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How European Protest Transforms Institutions of the Public Sphere

Discourse and Decision-Making in the European Social Forum Process

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How European Protest Transforms Institutions of the Public Sphere

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Abstract

Against the background of the alleged democratic deficit of EU institutions, this case study explores how politicization and emerging transnational public spaces in European protest movements innovate existing practices of discursive or grassroots deliberative democracy in national social movements. I studied the European Social Forum (ESF) process, a transnational participatory democracy platform created by civil society groups and social movement organizations. I explored discourse and decision-making in the small-scale European Assemblies in which hundreds of activists have met six times a year since 2002 to organize the ESFs, and form campaigns on issues such as global and social justice, peace, climate change, migration, health, or education. Comparing activists' democratic norms and discourse practices in these frequently occurring European Assemblies with social forum assemblies at the national level in Germany, Italy and the UK, I arrived at a surprising result: European Assemblies reflect a higher degree of discursive inclusivity, dialogue and transparency in decision-making and discussion compared to national social forum assemblies. In this paper I discuss structural, strategic and cultural changes that occur in the process of a Europeanization "from below", that is, when social movement activists work together transnationally across a certain time period. I argue that European protest as a form of contentious Europeanization has developed new social practices and actors that innovate existing practices of participatory democracy at the national level, showing the relevance of social movements to democratize European integration.

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1. Introduction[1]

This paper discusses the question of emerging transnational publics (della Porta/Caiani 2007; Fraser 2007), and multilingual discursive democracy experiments in European protest movements, which touch upon a politically and theoretically relevant key area of European integration. Research on the European public sphere and mass media has seen (national) language barriers in Europe as an explanatory factor for the lack of civil society participation in public debates on the European Union (EU). Viewing democracy and solidarity as closely linked to the nation state and its cultural, historical and linguistic community of fate and solidarity, scholars have warned of the democratic deficit in European integration (Gerhards 1993; Grimm 1995; Kielmannsegg 1996; see also Offe 1998). Recent theoretical and empirical work though suggests that the EU's multilingual political culture and democracy is capable of including citizens in emerging transnational public debates (van de Steeg 2002, 2006; Kantner 2004, 2008; Nanz 2006; Risse forthcoming). However, this valuable work has left open the role of linguistic difference in the Europeanization of protest politics as an increasingly relevant arena of politicization. In an intensified context of transnational exchange throughout and within European integration, people's asymmetric *transnational linguistic capital* (Gerhards forthcoming) may render it very hard to construct a democratic discursive public space beyond the nation state (Fraser 2007). What this paper brings in is a bottom-up perspective to the European public sphere. Responding to the multilingual challenge, activists in social movements seem to integrate the linguistic challenge in their practices of democracy in arenas such as the ESF process: Today, social forum organizers in Europe, Latin America, and Africa hold their discussions and decision-making in four or more languages implemented by linguistic broker groups (see e.g. Doerr 2008). However, more structural challenges are located in a lack of material, organizational and institutional resources, and considerable geographic distances (Bédoyan 2004; Andretta/Doerr 2007; Kavada 2007).

The emerging local, national and transnational social forums that form together the *European social forum process* understand themselves as discursive, or deliberative democratic arenas of alternative reflections on Europe and EU policies within the *movement for global justice* (della Porta 2005).[2] Over several years of working together, activists, unionists and party members who created the ESF process have addressed their critique at European policy makers and institutions, and mobilized thousands of participants across borders to attend the large-scale ESFs (della Porta et al. 2002, 2006). The notion "process" in the term 'ESF process' denotes the fact that the World Social Forum (WSF), and its regional "daughter," the European Social Forum, is organized by a series of regular occurring transnational *preparatory meetings*.

These comparatively small preparatory meetings take place before and after the large-sized Social Forums. Around six times a year these European (preparatory) Assemblies organizing the ESF bring together no more than one hundred to several hundred activists each. In these regular European Assemblies, activists decide on the programme for the upcoming ESF, and work out transnational campaigns on issues such as social Europe, alternative proposals for EU policy-making on subjects such as health, climate change,

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2   The Global justice movement is defined according to Donatella della Porta (2007: 6) as "the loose network of organizations (with varying degrees of formality and even including political parties) and other actors engaged in collective action of various kinds, on the basis of the shared goal of advancing the cause of justice (economic, social, political, and environmental) among and between peoples across the globe."

migration, education, gender, peace and others. Note that all European Assemblies work *multilingually* while nationally organized social forum assemblies preparing the ESF are mostly held in a monolingual format.

Activists' multilingual democracy experiments lead us to ask questions on discourse and democracy in the European public sphere in a new way: To what extent is democratic discussion and decision-making possible in such transnational multilingual arenas compared to national meetings in which the majority of participants speak the same language? Being interested in linking the theoretical ground of discourse and deliberative democracy to the subject of the emerging European public sphere, I have studied the extent to which *democratic discussion* in the sense of *deliberative debate* might or might not take place within the multilingual and Europe-wide preparatory assemblies in the ESF process. Complementing the valuable work on supranational deliberation in transnational institutions and governmental arenas (see e.g. Neyer/Joerges 1997; Risse 2000; Neyer 2003; Müller et al. 2004; Nanz/Steffek 2004; Steiner et al. 2004; Eriksen 2005; Nanz 2006), empirical research on deliberation in transnational public spaces created by social movements can show the practical conditions for currently not represented groups to gain access to debates on the future of the EU. This is all the more relevant, given the gap in empirical research on public spaces in social movements (della Porta 2005b) and the lacking inclusivity of supranational deliberative arenas organized by the European Commission (see e.g. Wodak/Wright 2006; Altides/Kohler-Koch 2009; Bozzini 2009; Galligan/Clavero 2009).

Guided by curiosity about how activists tackle the challenge of linguistic pluralism in multilingual European assemblies, my analysis considers the particular context in which deliberation takes place in small-scale social movement groups, which Donatella della Porta has described as comprised of the "conditions of plurality of values where people have different perspectives but face common problems" (della Porta 2005: 340f). Here it is assumed that activists who try to organize transnational public spaces under conditions of lacking material means and radical cultural, linguistic and social pluralism become experts in the attempt to create *inclusive* consensus democracy spaces for grassroots activists. When activists attempt to build deliberative spaces at the European level, they have to overcome the above-mentioned linguistic, geographic, material and structural hurdles that reach beyond and are different in nature from those of supranational deliberation among institutional actors.

