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Sub-theme 28:
Troubled Times, Big Issues, Institutional Crises: Insights from Organization Theory

‘Same’ goal, different worldviews: Comparing and contrasting the World Economic Forum and the World Social Forum

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Abstract

This paper prompts a discussion about different organizational responses to the big global issues of our time. Using two contrasting empirical settings, the World Economic Forum and the World Social Forum, it explores forms of organizing, mobilization of resources and power relations in order to achieve what, rhetorically, could be seen as the same goal - improvement of the world order. However, major differences can be seen in: 1) how conceptions of power and counterpower inform the organizing process; and 2) how the goal of ‘improvement’ is defined by each. This paper seeks to demonstrate that power is a significant factor in the processes of organizing as well as being a consequence of organizing in particular ways; power affects both the definition of the big issues of our time and their solutions.

Key words: social movement, power, counterpower, strategy, organization

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Introduction

“Power, then, is the most basic of all goods: a meta-good of political and social justice. If you do not change the power system, you do not really change a situation of injustice.” (Forst, 2005, p. 33)

The last decade has been characterized by threats to and/or the collapse of organisations across the globe in the nested fields of economics and politics. Evidence of this includes financial instabilities in Southern Europe, protest and riots in England, and changes to the political order in parts of the Middle East. The disruptions are influenced by differing perceptions of economic, natural and social resource constraints (Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002) in the context of the big global issues of our time, including debates such as: to be austere or not to be austere; and domination vs. democracy.

Those who have been languishing unchallenged in the normative field of power (for example, states and corporations) have been faced by new or revived manifestations of counterpower (for example, the Occupy movement, rioters, climate camps and other forms of public protest). These have emerged following a loss of faith in traditional economic, political and social mechanisms to fix the ‘crises’ that have permeated the world, resulting in changed/changing distributions of economic, political, social and cultural power (Held et al., 2010) and opening up the opportunity for other worlds to emerge. Such crises unsettle the way things are to such an extent that alternative processes and practices can be considered but there is a risk that there is a continuation of more of the same, either through inertia or through a belief that there is no alternative.

In one sense, none of this is new, but there appears to be a crescendo at present. There has been a collapse of one set of ideas around neoliberal economics and there is not a natural replacement for these (e.g. Harvey, 2003). However, despite
these challenges to dominant discourses, practices and associated consequences, there is an extent to which actors in each field (field of power and field of counterpower) claim to have the same goals; improvement in the world and sustainability for all.

With this paper, I aim to answer the question of what are the consequences of organizing in particular ways (Hinings and Greenwood, 2002) in order to achieve the ‘same’ goal? The empirical settings are the World Economic Forum (WEF), representing enactment in the field of power, and the World Social Forum (WSF), representing enactment in the field of counterpower. In each setting there are evident differences in: 1) how conceptions of power and counterpower inform the organizing process; and 2) how the goal of ‘improvement’ is defined by each. This paper seeks to demonstrate that power is a significant factor in the processes of organizing as well as being a consequence of organizing in particular ways; power affects both the definition of the big issues of our time and their solutions.

This paper is part of a larger PhD research project and one of the research questions is: what are the relationships between the fields of power and counterpower in responding to issues of sustainability? I aim to understand the ways in which responses to the three pillars of sustainability (economic, social, environmental) (Brundtland and World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) are formulated through different organizational forms (e.g. Clemens, 2005). Three sub-themes of the broader sustainability agenda have been selected: international trade; climate; and gender.

This paper contributes to this sub-theme of the EGOS colloquium by responding to the context of big global issues and exploring two organizational responses thereto; one which takes an elite, highly formal and organized approach within the neoliberalist discourse, and one which counters this through openness, informality and deliberate un-structure. This paper also contributes to the Colloquium theme of ‘Bridging Continents, Cultures and World Views’ by examining two fora which operate without geographic boundaries. In addition, their competing worldviews are bridged by an, at first glance, common goal. More broadly, this paper seeks to contribute to the power literature through an empirical study of two different forms of
organizing both in terms of the constitution of and relations between organizational actors and the textual expressions emerging from each form.

