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**ONLINE SOCIAL MOVEMENT LEARNING AND THE POSSIBILITIES
OF COUNTER-HEGEMONIC KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION**

THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE 'ZOOM'ED OUT

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Für Oma

Flanieren sie durch die Welt, fragte sie?

Mit allem, durch alle, für alle!

Immer Warum

Bleibt...

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Radical solidarity with the activists, movement facilitators and those activist academics out there. Longing for Change. This dissertation was only possible with the support of social movements and European training collectives. Gratitude. A good conversation with Dr. Aziz Choudry and Dr. Eurig Scandrett led the way, alongside the simple necessity to fight injustice and transform education. Rise and organise. I would like to thank the GLOBED cohort and consortium for the learning experience and Dr. Queralt Capsada-Munsech for her supervision and feedback. Gracias.

Rediscovering idealism and the counter-hegemonic potential of education, I am reminded of Eli who expresses, “The youngest and most different people – who have never identified as activists understand what we mean when we talk about a more collective way of life, autonomy, care and accountability for harm.”

ABSTRACT

Social movements, native to the streets, were forced to operate online during the global Covid-19 pandemic. This did not only change the tactics of protest and structures of organising but also fundamentally altered social movement learning. Adopting a mixed methods approach, this study conducted 23 surveys and 10 interviews to research how members of training collectives active within the European climate justice movement perceive social movement learning in the online space. Exploring the self-directed, incidental, integrative-embodied and socialised forms of informal learning, this study proposes a framework to demonstrate how social movement learning in the online context facilitates counter-hegemonic knowledge production. Working at the gap of informal and collective learning, the framework describes how the processes and methods initiated by trainers, shape counter hegemonic knowledge production. Secondly, this study suggests five components to assess to what extent social movement learning facilitates counter-hegemonic knowledge production. The paper concludes that the online space significantly complicates counter-hegemonic knowledge production and is hence not capable of generating radical counter-spaces, necessary to nourish, educate and strengthen counter-hegemonic discourse. The findings are useful not only for social movements, but can inform academia, policy and practise about manifestations of informal and collective learning, especially in today's omnipresent online space, as well as foster understanding of the the inner workings of democracy, social movements.

PREFACE

Conversation Starters – A Field Dialogue

face-to-face

Learning about direct action happens best on the street.

Online you don't have the spontaneous conversations that are literally the most important thing when getting people together.

It is harder to build relationships needed for real solidarity.

You don't feel that buzzing, you don't get the energy of an online interaction.

online learning

On zoom you can be comfortable from home.

There is more freedom for people to seek the information and experience by themselves online.

It radically broadens the audience for engagement, huge surge of accessibility.

The emotional driving force has been massively tamed.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Education without social action is a one-sided value because it has no true power potential. Social action without education is a weak expression of pure energy”
(Martin Luther King Jr., 1967).

Social Movements are spaces in which education and social action coincide. Spaces where public opinion is formed, negotiated and resisted; where history is written (Hall, 2009). Where else could one better study the connection between education and social action than in exploring the dynamics of social movement learning (SML hereafter). Social movements have been and are an integral part of societal development, building the roots of democracy, shaping community solidarity and reminding the world to reimagine (Farro and Lustiger-Thaler, 2014). From anti-colonial uprisings like the Mau Mau opposing Western colonialism in Kenya and the Civil Rights Movement ending institutionalised racial discrimination in the United States, to contemporary youth movements like Fridays for Future; social movements are living organisms, shaped by one continuity: learning.

Learning how to collaborate, mobilise the masses or strategize effectively for political change are only some of the cornerstones of social action (Kluttz and Walter, 2018a; Zuber-Skerritt *et al.*, 2020). Today, movements disrupt, collaborate and instigate momentum for alternative futures. From the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong and Belarus to activists fighting state repression in Myanmar and most recently Colombia, social movements bring hope to the power of collective mobilisation (Della Porta, 2020). In recent years the world has witnessed a revival of civic activism with Anti-Racist, Feminist, Environmentalist groups on the rise (Youngs, 2019; Richardson, 2020; Valls, 2020). Millennials have surfaced as a “remarkable protest generation,” and youth are raising their voice for recognition as active political subjects of the day (Flesher Fominaya, 2020b). While Black Lives Matter, #metoo and Extinction Rebellion continuously advocate for social justice, a number of right-wing groups have instrumentalised Covid-19 restrictions to spread conspiracy theories and populist ideology (Flesher Fominaya, 2020b; Woods *et al.*, 2020). How, why and what leaders and participants of these social movements learn is crucial to understand the inner workings and potential of these group. It is vital to comprehend future directions of thought, inherent in the nature of movements as incubators of new knowledge in our democracy (Kelley, 2002).