With respect to these possible exclusionary boundaries specific to the European level, the inclusiveness of deliberative discourse becomes an all the more valuable element to create and legitimize decisions made among a plurality of political, linguistic, generational and societal diverse groups and individuals (cf. della Porta 2005b: 341). In the normative ideal, a transnational democratic public should thus be an arena that provides *all affected* participants – citizens and denizens, elites and grassroots activists – an effectively inclusive setting, in which the *content* and *procedure* of deliberation itself recognizes different perspectives, experiences, ways of speaking, and narratives (Young 1996, 2000; Fraser 2007). Whether and to what extent emerging transnational deliberative spaces such as the European Assemblies are democratic, can be assessed by their ability to include discursively all interested groups and individuals who would like to join in preparing the ESF process, and/or participate in deliberative debates about the ESF in these meetings. Following these reflections, my analysis has a particular emphasis on the degree of inclusivity and equality of transnational deliberative arenas (see della Porta 2005: 340; Young 1996; Polletta 2002), to be contextualized in the following way. Apart from the potential exclusionary boundaries

of asymmetric *foreign language skills* of people in a transnational setting (Gerhards forthcoming), my analysis regards those *exclusionary* boundaries that sociolinguistic and feminists see more specifically as limits of *deliberative* arenas and that may reside in implicit discriminations intersecting with the continued exclusion of women, socially less privileged men and the exclusion of talk on private issues (Fraser 1992; Wodak 1996, 2000; Young 1996).

Comparison

I compared the above-mentioned European Assemblies with national preparatory assemblies in the cases of Germany, Italy and the UK. The cases at the national level were selected for being different cases in terms of their highly (UK) moderate (Germany) and inferior conflictual interrelations between the participating movements, NGOs, unions and parties, which I expected to produce different results regarding the potential inclusivity of deliberation in case-specific context settings.[3] I first analysed the practice of deliberation in social forum preparatory meetings through participant observation and analysis of transcriptions documenting plenary assemblies. Second, I analyzed activists' perceptions of discourse and democracy practices in meetings, trying to figure out the actors that may diffuse distinct (potentially new) democracy norms and practices in a mixed transnational arena. I did this through interviews (N=80) and a survey (N=130).[4] In order to assess the practice of deliberation in the survey and in-depth interviews I asked activists to compare European and national preparatory assemblies, based upon (1) how transparent[5] they perceived European as compared to national preparatory assemblies to be; (2) the opportunities for all participants to make a claim in European as compared to national meetings; (3) how they perceived attention from the facilitators at each level; and (4) their impressions of the quality of mutual respect and recognition within the European and national meetings. Given the influential role of facilitators in deliberative micro-publics (see Wodak 2000), my participant observation explored the more or less inclusive modes of interaction between facilitators with grassroots activists in meetings.

I asked activists to compare the European Assemblies with national social forum meetings, and came to a surprising result: the majority of grassroots activists I interviewed and who filled out my questionnaires agreed that the European Assemblies were a more inclusive, transparent and dialogical public space than preparatory assemblies organized at the national level of the social forums. In section 1, I will present this finding. In section 2 I show that the participants and facilitators in the European Assemblies, compared to their colleagues at the national level, had come to a different understanding of democracy. Even though belonging to the same groups as participants in national meetings, they were aware of the need for inclusive deliberations to a greater extent. In section 4, I discuss structural, strategic and cultural patterns

3   I assumed the Italian Social Forum process to be a comparatively inclusive arena with many radical and mo-
derate groups involved (Andretta et al. 2002). To a lesser degree, also the German case (cf. Rucht et al. 2007)
reflected a relative cooperative and open case compared with the British antagonistic case, which reflected the
recent decades' cleavages within left-wing movements and parties in the UK (see Rootes/Saunders 2005; cf.
Doerr 2009).

4   I selected a balanced sample of interviewees in the meetings studied by taking into consideration the individual,
socioeconomic, and organizational backgrounds of activists, as well as their political orientation, gender, natio-
nality, time of participation, and age.

5   Transparency is a key condition for inclusive deliberation (see e.g. Janssen/Kies 2005).

that should explain the change of norms and practices of participatory democracy occuring in these European meetings.

2.   Discourse Norms at the European Level: More Inclusive, Dialogical and Transparent?

The first relevant finding of my comparison between European and national preparatory assemblies of the ESF concerns the *practice* of democracy at different territorial levels. Participants in my interviews and the questionnaires distributed in European and national preparatory assemblies said that discursive rules and principles facilitating a deliberative discussion process were more pronounced in the European Assemblies compared to similar social forum preparatory assemblies at the national level. This concerned in particular practices in meetings such as facilitators' comparatively respectful listening to all participants and claims made, and the effective implementation of self-given discussion rules fostering transparency, dialogical, consensual decision-making, as well as gender equality in discussions.[6] Activists derived these rules from the above-mentioned Porto Alegre Charter of Principles.

Before I discuss my findings in detail, let me give a systematic perspective on the groups I studied in the interviews concerning their expected perception of deliberative democracy practices. I interviewed activists belonging to the different milieus of groups and organizations involved in the ESF process, considering their smaller or higher difficulties of gaining access to European Assemblies dependent on their material and formal organizational resources (see e.g. Walgrave/Van Laer forthcoming). I consider as *movement elites* groups who worked professionally for large organizations like Attac, unionists and left party activists and as insiders had a privileged access to transnational meetings.(Walgrave/Van Laer forthcoming). I therefore depart my analysis of the interviews tracing the impression of those groups of activists who had comparatively *more difficulties* to participate in the European Assemblies: these were grassroots activists involved in local or regional social forums foremost without membership in formal social movement organizations, and (other) activists with less material resources, in particular non-Western Europeans and resident migrants (see e.g. Boéri/Hodkinson 2004; Boéri 2006; Doerr 2007, 2009). How did these participants see the practices of democracy work in a European preparatory assembly, as compared to a preparatory meeting of the social forum process at the national level?

Grassroots Activists in the European Assemblies: Samira and Paul

The following were the impressions of Samira and Paul. Samira and Paul were both involved in local social forum initiatives, though they also both travelled to several ESFs and European Assemblies in countries other than those in which they lived. Paul is a university student, involved in local alternative media projects and in the London Social Forum. Samira is a member of migrant networks and community projects in her home town near Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

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6   The aspect of gender equality is discussed in more detail in Doerr 2007.

