, Attac's members display a very high rate of Internet usage in the political field.

In contrast to other examples in counterculture, Attac's goal is not to focus on the articulation of a particular political philosophy but rather to supply a technical framework for communication to be filled by the members of Attac themselves. The organization's undogmatic attitude includes openness to new issues, all of which were presented on the Web page. In this way, Attac has transformed from being a single-issue group<sup>7</sup> to a network of concrete political claims flowing from a broad-based approach to the economic aspects of globalization (e.g., financial markets), the world trade system, and activities of transnational enterprises.

According to Le Grignou und Patou (2005), amongst others, one reason for this transformation lies in the way Attac's members communicate digitally. In discussing results gathered from a survey of Attac's members in France, Le Grignou and Patou referred to the Web page, for example, as a "documentary goldmine," being "very convenient, full of good doc-

uments" for the activists (p. 170). The Web page's and mailing list's content consisted mainly of local issues and interests, thereby enabling Attac's organizational agenda to diversify rapidly and become more complex. This approach was likewise observed on Attac's German Web page and mailing lists (e.g., criticism of the German labor market policy and discussions of anti-Semitism and German military intervention abroad).

Thus, Bennett ascribes this process to the logic of "click here" (2003, p. 155) inherent in open computer networks. Attac's German Web page allows the most diverse topics to be easily and rapidly shared between numerous local groups. Yet, it is precisely this characteristic that also causes problems of organizational and communicative importance, which are clearly expressed by one of Attac's representatives surveyed by Le Grignou and Patou: "The main problem for Attac today concerns the unification of the movement and the way to give it a more unified content" (2005, p. 172).

*The network structure of Attac Germany and its external communication.* What, then, is the influence exerted by Attac's network structure on the emergence and quality of its media coverage? We defined Attac's media response as a central indicator of the success of its public relations efforts. For this reason, we measured Attac's German media coverage in regard to the G8 Summits held between 1975 and 2001.

At the beginning, the World Economic Summits of the G8 states consisted of annual meetings coordinating the economic policies of the greatest industrial nations. Later on, topics including the energy crisis, drug trafficking, and current questions about globalization and terrorism were included.

Considering our research question, the following is of particular interest: Before 1992, counterculture actors were very rarely mentioned. However, from 1992 onward, they have been mentioned more frequently in media coverage. Since 1999, they have become a regular and inherent part of the media coverage. In the analysis, we found that Attac was mentioned the most frequently of all CCOs. Furthermore, it was the only CCO that was mentioned several times in media coverage of the World Economic Summits in two consecutive years. Attac was the main subject of reporting in four articles in the year 2000 and in six articles in 2001.

What factors can explain the media coverage? Besides the usual factors influencing media coverage, such as political factors<sup>8</sup> or media events (e.g., scandals), we were particularly interested in *organizational* factors, especially those deriving from Attac's organizational network structure.

In searching for reasons to explain an increase in media coverage of counterculture issues, one must recognize that, over the course of our study's examination period, counterculture communication had been extensively professionalized. That is, organizations were implementing professional tactics of public relations and media relations to a greater degree than was the case in the 1970s and 1980s. In addition, CCOs were holding media events more frequently over this span of time. In doing so, CCOs adapted to production routines within the mass media system. This is especially true for Attac.<sup>9</sup> Its public relations sector is the only organizational area that is regulated centrally; all others are decentralized.

Press coverage during the 2001 Genoa Summit appeared to be the turning point. Attac was, at that time, the first organization from the counterculture to have a rather elaborate and professional Web page about globalization issues. It also established designated press contacts from the very beginning. Journalists were invited to accompany Attac Germany members on the bus en route to the Genoa conference. Once on location, members of the press had a short message service (SMS)<sup>10</sup> providing a continuous stream of up-to-date news about occurrences at the summit. Attac's public relations work rapidly led to new relationships with the press, and the Web page received more publicity when journalists recommended the site as a research tool for interest groups. In turn, a specific mailing list was created, with the needs of journalists in mind, to provide journalists with relevant information (Kolb, 2004).

We analyzed Attac's success in *establishing network structures* with journalists, which it began during the 2001 summit, in more detail using a qualitative framing analysis.<sup>11</sup> Media coverage and Attac's press releases during the 2001 Genoa G8 Summit were analyzed for themes of globalization. According to Entman (1993), three frames need to be differentiated: (a) diagnostic frames (identification of the problem), (b) prognostic frames (proposed solution), and (c) mobilization frames (calls to action). Referring to these three frame types, Table 1 contrasts the frame types analyzed in our research.