**Power, counterpower and the organizing process**

Capital accumulation is a characteristic of neoliberal economic processes which have dominated (particularly) US and UK politics and economics since the 1970s (Harvey, 2003; Harvey, 2005), with associated domination of the politics and economics of other countries. In particular, Banerjee (2008, p. 1543) writes of “practices of organizational accumulation that involve violence, dispossession and death” and his work focuses on forms of power in the maintenance of these practices, suggesting that the study of emerging social movements may enable greater understanding of the potential to change the normative (Banerjee, 2008). In addition, Vaara and Durand (2012, p. 250) recommend that the theories and models offered by strategic organizational research enable consideration of the place of institutional approaches, the use of stakeholder analysis, and critical questioning of the conventions and traditions underpinning organizational strategy; there is a call for researchers to “explore the ways in which strategies emerge in and through interactions of a number of actors playing various kinds of roles”. Social movements take on a range of organizational forms (Haunss and Leach, 2007) in which “a set of opinions and beliefs in a population… represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society” (McCarthy and Zald, 2003, p. 172). Indeed, “movements entered into civil society spaces such as the media in order to challenge existing patterns of legitimacy or develop new ones” (Spicer and Bohm, 2007, p. 1679).

In its simplest notions, “power has typically been seen as the ability to get others to do what you want them to, if necessary against their will, or to get them to do something they otherwise would not” (Hardy and Clegg, 1996, p. 623). By implication, this suggests an inequality of relationship that may not be static, but manifests an actor achieving their ends or interests over another (e.g. Benson and Kirsch, 2010). For example, power has been conceptualized as a characteristic of capital ownership (Knights, 2009) and power in relation to resources in general i.e. “the ability to exercise control over resources which, when agents engage in or refrain from practices, produce effects on other agents” (Clegg and Dunkerley, 1980,
In traditional organizational theory, power had its base in the “ownership and control of the means of production, supported by the power of surveillance...with power also deriving from knowledge of the means of production from ‘mastery’” (Hardy and Clegg, 1996, p. 622) or “command of resources” (Clegg, 1989, p. 98) and those in command can promote their interests over others. In this view, the bases of power include information, uncertainty, expertise, credibility, stature and prestige, access to/contracts, control of money, rewards and sanctions (Hardy and Clegg, 1996).

However, a critique of such a resource dependency theory is that a custodial relationship with resources is insufficient in itself to grant power (Hardy and Clegg, 1996). Rather, that power is “a property of relations” (Clegg, 1989, p. 99) and subsequently there is a need to understand the value of resources within the contexts of operation, between actors, and apply this understanding in the negotiation of the realization of interests (Hardy and Clegg, 1996). Indeed, deeper analyses have considered the nature of the way in which the holding of such resources is directed “in complex and shifting games with indeterminate rules, in which the rules themselves become the focus of analysis” (Clegg, 1990, p. 85). That is, how actors who are in control of such resources use this control in the enactment of the organization: “This process of mobilizing power is known as politics” (Hardy and Clegg, 1996, p. 626).

The study of power is necessary in order to explore “whether or how it is employed to sustain or modify the most fundamental aspects of political institutions and processes” (Bachrach and Baratz, 1975, p. 901). It is clear from this literature that “power exists within the relationship between social actors rather than residing in the actors themselves” (Hatch, 1997, p. 282) and that “power is a property of relationships such that the beliefs or behaviours of an actor are affected by another actor or system...it is understood here as an effect of social relations, rather than something an actor can ‘have’, ‘hold’ or ‘keep in reserve’” (Lawrence, 2008, p. 174).

Bachrach and Baratz (1975, p. 901) further develop the theory of power that “nondecision making in a power context is based on the additional presupposition that political consensus is commonly shaped by status-quo defenders, exercising their power resources, and operates to prevent challenges to their values and
interests” (see also Crenson, 1971). Indeed, that there are those within the organization who will deliberately exclude issues from discussion and decision making, keeping the discussions ‘safe’ in terms of protecting their interest (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962; Crenson, 1971) not only within the organization but in relation to its operational context (e.g. markets, global politics). Linked to this, there is an extent to which certain practices are “normalize[d] and naturalize[d]” in a revelation of power to preserve ‘the way things are’ (Benson and Kirsch, 2010); as Eagleton (2007, pp. xxii-xxiii) writes, “The most efficient oppressor is the one who persuades his underlings to love, desire and identify with his power; and any practice of political emancipation thus involves that most difficult of all forms of liberation, freeing ourselves from ourselves.”