Samira's account reflects an experience which was frequently described by interviewees from migrant networks involved in social forum processes in Western European countries. Comparing the European Assemblies with national social forum assemblies in her country of residence (Germany), she stated that she perceived the national preparatory assemblies to be an exclusionary space. The motive she named was that the migrant network she belonged to had made proposals for cooperation in the national social forum on numerous occasions, but their contributions within discussions were regularly ignored or silenced by the facilitators of national preparatory meetings - facilitators who belonged to the same groups as facilitators in the European Assemblies: moderate left unions and parties associated with the influential Attac network. Samira described what she saw as the problem of democracy practices in national social forum assemblies comparing them to the European Assemblies and the ESFs:

> "It is always the same. We are treated as if we were air. They talk about us but not with us, even if we are there and sit in the same room as them. There is just no reaction concerning questions which we migrants consider to be important. In Florence [i.e. European Social Forum in Florence], this was different. Also at the European assembly in Berlin there was a different atmosphere."[7]

Samira's account illustrates a very important aspect: Activists' personal experiences of inclusion and exclusion within given place-specific discursive and social contexts of meetings could stimulate their commitment or make them refrain from participation. It is noteworthy that more interviews with Samira after the one quoted above show that this activist refrained from active participation in the former *national* assemblies; while she and her group continued to participate in the *European* Assemblies of the ESF. Samira's perspective indicates two notable elements: First, according to this interviewee, deliberative and discursive democracy rules – institutionalizing the idea of a Social Forum as an "open space" – were better implemented into practice within European Assemblies compared to social forum assemblies at the national level. Second, activists like Samira in consequence left national meetings while continuing to be active at the European level. Across the cases studied, the perceived better implementation of the social forum model of democracy at the European level leads to participants' exit and a retreat from active participation at the national level. Note that this partial exit from national assemblies had often to do with what participants perceived a "listening deficit" practiced by facilitators and movement elites at national level meetings. Interviewees emphasized the "better" dialogical atmosphere and the more attentive (pluralist) listenership in European Assemblies, which seemed to facilitate both transnational networking and efficient deliberation. As an example, Samira, who did not speak English or French, mentioned that she had made friends with activists from other countries in the European Assemblies on whose help she also relied for travelling, hosting or translation.[8] I have discussed elsewhere that the majority of migrants I interviewed, like Samira, preferred the European Assemblies to nationally organized social forum meetings that according to these interviewees reflected more strongly place-specific stigmatizing discourses towards migrants as 'other' or 'guest' in a (predominantly nationally defined) social forum arena (Doerr 2007, 2009).

The European level could also represent an efficient public arena for grassroots activists from the sub-national and local level to create moral pressure on domestic elites dominating national meetings. It is in

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7   Interview conducted in Frankfurt, September 2003.

8   Interviews conducted in Frankfurt, February 2004; Erfurt, July 2005, and Athens, May 2006.

this way that Paul perceived the European Assemblies as a personally more inspiring arena than nationally organized social forum meetings. Paul saw the European Assemblies as a kind of enlarged pluralist public space for transnational networking to build alliances with people from other countries to balance the perceived dominance of radical left parties at the national level, in the British social forum. As confirmed in prior accounts on the London ESF (cf. Reyes 2006; Doerr 2009), the European Assemblies seemed to provide Paul and other British local social forum activists with a space for networking beyond the problems of democracy that Paul described for the particular case of the UK:

> "The problem in the UK is that there are two different conceptualizations of democracy and participation. In the national preparatory assemblies there is for instance the unionist who says that he represents [...] a big union – but does he also have the right to talk for all members? [...] Then there are the individuals from autonomous groups who have a quite different conceptualization of participation, of deliberative democracy, where all can talk and decisions are made in a deliberative way. But you cannot deliberate with elected delegates or representatives of a union. They are not prepared for a compromise or a consensus. The European Assemblies are a bit better, they are more pluralist." [9]

According to Paul, the European Assemblies were a less dominant space than national preparatory meetings in the UK for their "pluralism" (a feature to which I come back). To be sure, these impressions of Paul and Samira, to which I shall return, reflect two particular perspectives that were frequently found in the interviews with activists from the grassroots level involved in local social forums and/or with fewer material or formal organizational resources and belonging to "radical" democratic groups.

A second group of interviewees, situated in Western European countries, who agreed on the points raised by Samira and Paul, were activists from the more "moderate" sector of the global justice movement though equally involved foremost at the local and sub-national levels of social forum processes in the cases studied. Compared to participants like Samira and Paul, the latter groups potentially had a better access to 'insider' information and other resources required to access the European level, as they were members of large transnational organizations and institutionalized groups such as Attac (cf. Walgrave/Van Laer forthcoming). Interestingly, the latter groups, for example the interviewees from local Attac groups in Germany or those who were rank and file members of unions and radical left parties involved in the German and British ESF process, frequently said in interviews that they perceived the European Assemblies as a more transparent and pluralist space compared to the *national* level of the social forum meetings. Interviewees from the latter groups across countries perceived informal practices of decision-making, and the *centralization of decisional power* among a few professional leaders in their own groups a significantly more exacerbated problem at the national level:

> "The European Assemblies are more transparent than the national preparatory process, because the national assemblies are organized by a very small elite of people who meet always at the same place, in the same city. I cannot come to these meetings [...] I am the father of two children, I simply lack the time. At the national level, we discuss a lot by e-mail lists, but the main decisions are taken in a small committee by a few people. Here in the European Assemblies this is different, you have many more people who participate in discussions, not only a few leaders." [10]

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9   Interview conducted in Berlin, June 2004.

10   Interview in the EPAs conducted in Istanbul, September 2005.

It is worth noticing that my interviewees in all cases studied - both those from the moderate or more radical sectors of the social forums, - saw the problem of elitist and exclusive meetings as particularly relevant at the national level. While researchers suggested that it is only in the scale shift from the national to the transnational layer that social forum processes become exclusive for activists who lack formal organizational support and available time (Walgrave/Van Laer forthcoming), some interviewees even refrained from active participation at the national level as the discursively more inclusive and transparent European Assemblies allowed them to build alliances with geographically distant groups (Doerr 2009).

Discussing the salience of these results based on the interviews and the questionnaires collected in national and European preparatory meetings, we have to be prudent: different contextual and structural patterns could explain why the participants' *perceived* the European Assemblies a more discursively inclusive and dialogical space for deliberative discussion than national social forum preparatory meetings. Given for example that the composition of the participants in the European Assemblies was more homogeneous compared to the meetings at the national level, this could explain why deliberative discussions in the European Assemblies were perceived as more dialogical and inclusive: the real conflicts might then take place at the national level in meetings with more plurally composed groups. Such an expectation might hold if the participants in the transnational European Assemblies came largely from the same political organizations, in particular, if they were professional activists (and/or delegates) from political parties, unions or NGOs, and with this represented "the organizational elites" of the movement (cf. Walgrave/Van Laer forthcoming). However, as discussed elsewhere, the European and national preparatory assemblies show a similar composition of the participants in these meetings in socio-professional, organizational and political terms (see Doerr 2009). These results reflect the findings from larger surveys in the Demos surveys[11] on the ESFs showing the similarity of participants in European and national social forum preparatory assemblies to reflect a diversity of different political groups (Andretta/Reiter 2009). Another explanation for the notable differences between European and national meetings could be that the European Assemblies might be an arena of "cheap talk". However, a number of studies have shown that the contrary was the case: European Assemblies, compared to social forum preparatory assemblies at the national level, were major discursive arenas of high-stake decision-making and conflict-solving on most relevant issues of finances and politics on the organizing of the ESF (Andretta/Reiter 2009; see also Maeckelbergh 2004; Andretta/Doerr 2007). It is important to consider the relevance of my results not only for "cheap talk" but for ongoing processes of decision-making and problem-solving taking place at the European level, where a consensus could be found that often seemed unreachable in national social forum meetings (Doerr 2005, 2009).