In the time preceding the summit (anticipating phase) and during the summit (summit phase), the press drew a fairly identical picture analyzing the problem of globalization (diagnostic framing). Globalization was portrayed as a multilayered process involving positive and negative consequences for different societal spheres (complexity). However, on the contrary, Attac's public relations regarding globalization during the anticipating phase focused on the negative impacts of economic liberalization, or neo-liberalism.<sup>12</sup> During the summit, particularly in light of the impression that violent incidences between police and protestors were making, Attac communicated a negative message of repression: Globalization in a totalitarian system was being controlled by a specific urge for power. This topic was particularly interesting for the press due to police assaults on protestors and the delayed,

**Table 1: Dominant Frames within the Media Coverage of the 2001 Genoa Summit and within Attac's Press Releases**

	Anticipating Phase	Summit Phase	After-Summit Phase
<b>Diagnostic Framing</b>			
Press	Complexity	Complexity	Repression
Attac's Public Relations	Neo-liberalism	Repression	Neo-liberalism
<b>Prognostic Framing</b>			
Press	Business as usual	—	Business as usual
Attac's Public Relations	Acceleration	Business as usual	Business as usual
<b>Mobilization Framing</b>			
Press	—	Concerted action	—
Attac's Public Relations	Financial reform	—	Jurisdiction

somewhat procrastinated, clarification and investigation of these assaults on the part of Italian authorities hesitant to investigate their policemen.

In the after-summit phase, all three of the analyzed newspapers emphasized the repressive elements connected with the problem of globalization. For the journalists, links to this frame were found in Attac's press releases, as well as in actual events (i.e., the suppression of political and judicial enlightenment about the violent attacks and the policemen's assaults in Genoa). This could explain why, within the diagnostic frame, the media drew heavily on information from Attac's public relations materials.

Despite varying political orientations across the analyzed newspapers, each had a common forecast for the future (prognostic framing): They believed that, similar to other globalization controversies, in the end, the predominant political interests—and not those from counterculture—would be considered (business as usual).

In contrast, Attac warned the public in its public relations materials during this phase that, without precautionary measures, globalization would escalate endlessly (acceleration). However, this frame created by Attac was not adopted by the press. During the summit, the newspapers refrained from giving a forecast; rather, they focused on the demonstrations instead of proposed solutions. Although, in this phase, Attac began by offering a specific solution, it eventually adopted the prior journalistic attitude of the anticipating phase: one of business as usual. During the after-summit phase, the daily newspapers and Attac agreed on this prediction.

In answering the question of how to handle globalization in concrete terms, and how to deal with its consequences (mobilization framing), Attac's dominating mobilization frame in the pre-summit phase was radical financial reform, the central issue of which was the Tobin tax. However, during the summit phase, statements in Attac's press releases relating to mobilization were inconsistent; that is, there was no primary action proposed.

And what about the media? During the anticipation phase, the analyzed newspapers displayed different mobilization frames, depending on the political orientation of the newspaper. During the summit phase, journalists' opinions were more consistent, calling for a common solution to the globalization problem (concerted action).

In the after-summit phase, Attac offered a more consistent, though different, proposed action. It made the more moderate suggestion of pursuing a regulatory and judicial framework to deal with the consequences of globalization (jurisdiction). However, this change in Attac's approach was too late in respect to media coverage. Thus, after the summit, the daily newspapers held to their own established views on judging the globalization phenomenon. A dominating frame could not be identified in the media coverage. Therefore, Attac's proposed solutions to the problem were not reflected by the response of the media.

In conclusion, in the field of mobilization framing, Attac could not register any communicative media success, since the journalists chose to give prognoses, future scenarios, and proposed solutions independent of Attac's point of view. This could be due to the fact that, with respect to mobilization frames, Attac failed to offer consistent statements and a main proposed course of action. This effect is well known from the analysis of media coverage on political election campaigns: When political players choose to communicate

unfocused positions, they run a greater risk that related media coverage will not correspond to their own perspectives (Fröhlich & Rüdiger, 2006).

## Interpretation and Conclusion

The findings of our content analysis comparing counterculture and established political actors point to a relatively weak media response to the counterculture from a quantitative point of view. Obviously, CCOs have difficulties in breaking through communication and information barriers set up by established political actors. One reason is CCOs' comparative lack of financial resources and insufficient communication know-how. The only exception to the rule is Attac Germany, both in a quantitative as well as in a qualitative way, because it has established a functional—and somehow professional—organizational relationship management practice.

Since Attac in Genoa very seldom organized local press meetings or conferences and instead mainly relied on new decentralized ways of communication with the media, our findings lead us to the assumption that Attac's Web page, mailing lists, and SMS activities formed a vital node between internal and external communication.