When analysing power relations it is therefore important to “consider the question of political quiescence: why grievances do not exist; why demands are not made; and why conflict does not arise, since such inaction may also be the result of power” (Hardy and Clegg, 1996, p. 627). Lukes’ (1974) third dimension of power expands on this, that power is “not just about removing potentials for conflict off the agenda but also involves defining the situation such that subordinates internalize norms and comply even when it is against their interests to do so” (Knights, 2009, p. 147). In this respect, Lukes (1974) suggests that actors willingly comply with the situation despite potential interests to the contrary i.e. they do not either seek to air their interests, or even recognize that they have interests to be aired, because of the power relations of the situation. Lukes’ theory of power has been critiqued as it “reflects binary or dualistic thinking that sees power as oppressive and autonomy as emancipatory whereas the situation is much more complex than this” (Knights, 2009, p. 148). It does however, demonstrate an awareness of the complexity of power, particularly illustrating how the supremacy of elites is maintained and the way in which other interests are subliminally subdued to preserve “the status quo” (Hardy and Clegg, 1996, p. 627).

The relationship between power and ideology offers a helpful lens, as studying ideology helps us to identify those episodes or systems of power which are of most relevance in social relations. For example, “such a perspective should not only illuminate how power dynamics buttress the incumbent system of homogenizing
rules, but also how they drive institutional actors to pursue heterogenizing interests” (Hensmans, 2003, p. 356). Ideology is both a vehicle of power and a context in which power is enacted: “the individual’s intentions and acts of power take place and are shaped inside the ideological frames of society and culture; neither groups and relationships nor the individual exists in a societal vacuum” (Nafstad et al., 2007, p. 315). As (Clegg, 1989, p. 97) explains, power is “a process constituted within struggles…always embedded within rules: these cannot provide for their own interpretation independently of those agencies whose interpretations instantiate, signify or imply them.” Therefore the manifestation of counterpower, the presence of contest and contention, is critical, utilizing forms of organizing, identities, and opportunities for negotiation (Tarrow, 2011). Indeed, “the network approach to the study of social movements recognizes…that social movement organizations are not bounded entities; rather they are embedded in a web of connections to other organizations (both within the movement and outside of the movement” (Soule, 2012, p. 1721). Organizations both supportive of and counter to ‘the way things are’ claim legitimacy in their actions for a greater good; by doing more of the same (i.e. maintaining exploitative practices, albeit not defining them as such) or by discussing and demonstrating for change (i.e. promoting alternative practices). As (Castells, 2011, p. 774) describes, ‘the shape of the institutions and organizations that construct human action depend on the specific interaction between power and counterpower’.

**Methodology**
The full PhD study from which this paper emerges is examining the ways in which each form of organizing, WSF and WSF, proposes policy and strategy in relation to each of the three sustainability themes. These two forms of organizing have been selected for a number of reasons. Firstly, the WSF emerges as a case of interest from the literature, for example, it is purposely noted in Banerjee’s (2008) work as a mechanism through which normative practices are challenged and resisted. Secondly, because WSF began as a deliberately symbolic counterpoint to WEF and its meeting in Davos (Santos, 2006), it offers an opportunity to examine the relationship between the two forms of organizing and their discursive strategies. Finally, both forms of organizing exist to create discursive spaces through which participants can express opinions, ideas and strategies to address the world’s
issues. With regard to the topic, sustainability is a political issue (e.g. Carter et al., 2011) in as much as it is vast in meaning and contentiously debated by the public, state and corporations. Whilst the pillars of sustainability (economic, environmental and social) are huge and complex, three sub-themes have been selected which represent issues that are discussed by both forms of organizing allowing direct comparison, as well as being the subject of debate at a national and international level: international trade; climate; and gender.

There is a politics of research that researchers negotiate in their practice regardless of their focus. As such, it is vital that the researcher reflects on their own position in these power relations and recognizes their place in the construction of the research context and beyond in a reflexive manner (Haynes, 2012). It is as important to understand what is happening within the research (Alvesson et al., 2008) as it is to understand the knowledge it produces and what it tells us about the nature of reality. Researchers “[co-construct and co-interpret]…the meaning(s) of organizational events along with situational members” and must consider their position and place in the determination of meaning (Yanow et al., 2012, pp. 332-333). The ontological position of this research is constructionist, that is, a belief that “social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. It implies that social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision” (Bryman, 2001, p. 18). Therefore, reality is never static and is in constant manufacture.