3.   Why European Encounters may Change Individual Democratic Norms

Searching for explanations for the puzzle of perceived inclusive deliberations in the European Assemblies, I tried to find out whether participation in the European Assemblies had affected activists' individual norms and understandings of democracy. In the in-depth interviews and the survey collected, I analyzed

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11   The Demos project (Democracy in Europe and the Mobilization of Society; http://demos.eui.eu) a European Commission financed 6th framework programme. The project is coordinated by Donatella della Porta (European University Institute).

the democratic norms and values of activists in the European Assemblies and compared them with those of activists who were involved foremost at the national level. I came to an interesting result: participants in the European Assemblies, including those who worked as facilitators and organizers of the European Assemblies, were aware of the need to implement the self-given rules and principles that institutionalized an ideal Social Forum according to the Porto Alegre Charter, such as inclusive, non-discriminatory and consensual decision-making. In particular, professional activists from left unions and parties seemed to change their individual understanding of democracy and decision-making when becoming intensely involved in the facilitation and organization of the European Assemblies during the preparation of the ESF events. Asking why a European Assembly might diffuse "new" deliberative democracy norms, I start with an analysis of the accounts of two influential facilitators involved in the ESF process, Isabelle and Harald.

Movement Elites in the European Assemblies: Isabelle and Harald

Isabelle and Harald were part of the professional activists following and co-organizing the ESF process. Both were members of Attac Europe, both were highly committed activists and paid as staffers by their groups to participate in the European Assemblies, and both had a background in representative practices of decision-making by voting within left unions (Isabelle) or Marxist parties (Harald). Both Harald and Isabelle frequently facilitated or chaired social forum assemblies, so I assume that they were part of the organizational "insiders" whose groups organized the ESFs. The difference was, however, that Isabelle was a facilitator of many *European Assemblies* and she had participated in organizing two ESF events (the Paris ESF 2003 and the Florence ESF), while Harald's focus was rather at the national level. Harald was involved in organizing and facilitating many national social forum events and preparatory assemblies in Germany. Asked what democracy meant for her, Isabelle said that she and her colleagues from France had learnt *consensus* in the European Assemblies by working together transnationally with activists from other countries in the Florence ESF. When I first interviewed Isabelle in 2003 she explained how her experiences in the European Assemblies had changed her understanding of democracy:

> "Before, I was active in the unions where decisions were made by majority vote [...]. We invent a special type of language [in the European Assemblies], our own one, and we invent a culture of communication [...]. I also learnt the languages here."[12]

In an interview collected two years later, she specified that it was the transnational, intercultural speech situation in the European Assemblies that had made her re-think some of her views on democracy:

> "In [the preparation of the ESF in] Florence, we learnt that consensus is a process [...]. At the beginning, the Italian activists had a very high level of mistrust towards 'French culture'. They perceived us as rigid and authoritarian. We had to get together with the Italians to build confidence."[13]

These self-reflective impressions could mirror an interesting learning process. Isabelle considers her perspective to have changed considerably: with a background in representative democracy practices such as voting, she and other interviewed European network leaders thought themselves to have learned

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12   Interview conducted in Paris, November 2003.

13   Interview conducted in Florence, November 2005.

"consensus" by working together with activists from other countries.[14] Isabelle perceived herself to have learned the new deliberative, consensual democracy in a setting she experienced, ambivalently, as characterized by deep 'cultural' misunderstandings. Do transnational public spaces such as the linguistically pluralist European assemblies teach leaders "new" norms of democracy? And through which mechanisms does this occur? In section 4 I shall come back, and try to answer these questions.

Harald's account of democracy was different. In contrast to Isabelle, he had not been as intensely involved in organizing and preparing international social forum meetings and events, though he was the facilitator of many nationally organized preparatory meetings. In this respect, he frankly admitted during his first interview in 2003:

> "In no meeting that I ever have facilitated myself, I would have been changing my position due to something like 'deliberation' taking place in the discussion within the meeting. Facilitators talk about what they want before, and that will be decided, too."[15]

Harald did not change his viewpoint regarding the first aspect in an interview conducted three years later. However, his account in the interview conducted in 2006 indicates that something about the European Assemblies was different from the meetings he facilitated himself at the national level. Harald, similarly to many other interviewees, came to reflect on the perceived high number of women having acquired informal leadership positions in the European Assemblies, an impression confirmed in my participant observation (Doerr 2007). Harald reflected on the leadership style of his colleague Isabelle and other European network leaders who as women chaired most of the European Assemblies:

> "The women in the European preparatory process are important personalities […]. I have a lot of respect for them. They know how to make a claim. They do not fit the general stereotypes of women as being rather mediators or as not daring to speak up."[16]

What is interesting about Isabelle's and Harald's perspectives on democracy and decision-making is not only that they illustrate the diversity of individual norms and concepts of democracy within the same political group and sectors (Attac and traditional left parties). The evidence from the survey indicates that - in the same vein as illustrated in Isabelle's case - participants active at the European level learnt to appreciate the consensual model of inclusive, deliberative democracy practices while those active at the national level continued to be closer to Harald's opinions. In the questionnaires I distributed among participants in European and national preparatory assemblies, I asked respondents to rank different items that they might perceive as more or less important for discussion and decision-making practices in the ESF process.[17] I asked respondents to rank those elements that they understood as most relevant for internal democracy (such as *cooperation, mutual respect* and *mutual listening* and the internal *fight discriminations*) in the social forum meetings themselves. Several answers were possible. The responses

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14   This is confirmed by more evidence from the interviews with facilitators in the EPAs.

15   Interview conducted in Paris, November 2003.

16   Interview conducted in Vienna, January 2006.

17   In the survey distributed to both participants in European and national preparatory assemblies, the respondents were asked to rank different values with respect to their priority for a democratic process.

show that a notably higher number of participants in the European Assemblies compared to those at the national level were highly aware of a possible need to actively provide an inclusive, non-discriminatory and cooperative setting for deliberative discussion within meetings (see Table 1).