Social movements need to learn from mistakes, collectively, as they accommodate a wide variety of people. Learning processes range from delivering practical skills on how to enact non-violent direct action such as blocking a road, over soft skills like communicating with press and police to strategic campaign planning (Ulex, 2020). Participants in social movements learn from each other and establish their own structures and norms of knowledge production; ways of non-formal and informal learning (Hall, 2009). While formal learning is ascribed to established educational institutions, non-formal learning can be defined as any organised educational activity outside the formal system (Coombs *et al.*, 1973). Informal learning is the lifelong process in which an individual acquires attitudes, knowledge and skills from everyday experiences (Coombs *et al.*, 1973). The forms of learning need to be seen on a continuum as they act dialectically (Choudry, 2015, p. 83).

Although movements are primarily places of informal and non-formal learning, Heidemann (2020) claims that formalised learning is under researched but important, as it socialises the learner. Most research focuses on non-formal learning such as workshops, facilitated by social movement trainers. The more subtle, unmeasurable informal processes remain unrecognised and have received little attention in academic and activists' discourse (Foley, 1999; Tilly and Wood, 2009; Scandrett *et al.*, 2012). A range of scholars demonstrate this substantial lack of research on the informal and often tacit ways of learning (Walter, 2007; Hall *et al.*, 2011; Cox, 2014; Kluttz and Walter, 2018b; Choudry, 2020; Ollis, 2020).

Although, Choudry (2015, p. 101) argues that “relying solely on informal, incidental learning in social activists' contexts for political education is not enough,” Foley (1999, p. 4) upholds that “it is clear that critical learning is gained informally, through experience, by acting and reflecting rather than in a formal course.” Informal learning has the potential to shape, reinforce or change the ways in which knowledge is constructed, when people subconsciously learn “what is to be done in a given situation” by participating in the social world (Bourdieu, 1998; Foley, 1999; Steinklammer, 2012). What Bourdieu (1998) calls “habitus” is what centrally contributes to societal structures and ways of interacting.

As pedagogical centres or even “epistemological communities of knowledge production” social movements are spaces “where new knowledge including worldviews, ideologies, religions, and scientific theories” can originate and be put into action (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991, p. 14; Foley, 1999; Scandrett *et al.*, 2012). Knowledge production in social movements can be

described as counter-hegemonic, as it explicitly challenges the status quo and normative arrangements of political, social and economic relation (Gramsci, 1971). However, informal and non-formal learning processes are by no means automatically emancipatory (Choudry, 2020). Only when aimed at “human liberation” and explicitly problematising the established relations with power (established as habitus) they become truly counter-hegemonic, compared to other forms of adult education that have an assimilatory nature like lifelong learning rooted in the human capital approach (Tiana Ferrer, 2011; Torres, 2013; Lucio-Villegas, 2015). This dissertation posits informal learning as a breeding ground for counter-hegemonic knowledge production (CHKP hereafter)(Kilgore, 1999; Hall, 2009; Steinklammer, 2012).

In the context of the 21st century, an age of rapid digitalisation, greatly impacted by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, social movements, once native to the streets, have to adjust their ways of knowledge production. They create increasingly alternative forms of engagement including online protests, e-petitions, car marches, socially distanced flash mobs and collective messages of solidarity from balconies (Della Porta, 2020). These new ways of organizing brought along different ways of communicating, interacting and collaborating in social movements – new avenues of learning opened up, while others closed. As social movements do not have standardized curricula that could be easily transferred to an online format as in formal learning spaces, they have to reinvent the ways in which learning takes place. The online context allows for wider accessibility and formalised some trainings but eventually limits the potential for informal learning and poses new challenges of security and collective agency.