The arguments in this paper rest on the assumption that documentary material produced by each form of organizing is representative of forms of power and counterpower; that the processes of production and authorship, as well as the written product, are imbued with power relations and that power and counterpower inform these processes and the product which in turn construct further power and counterpower. It is important to reflect that I have been part of this by selecting what documents to look at, as this paper draws on only a small selection of publicly available documentary material on the comparable topic of ‘climate change’ from the websites of WSF and WEF. Specifically, an extract from the Climate Space blog set up for the WSF annual meeting in Tunis, March 2013 (http://climatespace2013.wordpress.com) and an extract from the material produced
by a meeting of Climate Change and Green Growth participants in the annual meeting in Davos held in January 2013 (http://www.weforum.org/issues/climate-change-and-green-growth). Of the three sustainability subthemes that comprise the full PhD study, climate change has been chosen for the purpose of this paper for two main reasons: 1) it is a topic that has been demonstrably discussed at the most recent congregations of each forum (2013); and 2) texts have emerged from these discussions which take a similar format, that of a set of proposals (World Economic Forum, 2013; World Social Forum, 2013).

Documents are often underused in qualitative organizational research for a number of reasons, including their free availability and often large volume (Lee, 2012) which affect perceptions of reliability, authorship and value. However, in this study, they are a core and structured part of the methodology. In collating the material, the purpose of each document is considered, the extent to which the purpose is realized, consistency (or otherwise) within the treatment of issues, explore evidence for the content structuring organizational relationships, and look at how the documents are used to project a view of themselves as a form of organizing (Wodak, 2007; Lee, 2012). Within the broader project, virtual ethnography is of value because of the virtual spaces in which these organizations both operate and communicate (Hine, 2008) and the documents of study are located on web pages. Analysing the documents in this context offers the opportunity to additionally observe the behaviour of organizational actors and the identity of the organizations themselves (Jeacle and Carter, 2011).

The web-based material produced by WSF demonstrates a complex picture as a form of organizing, for example, including a range of blog sites established by particular participants in WSF activities, for example, the overarching site for WSF (www.forumsocialmundial.org) and overarching sites for each of the annual meetings, the most recent of which can be found at http://www.fsm2013.org/en. These sites are egalitarian, in as much as commentary and participation is welcomed, and voluminous. There is also a degree of transience in the material, in that comments, posts and pages may be present temporarily, but without structure or predictability to the inclusion or withdrawal of material.
In comparison, the web-based material produced by WEF is very centralized through a single site (www.weforum.org). It is very detailed in one sense, as a breadth of issues and activities are channelled and documented, however, there is a high degree of structure, the material is edited and limited as opposed to free expression. It is more static and more controlled which, for the viewer, makes engagement an easier experience – the material is presented ready for digestion. But with all of the documentary information, it is important to look beyond content to how it was produced, how it functions in everyday action and how it circulates (Prior, 2007).

The data is being analysed using the framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA). This framework is appropriate because it relates explicitly to the consideration of power and ideology (Wodak, 2001), as well as research sites where the social is of importance (Oswick, 2012). It picks up on the discourses that organizational actors are drawing on, meaning is central to discourses and the power relations of the groups involved, as well as taking account of the socio-political context (Oswick, 2012) which discourses simultaneously create and are created by. Discourse is defined as “a cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices that are situated within specific fields of social action, socially constituted and socially constitutive, related to a macro-topic [and] linked to the argumentation about validity claims such as truth and normative validity involving several social actors who have different points of view” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009, p. 89). It is therefore a meta-narrative, where practice comes from exchange under a phenomenon. The data can be analyzed in terms of the use of language, how texts are produced and consumed, and the contextual practices that surround selected discursive events (Oswick, 2012). Whilst it is recognized that CDA can be critiqued for its overly broad context, sprawling theoretical framework and political activity (Wodak, 2001), as well as some question as to the researcher’s position in the data (Oswick, 2012), the benefits of the analysis are evident for this topic and data and outweigh the limitations. An investigation can be made of the ways in which different groups of social actors can attempt to shift the status quo in ideological positions, particularly as discourses of change abound in times of collapse and crisis (Hensmans, 2003).
Forms of organizing

From its first assembly in 2001, WSF defines itself as “an open meeting place where social movements, networks, NGOs and other civil society organizations opposed to neo-liberalism and a world dominated by capital or by any form of imperialism come together to pursue their thinking…but it does not intend to be a body representing world civil society. The World Social Forum is not a group nor an organization” (World Social Forum, 2002a). Interesting questions are raised as to how strategies are formed by and through the WSF as a space that aims to support the creation of “another world” (World Social Forum, 2002b). However, it has been proposed that, “a situation of strategic ambiguity can create a ‘space’ in which multiple interpretations and responses by stakeholders are enabled and possible” (Carter et al., 2011, p. 695). In this respect, a deliberate openness and unwillingness to be categorized or labelled in formal organizational terms can maximise opportunities for broad thinking.