Table 1: Comparing democracy norms of participants in the European and national meetings[18]

Perceived 'key' elements of democracy in the social forums	Participants in social forum assemblies at national level (Percentages of Yes)	Participants in European Assemblies (Percentages of Yes)
Need to **fight against (discursive) discrimination** in social forum assemblies	48 %	66 %
Need of facilitators to include all voices in a **consensual** decision	19 %	47 %
Need of **mutual cooperation** within a social forum process	54 %	70 %
Total number of cases (N)	100	

Table 1 reports the remarkable differences in the answers between respondents who participated in the *European Assemblies* as compared to respondents who participated in preparatory assemblies at the *national* level: the former cases, according to their own ranking, seem to be more aware of a number of discursive norms such as non-discrimination, inclusive facilitation and mutual cooperation (these mirror the Porto Alegre Charter of Principles) than their colleagues at the national level. In particular the need for an active effort for an inclusive facilitation was emphasized by a notably higher number of participants in the European Assemblies (47 per cent) compared to those participating in preparatory assemblies at the national level (19 per cent). A larger number of attendants in the European Assemblies than their colleagues at the national level also emphasized the fight against discrimination within the assemblies of the social forums as a "very important element of internal democracy" (66 per cent as compared to 48 per cent at the national level) and the (perceived) value of dialogical cooperation found equally more supporters in the European Assemblies (70 per cent as compared to 54 per cent at the national level). More evidence from the survey shows that the type of answers that made the noteworthy differences between the norms of participants in the European Assemblies and the ones of national meetings can also be found among activists with membership in moderate social movement organizations like Attac and the traditional left political parties and unions to whom Isabelle and Harald belonged.

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18   The percentages add to more than 100 per cent because multiple responses were possible.

4. Structural and Strategic Impact of a Transnational European Setting on Democracy

Summarizing, activists perceived the European Assemblies of the ESF process to work with comparatively more inclusive discussion rules and consensual practices of decision-making than the national level of social forum assemblies. Participants in the European Assemblies, including the influential facilitators, admired consensual, inclusive discussions to a larger extent than their colleagues at the national level. Then, what explains the observed differences within the norms and practices of participatory democracy at the European compared to the national level? I received a surprising answer when asking interviewees this question. Effective democracy in the European Assemblies, as illustrated in the following quote, came along with a distinct practice of active listening – that differed from national level assemblies:

> "In the European Assemblies you will listen more than in an assembly at the national level. In the European Assemblies, I only speak up to say something if I really have to. What happens in the European Assemblies is not negotiation, nor is it compromise. It is consensus. You cannot say exactly what consensus means, but people are satisfied with it. Newcomers do not understand what it is, that is typical. It is a kind of exchange. That you can have several positions in the same public space, the search for a true terrain, of coexistence, that is really deliberative, a forum. [...]. At the national level, you don't listen to each other any longer. [...] In the international meetings – it really counts what you say."[19]

In the following, I will compare such perceptions, shared among an important part of my interviewees, with those structural, institutional and normative changes that I found as a participant observer and interviewer in the European Assemblies. First (4.1), I found that the particular complex transnational speech situation of the European Assemblies created structural and strategic incentives for leaders and participants in the ESF to work together more dialogically than at the national level. Second, (4.2) to tackle conflict potential of culturally and linguistically pluralist European Assemblies, activists invented a social practice of multilingual decision-making based on explicit discursive norms to facilitate inclusive and egalitarian deliberation that did not exist at the national level. At the European level, discursive norms of democratic translation were institutionalized by a range of actors that had only been formed through the process of contentious European protest movements, such as the above-mentioned 'Babels' activist translators.

4.1 Structural Uncertainty and the 'News Benefits' in a Transnational Public Space

A first explanatory pattern for the (perceived) inclusivity of deliberative discussion in the European Assemblies originates in the institutional condition of uncertainty entailed by a setting of transnational complexity. By the uncertainty institutionalized in the context setting of the European Assemblies, I mean the relative *lack of mutual knowledge* about the European field of action and about each other that gave incentives to participants in the European Assemblies to listen and learn from each other in a context of *national and geographic pluralism* and *little prior contacts*. The following results from the interviews

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19   Interview with an activist from the Babels, Istanbul, September 2005.

indicate that these interrelated patterns made mutual, attentive listening and a dialogical exchange of information an increased necessity and provided it with distinctive benefits compared to the national level: in national meetings participants considered themselves aware of each others' positions and they were informed by media about political issues.

Transnational Complexity and the 'News Benefit' from Mutual Listening

In my interviews, activists, including long-term participants, described their own need for an inclusive dialogue and for the benefits from carefully listening in the discussion in the European Assemblies compared to the national meetings. Lacking knowledge of European politics and about each others' political ideas related to national and linguistic pluralism made mutual listening and inclusive deliberation a distinctive benefit, which I would like to term a *news benefit*. By this I mean a learning effect that interviewees constructed only with regard to their perceived experiences in the European Assemblies and that seemed to be an indirect consequence of the lack of a broader European media public. An activist involved in the local and regional social forum process in Tuscany, Italy, described why lacking knowledge on European politics together with the difficulty of cross-national translation of political ideas, made careful listening and inclusive deliberation a necessary and a beneficial practice of cooperation in the European Assemblies:

> *"For me, it was in the European Assemblies in the context of the ESF where I first heard about the existence of the [European] Commission's 'Bolkestein directive'.[20] Now, we have started to inform about it and mobilize against it. We simply would not know all these things without European Assemblies and networks. It is different than in a national meeting. There is a lot of learning, but also communication problems. For instance in the discussion today in the assembly, regarding the question how to translate elements of the [Charter of Principles for another Europe],[21] concerning questions of liberalism: it had to do with different meanings of liberalism and libertarianism in different languages. For French activists, the sound of 'liberismo' becomes associated automatically with liberalism, thus neo-liberalism, something they are against. Nevertheless, the word liberist can be positively connoted in other languages, too."[22]*

In the above interview, it becomes clear why careful listening is considered both necessary and beneficial by many participants in the European Assemblies: Activists were aware of the benefit to acquire new

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20 By its "Directive on services in the internal market" (referred to as the Bolkestein Directive) the European Commission aimed at liberalizing a single market for services within the European Union. Activists in the ESF process and the EPAs campaigned and networked against this Directive, which was eventually adopted after significant amendments (cf. Parks 2006).