Can the unusual encounter with the digital playing field – known simultaneously as a liberation technology and a force of oppression - facilitate CHKP? (Chenoweth, 2016; Tufekci, 2017; Kendall-Taylor *et al.*, 2020). What is the role of the collective when social movement interaction is suddenly occurring through individual screens? Drawing on a mixed methods approach, this thesis investigates training collectives operating in the European climate justice movement and asks: **How and to what extent does social movement learning in the online context facilitate counter-hegemonic knowledge production?**

1.1 Why To Care - Rationale

This research project is important on a social and academic level, and of relevance to social movements themselves. It provides avenues for conceptualising informal and collective learning for academia, policy and practise and contributes theoretically and empirically to the gap in the literature. It sheds light on not only the practices of CHKP but also on learning in the unprecedented online context, invoked by the global Covid-19 pandemic.

These unprecedented conditions caused by the global pandemic, provide avenues to better understand everyday (informal) online learning and collaboration in a world where social interaction is increasingly digitalized. Moving learning online not only raises questions for the formal sector, but also for non-formal and informal learning spaces where learning often relies more on tacit in person interactions (Ollis, 2020). I will shed light on the ways in which movements “learn, analyse and generate knowledge in the course of organizing for progressive social change”, despite or exactly when operating in an online context (Choudry, 2015, 2020, p. 28). How SML happens despite and amidst a global pandemic is not only worth inquiry but central to anticipating future directions of education (policy) and social change, critical drivers of a just recovery.

Secondly, social movements have been and will continue to be central to the world’s intellectual development, as they inspire the emergence of anti-colonial, feminist and Marxist theorizing. Social movements have shaped various disciplines, including women’s studies, peace studies, adult and popular education, black and post-colonial studies, queer studies, among many others (Chesters, 2012, p. 153). Researching the climate justice movement is urgent, as it is a growing movement with strong educational structures, whose investigation can be useful for other movements. It is also of interest to those, who wonder about the role of social movement knowledge production in driving the push for a Green New Deal or in attempts of bringing the government to court for the climate crisis.¹ Uncovering particularly indigenous knowledges, and other counter-hegemonic avenues for the world’s social and intellectual development is a useful exercise for academia, policy and practise.

¹ Neubauer et al. v Germany [2021] 1 BvR 2656/18, Rn. 1-270.

Thirdly, this dissertation is original because it approaches research from the activist educator's angle. It is motivated from a grassroots perspective and driven by the "real usefulness of knowledge" for the movement (Johnson, 1983). It supports movements to further understand the effects of Covid-19 on learning and reveals rather and in which ways online learning can be counter-hegemonic. I will provide feedback, highlight best practices from this research and share findings with movement as an activist toolkit (Appendix A). Sharing collective knowledge on how to organize online, build collective power and produce counter-hegemonic knowledge can support movements to sustain their group and momentum (Scandrett *et al.*, 2012). I posit social movements as knowledge producers, rather than as objects of knowledge and recognise that some previous research has disregarded the experiences of activists and ignored how real change emerges from struggles, at the margins and through the hidden stories and uncomfortable conversations (Chesters, 2012; Massoud, 2018; Choudry, 2020). Instead of whitewashing and romanticising findings focusing on the successes of the leaders and winners of the movement, this research emphasises the contribution of the collective ordinary (Choudry, 2015).

"In the poetics of struggle and lived experience, in the utterances of ordinary folk, in the cultural products of social movements, in the reflections of activists, we discover the many different cognitive maps of the future, of the world not yet born"

(Kelley, 2002, p. 10).

1.2 What To Find - Anticipated Outcomes and Assumptions

This dissertation seeks to demonstrate how online SML contributes to, limits and/or hinders CHKP in social movements. Starting from an interest in informal and collective learning, I assumed that the subtle ways of learning have counter-hegemonic potential. The self-observation of a lack of trust within online SML, made me question the necessity of the collective element and doubt the potential of online spaces for social movement organising. Hence, my implicit hypothesis was that online spaces complicate CHKP in social movements. Not knowing how and to what extent I departed on this journey.