As (Clemens, 2005, p. 355) notes, “many newer movements explicitly foreground nonhierarchical models of organization, … alliance structures and consensus-based decision making”. Although some unease has often been exhibited between organization studies and the study of social movements, given an association of ‘organization’ with rigidity and control, which “seems incompatible with projects of social change” (Clemens, 2005, p. 352), there is an extent to which ‘organizing’ is evident. WSF has an International Council and committees are convened to organize the annual meetings which represent the most centralized manifestation of Forum activity. In other words, ‘organizing’ does not equal ‘organization’ (Weick, 1979). But the Forum deliberately organizes differently to those in power; the counterpower enacted is to enable strategies from below, to “facilitate decentralized coordination and networking among organizations engaged in concrete action towards building another world, at any level from the local to the international” (World Social Forum, 2002a).

WEF defines itself as “an independent international organization committed to improving the state of the world by engaging business, political, academic and other leaders of society to shape global, regional and industry agendas” (World Economic Forum, 2012). It has a formally organized structure, managing directors, senior directors and directors and administrative staff. WEF has a longer history than WSF
and its heritage is academic. Within the managerialist paradigm, it began in 1971 as the European Management Forum. Its founder and current Executive Chairman is described as “Professor, Manager, Visionary” (Zwick et al., 2009), language that evokes a position of influence, leadership and authority. As (Oakes et al., 1998, p. 271) state “power need not involve coercion or conflict but may involve reconfiguring positional and organizational identities, vocabularies and values.”

Like WSF, WEF has an annual meeting as well as other conference-style gatherings convened on a thematic basis. The annual meeting, always held in Davos, Switzerland, is the flagship event which attracts significant media attention and is attended by the ‘great and the good’ as invited (defined) by WEF. This approach supports the discourse of involvement purported to be the core of WEF values, an approach which invites multiple select individuals considered to be stakeholders from business, politics and (increasingly) non-governmental organizations and celebrity activists (Pigman, 2007). In this respect, WEF mobilizes resources of the powerful; the elite who hold a range of economic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1996) on a global scale. This form of organizing maximises a perpetuation of the extant dominant hegemony, as “legitimized through powerful consent structures in the wider realms of civil society” (Spicer and Bohm, 2007, p. 1679). In other words, participants in WEF events are installed as powerful and authoritative in the global consciousness, “their claim to govern [is] legitimate” (Dahl, 1961 quoted in Lukes, 1974, p. 23).

How conceptions of power and counterpower inform the organizing process
Emergent consequences of organizing in these two ways can be seen as follows. WEF utilizes the manifestations of accepted and legitimized power by the dominant discourses in the world (the US, UK and western Europe) and organizing in such a way as to maximise the resources available (Bourdieu, 1986). The activity of the forum is highly selective (despite the multi-stakeholder discourse), highly visible (maximising social media, world media, internet and publication communications), highly talked about and listened to (as evidenced by the media response to the annual Davos event). Specifically considering the Green Grown Action Alliance as a sub-group of WEF and for whom WEF provides a secretariat function (Green Growth
Action Alliance, 2013), we can see in Table 1 that the membership comprises a predominantly private sector, corporate representation.

**Table 1: Green Growth Action Alliance members** (Green Growth Action Alliance, 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accenture</th>
<th>Alcatel-Lucent</th>
<th>Applied Materials</th>
<th>Bank of America Merrill Lynch</th>
<th>Barclays Capital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Sea Trade and Development Bank</td>
<td>Climate Development Knowledge Network</td>
<td>Climate Policy Initiative</td>
<td>Deutsche Bank Group</td>
<td>Environmental Defense Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eskom Holdings</td>
<td>European Bank for Reconstruction and Development</td>
<td>European Investment Bank</td>
<td>FEMSA</td>
<td>GDF Suez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GE Energy</td>
<td>Global Green Growth Forum</td>
<td>Global Green Growth Institute</td>
<td>GrupoFinancieroBanorte</td>
<td>Hanwha Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSBC</td>
<td>Iberdrola</td>
<td>Infosys</td>
<td>Inter-American Development Bank</td>
<td>International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novozymes</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
<td>Overseas Private Investment Corporation</td>
<td>Private Sector Center for Sustainable Development Studies</td>
<td>Samsung Electronics Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sekunjalo Investments</td>
<td>Siemens</td>
<td>Standard Chartered</td>
<td>Standard &amp; Poor’s</td>
<td>Suntech Power</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WSF, in organizational contrast, has limited centralization and an egalitarian approach to participation. Its presence emerges from the masses, with expressions of debate from a multitude of grounds, both as individuals and organizations, but whilst there was an initial “presence in the public consciousness.” (Zald et al., 2005, p. 258) established in its earliest years, this has waned, with movements such as Occupy being much more visible. However, perhaps this is accepted as part of acting differently, generating counterpower by playing a different game i.e. a strategy “in which some voices may not be attended to for some time, but which can, if insistent and well organized, make it on to the agenda” (Carter et al., 2008, p. 94).