21 The network for the Charter for another Europe is one of the networks that emerged within the EPAs of the ESF process after the referendum consultations (see fn 20). Its objective is public deliberation on a "Charter of Principles for Another Europe" against neoliberalism: "European mobilizations during the first years of the 21st century against the war, neoliberalism, sexism and racism, against the destruction of democratic and social rights and the privatization of public services and demanding the guarantee of universal rights, have opened the way to elaborating a project of a "Charter of Principles for Another Europe", which we wish to submit for public discussion." (Charter of Principles for Another Europe declaration, signed in January 2006). See http://www.fse-esf.org/spip.php?article586; last access 22 September 2009.

22 Interview with a social forum activist from Florence, Italy, November 2006.

vocabularies and novel concepts in the European Assemblies, though only when they accepted to become attentive listeners willing to engage in the difficult process of cross-cultural translation and discussion with other groups. These ambivalent incentives could be a strategic mechanism to explain why the novel norms of deliberative talk and its listening-habits diffused to attendants: Participating in the Europe-wide meetings seems to foster a process of *learning through translation*, a practice in which activists *build an expertise on EU politics*, *transnational solidarity ties* and *movement allies*. Since activists in the European Assemblies did not know much of each other, were only weakly connected to each other, were separated through geographic distance and had formerly been so due to high travel costs, they had many incentives to listen and learn from activists in other countries. To contextualize these impressions, we should also notice that activists may come to consider deliberative discussion processes to be particularly beneficial when they work together in a context with little other than ideal incentives (cf. Polletta 2002). I assume that the European Assemblies were a context that made these benefits particularly precious: the emergent transnational setting of the European Assemblies was characterized by a lack of knowledge of European politics and inexperience with foreign language and intercultural cooperation. This should have made inclusive deliberation in European Assemblies both a useful and a necessary practice to work together and build an emerging transnational solidarity bonds for future collective action. The above-quoted examples from the interviews with long-standing participants clearly reflect that at the national level, the *expectation* to develop a new emerging process for future collective action was somewhat smaller, given the familiar setting, prior interactions and the long-standing cleavage lines and knowledge on each others' interests and concerns. To recall one of them: "At the national level, you don't listen to each other any longer [...]. In the international meetings – it really counts what you say."[23] Importantly, most interviewees like in above-mentioned example stressed that the conflict potential of the European Assemblies was not smaller compared to the national level, while their impressions lead to suggest that democracy at the European level followed a different logic of "listening"—particular in conflict solutions this might be crucial to facilitate deliberation — an aspect that needs to be deepened as follows.

Does Uncertainty Make for more Dialogical Conflict-Solving?

Note that a frequently mentioned aspect in the interviews was that dialogical conflict-solving practice among participants in the European Assemblies was an outcome of the institutionalized condition of constant uncertainty entailed by a transnational speech situation. Why is this important? Scholars in International Relations (IR) have pointed out that uncertainty should bring discourse participants to treat *conflict* in a more dialogical way compared to a familiar setting in which they know each others' interests, norms and aims by prior interaction (cf. Risse 2000). This is what we find indeed reflected in the results on the *perceptions* of the participants who saw the European Assemblies as a highly stimulating though tricky setting with high conflict potential due to mutual misunderstandings. A frequent impression by long-term participants was that conflict potential in the European Assemblies was not smaller but larger as compared to the national level. However, interviewees opined that due to the greater pluralism of language speakers, nationalities, groups and individuals involved in the European Assemblies, conflict-solving followed a more deliberative interaction modus, given the shared willingness to develop future collective action in an emerging transnational field. A long-standing participant from a French union who

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23   Interview with an activist from the Babels, Istanbul, September 2005.

had been participating in many European Assemblies and the ESF in Italy, France and the UK described conflict-solving in the European Assemblies:

> *"At the national level, you know each other. There are the old cleavages. Here, you simply don't know what the others did before. There are more conflicts in the European Assemblies than at the national level. Right now in this meeting there is a deep disagreement [groups] [...]. However, the goal in the European Assemblies is to do it together. Not like in the UK or in Germany where two groups who discuss with each other break up and leave. If here in the European Assemblies someone would leave, it would no longer be a European social forum. The goal is thus to find a consensus solution. A consensus solution will be found because the actors are too many."[24]*

This conflict mediator involved in the ESF preparatory process elaborates on a very important aspect frequently mentioned by long-experienced participants in the European Assemblies. He addresses the positive linkages between the lack of mutual knowledge and the more dialogical conflict-solving practices in the European Assemblies compared to the national level. Note that the interviewee considers potential for conflict to be higher in the European Assemblies, although he estimates cleavages to be stronger (or older) at the national level. This seemingly contradictory statement reveals that a perceived deep "history", associated with long-grown informal relationships, was constructed a frequently mentioned hurdle to efficient deliberation in national preparatory assemblies. In contrast, participants saw the greater pluralism and lack of mutual knowledge of participants in the European Assemblies as a resource for consensus in the European Assemblies: "Here, you simply don't know what the others did before." Note that not only newcomers but also many of the long-term participants such as the interviewee believed that cooperation was more dialogical in the European Assemblies compared to the national level due to the complex (informational) interdependencies of groups who lacked mutual knowledge but wanted to build something "together." The institutional and strategic effects of uncertainty could make deliberative conflict-solving a more necessary and useful practice at the European than at the national level.

An important doubt is that the observed diffusion of a "new" deliberative democracy model in the European Assemblies was a result of novelty: Were the European Assemblies a "newer" and therefore more transparent, dialogical arena than national meetings? Strategic and institutional context conditions such as the above-mentioned *news benefit* and the institutional "uncertainty" element may be temporary effects of the novelty of the European Assemblies. It would seem not. The above-quoted examples of interviews with long-standing participants together with the interviewing of grassroots activists reveal that activists had established informal relationships and in-group hierarchies in the European Assemblies – "newness" was thus not the explanation why deliberators interacted more dialogically and transparently at the European level compared to the national level. This brings me to the cultural side of deliberative practices and to translation itself, indeed a novel, though increasingly institutionalized social practice of dialogue in the European meetings. Transnational encounters at the European level, as will be shown, has created new norms standards of active listening that are key to efficient decision-making in linguistically and culturally pluralist settings. These are implemented and institutionalized by new actors created in the process of contentious European integration and transnational protest, such as the Babels translators.

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24   Interview with an activist involved in the French ESF organizing committee, Istanbul, September 2005.

4.2   The Consequences of New Norms and Actors Emerging at the European Level

Activists' choice and effective implementation of multilingual translation as a deliberative working practice entailed both complex (informational) interdependencies and normative learning processes among deliberators in European Assemblies that should together explain the institutionalization of inclusive deliberation. Both have to do with what activists stressed as the distinct listening-practices of the European Assemblies ("In the European Assemblies you will listen more than in an assembly at the national level"). Before I present the evidence that shows the active role of listening to create a deliberative setting, some theoretical arguments have to be named.