Communication creates essential structures and networks within an organization, thus providing a platform for performance and action not previously experienced. By no means do we owe this insight only to the digitalization of communication via ICTs. However, technical and sociopolitical changes have also changed the general public sphere and its boundaries (cf. Calhoun, 1992). This is also true for the communication of political organizations; that is, due to the use of ICTs, the boundaries between internal and external communication are becoming more blurred.<sup>13</sup>

Analysis of the case study of Attac Germany leads to the assumption that CCOs facing this blurring, as a consequence, can now achieve greater communication successes than previously possible. This, in all probability, is because CCOs rely on strong internal communication between their members (networking) fostered through the possibilities of new media like the Internet. The success of Attac's organizational structure likely traces back to its founding as a virtual association utilizing the advantages of digitalized communication.

ICTs have contributed to reducing communication costs, thereby establishing more flexible structures that facilitate interaction between numerous decentralized and localized Attac groups. Additionally, ICTs have also significantly changed communication with journalists and the media. In particular, Attac's success in external communication (media response) with diagnostic frames could be an indicator of the fact that the organization applied new forms of digitalized communication with the media (Web page, SMS, and e-mail). In doing so, it improved relationships with journalists and balanced the weaknesses of a decentralized organizational structure.

Furthermore, perhaps due to its *transnational* network structure, Attac gained a high credibility bonus on the side of the media in comparison to other organizations from the field of counterculture. Journalists attach great importance to authentic, independent, and

locally based information in diagnostic framing. In particular, Attac's transnational network structure related to globalization makes Attac one of the few organizations of the counterculture that has been able to establish itself globally.

Attac defines itself as a type of organization "situated between being a network, NGO, and movement" and fights for a pluralistic world (Attac, 2006). Interestingly, Attac's characteristics of being multidimensional and very open regarding new topics and organizational structure do not appear to have had a negative impact on its success to date. This is actually contrary to previous findings on communication problems of decentralized organizations. The data gathered in this study seemingly confirm the advantages of a flexible and decentralized organizational structure—provided that it is combined with the advantages of communicating via modern ICTs.

However, being a mixture of a network *and* an organization has led to conflicts of interest between Attac and its member organizations, especially in those cases where Attac has threatened to undermine the political importance of its member organizations. Furthermore, despite its network structure, Attac is still some distance from reaching its (normative) claim of providing an open communication platform. Within the framework of internal communication, not only access to the organization, but also promotion within Attac's organizational hierarchy requires detailed technical knowledge of the application of digitalized communication. Certain forms of communication, such as open mailing lists and an established discussion forum, display a tendency for information overload. For this reason, Attac's members have complained about the difficulties in reducing this problem (cf. Le Grignou & Patou, 2005).

We have argued that reviewing and developing Castells's recent work on the concept of a network society may help us to better understand the increasingly important role of new ICTs and networks in organizational communication and public relations. To take this study further, our analysis would also have to include other representatives from the field of counterculture as well as be extensively compared to established (political) organizations.

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### For consideration

- 1 To what extent do new information and communication technologies add credibility to counterculture organizations and differentiate them from more dominant political actors?
- 2 What new challenges are arising through social and technical changes that have to be met by (a) internal and (b) external communication management of political organizations?
- 3 How can nascent as well as established political organizations reach (a) short-term and (b) long-term communication objectives in the political public sphere?
- 4 How can the relationship between media and activists be described?
- 5 What are the changing needs of various organizational publics that political organizations should take into account when planning communication activities?

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## Notes

1. The name *Attac* is derived from *Association pour la Taxation des Transactions pour l'Aide aux Citoyens* (Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions to Aid Citizens).
2. For a more detailed description please refer to Wimmer (2004).
3. The name *ver.di* is an abbreviation of *Vereinigte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft* (United Union for the German Service Sector).
4. More information available at: <http://www.attac.de/interna/selbstverstaendnis011101.pdf> (German language document, retrieved June 6, 2006).
5. “Founded in 1990 as an independent non-governmental organisation with offices in Berlin and Bonn. WEED is campaigning for the globalisation of democracy, justice, human rights and environmental sustainability” (WEED, n.d.).
6. German Society for Nature Conservation.
7. As can be seen from the name *Attac*, the first and only political claim for a long period of time was the implementation of the so-called Tobin tax, that is, a tax on exchange transactions applied to all businesses involved in money exchange, making them less lucrative and thereby decreasing an over-liquidity of the money exchange markets while, at the same time, collecting a vast amount of money on an international level to be spent on developmental aid programmes.
8. That is, media system orientation and political decision makers (elite personalities and elite organizations). See Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Østgaard, 1965; Rosengren, 1970; Schulz, 1982; and Staab, 1990.
9. For a detailed overview refer to Kolb (2004).
10. Text messages sent by mobile phone.
11. For a detailed description of the methodological proceedings, please refer to Wimmer (2004).
12. Since the 1990s, activists have used the word *neo-liberalism* for the negative effects of global market liberalism (capitalism) and for free-trade policies.
13. Consequently, the majority of *Attac*’s local groups (amounting to a number of more than 250 units) has their own publicly accessible Web pages connected with the main Web page.

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