With regard to participation in the Climate Space of WSF, the number of facilitators (their term) is fewer and of counter types to the Green Growth Action Alliance, as shown in table 2.

**Table 2: Facilitators of the Climate Space (World Social Forum, 2013)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alliance of Progressive Labor, Philippines</th>
<th>Environmental Rights Action, Nigeria</th>
<th>Global Campaign to Dismantle Corporate Power and end TNCs’ impunity</th>
<th>La Via Campesina</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alternatives</td>
<td>ETC Group</td>
<td>Global Forest Coalition</td>
<td>No-REDD Africa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Given the sites of this research focus, it is important to consider different forms of organizing to those more traditional structures. In this respect, the “focus [is] not on organizations, which tends to privilege their claims and obscure less formal processes of political and cultural change, but on the broader ‘social fields’ in which organizations operate” (see also Bourdieu, 1996; and Clemens, 2005; Edelman, 2005, p. 41). In WSF, we can examine “collective challenges which involve relatively coherent groups of people”, “how these collectives are held together by a sense of common purpose and solidarity” and reveal “resistance [that] may involve sustained interaction with dominant groups” (Spicer and Bohm, 2007, p. 1673). Organizational fields can also offer a useful analytical lens, as “a system of actors, actions and relations – whose participants take one another into account as they carry out interrelated activities. Rather than focusing on a single organization or movement, or even a single type of organization or movement (population), it allows us to view these actors in context” (McAdam and Scott, 2005, p. 10).

In the specific WEF text selected for analysis in this paper (World Economic Forum, 2013), the meeting is described as “high-level” and “private”. Participants are described as “100 global leaders, including CEOs, Heads of State and heads of international and civil society organizations” and as “welcom[ing] remarks from United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, who testified to the value of public-private coalitions to deliver finance”. By using these terms, it is apparent that there is an emphasis on the legitimacy of both the meeting and its outputs, the proposals that have been made. The text suggests that these were important, powerful people having important, powerful discussions that are endorsed by an individual who has
some global respect (and so you, dear reader, should endorse them too). Additionally, not only were the ideas endorsed by the United Nations Secretary-General, but so were the individuals involved, with the text stating that he “congratulated the Alliance on its progress”. This further legitimates both the process of organizing (the Alliance) and, by extension, those participating in the process. Interestingly, the text is also written in the third person, describing the events and creating an objective impression of the text content as opposed to revealing any sort of value judgment on its content.

Whilst “the process of legitimation prevents opposition from arising” (Hardy and Clegg, 1996, p. 630), that is, actors within WEF consider the situation as it stands to be fully legitimate and therefore challenge would be inappropriate and/or unnecessary, “social movements are defined as organized efforts to bring about social changes in the distribution of power.” (Jenkins and Form, 2005, p. 331), challenging the existing legitimacy. Social movements have been defined as “collective challenges to existing arrangements of power and distribution by people with common purposes and solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities” (Meyer and Tarrow, 1998, p. 4 quoted in Jenkins and Form, 2005, p. 332). Specifically, such actors as those participants in WSF need to have resonance at a local level, generating belief that things can be made better, in order to give them basis and capacity in their counterpower (Evans, 2005).

The WSF text selected for analysis (World Social Forum, 2013) is written from within, using the first person plural (we) throughout. It is presented as a statement of position and belief as opposed to a description of the event and it is signed by those responsible for facilitating the Climate Space (the meeting and beyond, see Table 2 for the signatory organizations). The document also claims legitimacy but not through a presentation of the credentials of participants, but making the case for action through positioning themselves in direct opposition to a perceived cause of the problem, specifically “the capitalist system” which has “exploited and abused nature, pushing the planet to its limits, so much so that the system has accelerated dangerous and fundamental changes in the climate.” In this respect, this document and its authors have legitimacy because they identify the cause of the problem and
propose solutions counter to the cause, as opposed to building legitimacy through the participants and authors of the associated texts.