In her research on participatory democracy in American social movements, citizen fora and court settings, sociologist Francesca Polletta points to the listeners' constitutive and ambiguous role within deliberative discussion to occur (cf. Polletta 2002, 2006). Her argument is that disadvantaged groups in a deliberative arena may "get heard" against the filter of institutionalized culturally specific habits of hearing. These "cultural constraints" in the listening habits could delimit the transgressive possibilities of 'good arguments' independent of the speakers' effective linguistic competence if the speaker belongs to a traditionally minoritized group (Polletta 2006: 26). In a language theoretical account, deliberative democracy theorist Patrizia Nanz has shown the potential of listening as the interpretative dimension of dialogue for a European multicultural polity (Nanz 2006).

In the following, I will apply these critical reflections to interpret the unexpected findings of my comparison suggesting that the European Assemblies' distinctive *transnational speech situation* and Babels' novel social practice model of democratic translation changed a few of the informally established culturally embedded "habits of hearing" that hindered inclusive deliberation at the national level of social forum arenas. In other words: When a participant speaks in a national meeting, she or he is *interpreted* in light of facilitators' specific hearing habits—as shown with the (perceived high) risk of grassroots activists and disadvantaged groups to pass "unheard" by implicit leaders. When a political translator *re-interprets* an opinion and monitors informal leaders' implicit interpretation of participants' talk in European meetings, things might look different. If translators attempt an explicit *principled* work of brokerage, as Babels did, this may potentially prevent the automatic – implicit - "unhearing" of some voices in discourse.

Habits of hearing and new actors facilitate European-level decision-making

First of all, to understand why listening habits of discourse participants (including those of informal leaders such as Isabelle) changed when they came together in the multilingual European Assemblies, we have to consider the *permanent presence* of new groups of actors such as the Babels, that emerged through the Europeanization and transnationalization of protest in constant transnational encounters in the ESF process and spread new (multilingual) standards of 'good discussion' and decision-making appropriated to a complex, linguistically pluralist space. Present in all plenary sessions and within informal negotiation, the Babels' volunteers translated all statements in the European Assemblies (mostly into four or five languages) and thus had an indirect influence to balance and control facilitators' influence within decision-making. In the European Assemblies, Babels' simultaneous translation allowed speakers to intervene in their own languages, though the Babels interestingly were advocates of groups that risked to be marginalized within national meetings.

Babels were considered as a politically less influential non-partisan group by organizers and founders of the ESF and they were aware of this (cf. Boéri 2006). Babels founders however named their own group's explicit political motivation that aimed at making heard those voices that may otherwise pass unnoticed within deliberation and decision-making:

> *"The idea to found Babels came up when in an international meeting a woman from Kirgizstan from a Human rights organization made a statement. She noticed that nobody could understand her. She became more and more desperate, she talked for half an hour; all listened but nobody understood. That is why we as students of simultaneous translation created Babels."*[25]

The quoted Babels founder describes the negative consequences of a radical multilingual speech situation in which people are separated by linguistic communication problems. Note, in this respect, how important the activity of attentive listening is in this foundation story of the Babels network and its normative principles: "(A)ll listened but nobody understood. That is why we [...] created Babels". Participant observations confirm that in the period from 2003 to 2006, Babels increasingly set multilingual practices of communication as a new standard of 'good deliberation,' based on an informal work of *principled brokerage* in the International Council of the WSF and among ESF organizers. Babels activist translators belonged to groups that risked to be marginalized within national level social forum processes. These groups' own awareness of the possibility of exclusion and multilingual skills could be crucial to explain the quality of deliberation in the European Assemblies. In another quote of a Babels member we learn that in national meetings it seemed to be mostly large (party) organizations with many members who, within decision-making or also recruiting their own elites, acted as *gate-keepers* (Wodak 2002) with particular in-group styles and preferences:

> *"At the national level [...] [t]he SWP [Socialist Workers Party] wanted me to be part of their steering committee. I left again because of their political practices in preparatory meetings: authoritarian, not inclusive, total control-freaks, anti-democratic, patriarchal. [...] They expected me not to be a kind of person who will speak up and make problems, timid and to be instrumentalized. [...] I remember one European Assembly before the London ESF. I was among the voluntary translators from Babels. [...] as I am bilingual I went in these meetings to make sure that the SWP does not abuse its power. A part of the English participants tried to trick the French and Italians by playing on subtle linguistic differences within decision-making. But as I speak French and English, I told the French and the Italians what was going on and made sure that they knew that they were going to be manipulated."*[26]

Importantly, this quote points to the particular "dominant" position of the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP), a Trotskyite party that was attacked by many interviewees for its particular instrumental action logic performed in both national and European meetings (see also Maeckelbergh 2004; Boéri 2006; Reyes 2006; Kavada 2007). However, this interview illustrates that the Babels' highly relevant network position could reduce the attempted domination by this group as Babels acted as a broker between different language groups and their manipulatory "language politics". The above-quoted interview with a Babels member gives an important key to understand the democratic efficiency of the Babels to set and diffuse

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25   Interview with a Babels founding member, Istanbul, September 2005.

26   Interview with Babels activist, Berlin, June, 2008.

new democracy norms at the European level: Babels were quite successful brokers in institutionalizing multilingual deliberation in the EPAs, which were of benefit for a large number of groups and individuals and worked against the risk of a single group like the SWP to "take over" the Social Forum process. This group's expert knowledge on the challenge of potential exclusion could profoundly change the norms and standards of participatory democracy practice towards adopting an increasingly transnational, Europe-wide process of networking in movement, beyond priorly more closed-up discourse arenas in national contexts.

Concerning the theoretical discussion, this points to the importance of the interpretative dimension - the listening side within deliberative processes: In the above quote, as also in the interviews in Part 1, a key element to explain the interviewee's frustration with exclusionary discussion in national social forums resided in "dominant" groups performing a double-position of informal leadership, and of (implicit) interpretation of participants' voices featuring "instrumentalized" action logics. The interview overlaps with my finding from participant observation: Like they used to do at the national level social forum meetings, particular groups like the SWP did not stop their attempts to dominate decision-making also at the European Assemblies (see also Maeckelbergh 2004; Reyes 2006). However, at the European level the Babels' and other groups' *explicit* monitoring and practice of translation made it more difficult for these groups to impose their preferred view within decision-taking. An example for the Babels' explicit political work of democratic translation is given by the above quoted Babels translator: This Babels member at the national level formed part of a British Muslim migrant network and had experienced the effects of instrumental action by informal elites in national meetings. In the European Assemblies though, this activist used her knowledge on "manipulation" in explicit bilingual translations to prevent informal British elites from a Trotskyite party to reproduce their informal power position at the European level.

While participant observation and interviews with ESF founders show that Babels was seen not as a relevant political actor within the ongoing high-stake political decisions taken in European Assemblies, translators worked at democratizing the procedures of deliberation, and had a more soft, though all the more enduring, impact to change implicit and explicit rules of decision-making — to the advantage of groups that were marginalized at the national level meetings. A Babels member described this small though important impact of the Babels on the process of deliberation:

> "As translator, you are in a strange position: you have power and you don't have power. You are like the service woman who gives coffee. Yet, the elites who organize the ESF show respect towards Babels for our technical knowledge [...]. Babels have a vote in the International Council, and we have a clear political position, so we matter."[27]

To help understanding the institutionalization of democratic norms, this Babels founder points to a very important aspect: Where Babels had an institutional voice in the International Council (IC) and close working relations to "the elites who organize the ESF," this had a notable impact for potentially linguistically minoritized groups in the European meetings. Regarding the political idea of this group, my interviews reveal that Babels members had pluralist backgrounds, being often members in both moderate and radical groups, some of them being citizens and others migrants. Importantly, all Babels members

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27   Interview with a founding member of the Babels from France, Istanbul, September 2005.

interviewed had one shared moral concern: To democratize deliberation and make it possible for groups that were marginalized at the national level to have a say within discussion and crucial moments of decision-making.

Furthermore, the Babels' constant presence in decision-making in the European Assemblies explains another confirmed finding from discourse analysis (Doerr 2008): In strategically relevant moments of decision-making, the voices of participants like Samira, who had no active command of English or French, found a room to express themselves and therefore could make a change within decision-making even if this went against the strategic interest of influential facilitators like Isabelle. To believe the words of Paul, who as radical grassroots activist scrutinized the political influence of new actors such as Babels, the strategic key position of Babels in all phases of deliberation explains why newcomers or other less influential activists could have a say in the European Assemblies more than at the national level:

> *"It is funny, the Babels have a lot of influence on the elites in the European Assemblies, and I think they were at first not aware of this. Translation reduces the hegemony of those who have taken part for a long time. For newcomers, access gets easier."*

Paul's remark points to the unexpected influence and control tactics that media activists and grassroots activists like himself noticed in the translation work of the Babels network. This helps understand the result in section 1 that grassroots activists from local and regional groups perceived the European Assemblies as a potentially democratic space contrasting national social forum preparatory assemblies perceived to be dominated by a minority of professional activists discussing in an exclusive group language. As we have already seen in section 3, facilitators in the EPAs were more aware of a perceived need for inclusive, dialogical deliberation compared to their colleagues at the national level who preferred more pragmatic efficient-styled decisions. Multiple structural and strategic changes that occurred through cooperation at the European level help to explain this. Moreover, it has become clear that facilitators and deliberators also changed their normative understandings and practices of leadership entering the novel social practice of multilingual democracy. Groups that had only formed in the very process of cooperation at the European level, such as the Babels, worked for the effective inclusion of groups that at the national level risked to be excluded. Leaders, who stood in a *complex equality* (cf. Polletta 2002) with new-created actors making possible intercultural decision-making, such as the Babels, learnt about the advantage and requirement of listening to people they normally did not talk to in national social forum assemblies.

5. Conclusion

I have explored structural, strategic and cultural explanations to the puzzle that transnational public spaces created within European protest movements, such as the European Assemblies within the European Social Forum (ESF) process, operated by a potentially more inclusive, dialogical practice of decision-making compared to national social forum assemblies. Activists seemed to turn into *listening leaders* and *attentive deliberators* when active at the European level, reflecting in notable differences in the individual norms and values of participants, in particular those of informal elites. As a first structural explanation, I showed that European Assemblies' provide a contextually embedded *uncertain speech situation* that seems to

have made these meetings a highly dialogical discussion arena. Interrelated with this, uncertainty and the high complexity of issues and stakes at the European level institutionalized the benefits of egalitarian and inclusive discussion. Interestingly, the absence of a transnational Europe-wide media public created a *news benefit* that stimulated deliberation and mutual listening in the uncertain transnational arena that activists tried to construct in their regular European Assemblies.

My analysis showed that in high stake decision-making at the European level, newly created actors, emerging due to the transnationalization and Europeanization of protest, facilitated democratic decision-making - beyond the standards of inclusivity and equality observed at the national level of the ESF process. I used the example of a newly created transnational activist group, the 'Babels,' who do a functionally required work as voluntary translators in European Assemblies. A more unintended side-effect of these non-partisan activist groups is to democratize norms and standards of decision-making compared to the national level: European Assemblies are composed of hundreds of activists with differentiated and pluralist language skills, and Babels' goal is to give all of them the opportunity to have a say within all moments of decision-making, including high stake decision-making in informal meetings at the side of the large European assemblies. At the national level of meetings though, such actors and translation practices did not exist and leaders did not see a particular need to "listen" to grassroots activists. At the national level, the former groups felt marginalized when criticizing influential facilitators' selective "habits of hearing" and decision-taking among insiders.

These findings show the potential of European protest, and of emerging transnational publics to innovate conventional institutions of democracy in social movements, and they also demonstrate how new groups of grassroots actors, emerging within and through the process of contentious European integration, may democratize European politics and the institutions constituting the public sphere in EU member states. At the level of theory, they also tell us something about the conditions fostering inclusive and egalitarian public deliberation. Regarding the latter aspect, the comparison of deliberative practices in European and national meetings shows the importance of distinct practices of listening, rather than of making claims in particular ways. Grassroots activists and immigrants felt that their perspectives were recognized in settings where participants actively listened. Listening, interestingly, took place in transnational, multilingual settings created in the process of contentious European collective action in which new groups of translators facilitating decision-making took an active role. Given the comparatively high quality of discursive inclusivity, gender equality and the potential empowerment of formerly marginalized groups in a transnational public arena such as the European Assemblies, compared to similar public arenas in national social forum meetings, the idea that grassroots democracy requires a homogenous, monolinguistic contextual setting should be revised. On the contrary, due to informal elites' perhaps carelessly presumed homogeneous we-group understanding it seems that national discourse arenas, as seen in the social forums, have generated a deaf situation. The relevance of activists' democratic innovation at the institutional level is confirmed by research on multilingual public spaces in emerging transnational publics inside and outside the EU and in national contexts (van de Steeg 2002, 2006; Kantner 2004, 2008; Nanz 2006; Doerr 2008). While for Western European activists in moderate unions and parties translation was "new", their colleagues in the African regional social forum and within local activist groups in Southern Europe developed advanced deliberative translation practices building on place-specific movement traditions to tackle multilingual and extremely asymmetric group settings (Doerr 2008).

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