How the goal of ‘improvement’ is defined by each – the example of climate change proposals

The example text produced by WEF (World Economic Forum, 2013) reveals the underpinning ideology of the discussions around climate change. Specifically, that investment, markets and growth are needed for a sustainable and ‘green’ future. Catalysis is a repeated theme, with related words used four times in a document which is nearly 600 words in total, invoking images of stimulation, energy, action and change. In this text, money is the catalyst, specifically private finance and investment. This can be seen in the way that the topics for discussion are described, representing the particular interests in the room (Bachrach and Baratz, 1963; Crenson, 1971) as follows:

“Together, they explored the current green investment market context, challenges and opportunities, highlighting recent analyses of global investment flows by region and market sector. The participants then reviewed proven and new ways in which governments can attract green investment by showcasing ongoing country pilots in key emerging economies. Finally, they discussed how to catalyse leadership by using the Alliance to scale up and replicate successful approaches through both international processes and bottom-up action.”

It is assumed that green investment equals a good thing and the text goes on to describe the “urgent need to increase private sector investment in green growth” and “the opportunity to use catalytic quantities of public sector finance to leverage private investment”. There are two interesting points here. Firstly, that a sense of urgency is created. Whilst there is no denying that the environmental problems of the world are a priority, it is possible that this sense of urgency is used to justify the selective nature of those invited to the “private session”, in terms of someone’s judgment of their ability to act and make decisions quickly, albeit that those actions and decisions may be made in limited interests (Hardy and Clegg, 1996). Secondly, not only that
private sector investment is proposed as the singular or utmost solution, but that public sector investment can be used to draw out this private sector investment. Perhaps a message here is, ‘we will invest (more, more quickly) if you commit public funds’ or ‘we will not invest without it’.

Five proposals are outlined in the WEF document that are “new and action-orientated” and are “to advance the green financing agenda”. In this respect, this is their goal of improvement. Extracts of the proposals are as follows (emphasis in the original text).

- “The design of a standard renewable energy power purchase agreement for emerging markets.”
- “The development of a new policy risk insurance product to support investment in green infrastructure by covering commonly encountered regulatory and policy risks.”
- “Delivery of a tiered fund to provide affordable capital for energy efficiency projects, drawing together finance from development and commercial banks supported by equipment providers and international corporations.”
- “The Alliance’s partners announced a new collaboration to pool corporate demand for renewable energy, including a growing number of Indian and international companies.”
- “Further development, selection and execution of potentially catalytic proposals to finance a low carbon and resource efficient agriculture sector.”

Proposals 1, 2 and 3 seem to particularly relate to action that will make things easier for businesses and corporations to operate globally and minimise the inconvenience of local detail. Proposal 4 does not seem to be a proposal, rather a statement of something which has already happened, the “new collaboration” and seems to relate to the generation of economies of scale, however, the meaning is vague. Proposal 5 is also vague, but the following sentence reads “The select finance instrument(s) will first be applied in Vietnam, with an outlook to assess replicability in other agriculture-heavy economies such as Brazil and Tanzania.” This suggests, as do other elements of the text, that participants are executing plans which were already in train, that
perhaps this discussion is merely a rubber-stamping exercise which enables the demonstration of high profile support for the activity.

The text of focus as an output of discussions through the WSF annual meeting and beyond (World Social Forum, 2013) can be compared and contrasted with that produced by WEF. It is a longer document, just over 1,500 words, and comprises both a set of proposals for what "system change means" (e.g. Forst, 2005) and more extensive commentary regarding the ecological context of these proposals. The ideology revealed is that the cause of ecological crisis is the capitalist system and that what is needed for a sustainable future is systemic change. Stopping particular behaviours, practices and actions is a recurrent and dominant theme, as well as dramatic use of the battle metaphor and firm imperative statements of intent, for example, as follows (spacing as in original).

“We will not allow the capitalist system to burn us all. We will take action and address the root causes of climate change by changing the system. The time has come to stop talking and take action.

We must nurture, support, strengthen and increase the scale of grassroots organizing in all places, but in particular in frontline battlegrounds where the stakes are the highest.”

A sense of urgency is also created in the WSF text but it does so by drawing attention to the potential end of days for humanity, “Humanity and nature are now standing at a precipice. We can stand idle and continue the march into an abysmal future too dire to imagine, or we can take action and reclaim a future that we have all hoped for.” In this small examination, it is possible to see that WSF and WEF see action on climate change very differently, with the implication in the WSF text that the representatives of the capitalist system are not acting, rather they are (contradictorily) ‘standing idle’ and ‘continuing the march’ by doing more of the same and relying on existing systems and processes to save the planet. Action, implied in the WSF text, means systemic change and not the continuation of any capitalist activity in any form.
There are 15 points made as to what is proposed that needs to happen in order to invoke system change. Nine of these points require certain activity to be stopped, ended or banned, for example as the following extracts.

- “Ban all new exploration and exploitation of oil, tar sands, oil shale, coal, uranium, and natural gas.”
- “Stop building mega and unnecessary infrastructure projects that do not benefit the population and are net contributors to greenhouse gasses like, mega dams, excessive huge highways, large-scale centralized energy projects, and superfluous massive airports.”
- “End the dominance of export-based industrial forms of food production (including in the livestock sector)”

Points that express positive action, that is, things that need to start or happen in some way are fewer but present and include the following extracts.

- “Adopt Zero Waste approaches through promoting comprehensive recycling and composting programs that end the use of greenhouse gas emitting incinerators – including new generation hi-tech incinerators – and landfills.”
- “Develop economic strategies that create new kinds of ‘climate jobs’ – decent paying jobs that directly contribute to carbon reductions – in such sectors as renewable energy, agriculture, public transportation and building retrofits.”
- “Recover the control of the public sources to finance projects for people and nature like health, education, food, employment, housing, restoration of water sheds, conservation and restoration of forest and other ecosystems and others”

In this text there is minimal expression as to how any of these proposals will happen or stop, although there are elements which claim ownership and personal commitment to their execution (“we will stop”, “we will avoid”) and the recognition of certain activities which are currently happening and are supportive of the systemic change demanded (Buen Vivir, defending the commons, the happiness index and the Peoples Agreement of Cochabamba are examples mentioned). In addition, there are expressions of the location for action to take place, for example as follows.
“...the main battlegrounds will be outside and will be rooted in the places where there are frontline struggles against the fossil fuel industry, industrial agriculture, industrial pollution, carbon offsets schemes, and REDD-type carbon offsets projects, all resulting in land and water grabbing and displacements taking place all over the world.”

The implication of the metaphors of battle and struggle is that direct interaction between perspectives (whether as organizations or individual actors) is expected and that these will be in opposition (Castells, 2011; Tarrow, 2011). But compared with the WEF text, it is difficult to understand what would happen next in order to generate the change that is demanded, and convincingly argued to be necessary, here.

Discussion and conclusion
Emergent analysis has shown that the discourses illustrated by analysis of the WEF document “are less concerned with issues of sustainability in impoverished and rural communities” (Banerjee et al., 2009, p. 188). Whilst WSF would position itself as counter to WEF (Santos, 2006), the rhetoric alone would suggest that both WEF and WSF share a common ultimate goal (Pigman, 2007) – improvement and a better world – however, it can be argued that “defenders of capitalist institutions have developed conceptions of justice that support rights to unilateral appropriation of disproportionate shares of resources while accepting that all inhabitants of the earth ultimately have equal claims to its resources” (Pogge, 2004, p. 270). In other words, in the WEF text there is evident defence of the status quo (i.e. more investment, more growth) in order to perpetuate the field of power under the auspices that more of this will promote a better world (Lukes, 1974) compared with the WSF text which demands fundamental structural change.

Each form of organizing has points of opposition with one another, with complex relations of power within and between, and each struggling for their beliefs and values to become embedded and accepted, albeit with one explicitly foregrounding its claims to legitimacy in terms of the position of its organizational actors. As van Dijk writes (2006, p. 732) “in order to be able to compete, political groups need to be
ideologically conscious and organized” but even then, expressions of counterpower such as WSF may find it difficult to provoke a ripple that might displace the status quo (Hardy and Clegg, 1996; Evans, 2005).

However, knowledge of participants and ideologies in a field of interest enables response to be formulated, in order to try to realize one interest over another (Hensmans, 2003). Disruption can be provoked through varying forms of organizing, specifically those which do not follow a formalized structure; collective action, advocacy and networks are models which are dispersed and flexible to respond to the issues under debate (Tarrow, 2011). In particular, “heterogeneity and interdependence are greater spurs to collective action than homogeneity and discipline, if only because they foster interorganizational competition and innovation” (Tarrow, 2011, p. 138). Further research will unpack the relationships of power and counterpower using these two forms of organizing as examples, examining the disruption (if any) to the ways in which responses to issues of sustainability are discussed and enacted.
References