*The title *The revolution will not be 'Zoom'ed out*,² questions not only the potential for online CHKP, but also contemplates today's realities of zoom out³, while emphasizing the continued urgency to organize for climate justice: despite the constraints – the revolution will not be zoomed out.*

1.3 Where to Walk - Roadmap

Firstly, I will outline the context of the study, training collectives with the European climate justice movement (ECJM hereafter). Then, I will conduct a literature review on the history of SML, present relevant theoretical and empirical works and show the gap in the literature. I propose a new conceptual framework for informal-collective knowledge production that expands on Bennett's extension of Schugurensky framework of informal learning, linking it with theories of collective learning. In the research design, I critically reflect on my role as the researcher, ontology and epistemology and show how I have anticipated, collected and analysed the data in a rigorous way. I will present limitations, their management and my ethical considerations. Adopting a mixed methods approach with a qualitative domination, I merge the findings with insights from SML theory and answer first how and then to what extent informal SML facilitates CHKP. Finally, I conclude and present implications and avenues for research, practise and social action.

² Building on Gill Scott Heron's (1990) famous quote, "what I meant by the phrase 'the revolution will not be televised' was, the first revolution takes place in your mind. ...It's not nobody will ever be able to catch on film ...It'll just be something that you feel and realize... you have got to get in sync with everyone else to understand..."

³ Being zoomed-out is a reaction to prolonged online work on the platform zoom, which is characterized by a feeling of exhaustion, cynicism, disconnection and numbness, that leaves the person unable to continue or cope with their work.

CHAPTER 2: THE CONTEXT

This dissertation focuses on training collectives within the ECJM. The movement experienced recent growth and has strong structures of learning (Heggart, 2020; Richardson, 2020), which arguably might stem from its fairly well educated demographic (Wahlström *et al.*, 2019; De Moor *et al.*, 2020). The intersectional and decentralized approach of the ECJM is symptomatic for new social movements, as opposed to old social movements like trade unions, which have more hierarchical structures (Schlosberg and Collins, 2014). The aforementioned characteristics show the ECJM's comparative potential. This case study focuses on training collectives that operate within ECJM not only because they facilitate and evaluate learning and have an overview of processes, but also because the training content might resemble other social justice movements (Choudry, 2020). Extrapolating findings may be useful for other movements with similar tactics and lifelong learning institutions that use similar methods. The training collectives within the ECJM are thus an interesting case study that can allow for transferability to social movements in the European context, during a time that has forced groups online. Further logistical reasons for the sample will be elaborated in Chapter 5.

2.1 The Climate Justice Movement

Climate justice as a concept goes beyond the environmental consequences of the climate crisis and frames global warming as an ethical and political issue; thereby closely linking it with social justice. Climate Justice highlights the voices of underrepresented and historically marginalized groups such as indigenous people, communities of colour and women; those that are most affected but have least contributed to the crisis (Shiva, 2009). Today, many global groups identify as being part of the climate justice movement, including global movements like *Fridays for Future* and *Extinction Rebellion*, larger NGO's including *Friends of the Earth*, *Greenpeace*, *350*, *La Via Campesina*, as well as smaller local and national action groups. The climate justice movement actively engages with critiques of domination and establishes alternatives, thereby facilitating processes of CHKP (Adler and Mittelman, 2004; Heidemann, 2020; Richardson, 2020). Learning, education and training can take place within respective climate justice groups or is facilitated by separate training collectives that may operate across social and climate justice movements.

2.2 European Training Collectives

European training collectives serve the needs of social movements as they develop responsive social movement training, strengthen communities for social action and build capacity for social, racial, and economic justice and ecological integrity.⁴ One example of a historical training collective is the famous *Highlander Folkschool*, a political education ground of the Civil Rights Movement founded by Myles Horton (Adams and Horton, 1975; Chang, 2013). The Catalunya based training collective *The Ulex Project* is a European example. Providing spaces for non-formal and informal learning, training collectives often create and use their own material, support capacity building, outreach work and internal dynamics – ranging from fostering Anti-Oppression to non-violent direct action and preventing activist burnout. Fundamentally, training collectives establish solidarity within the ECJM and operate as a platform for learning and individual and collective development. These collectives operate on the local, regional, national or European level and while some are residential, others are not geographically rooted and run dependent on need. This dissertation uses trainer/ facilitator/ activist educator interchangeably because study participants identify with different labels.

The Covid-19 pandemic and general trends of digitalisation have drastically affected social movements, and therefore training collectives. Participants of this study confirm that people's involvement has deteriorated during the pandemic.⁵ While the pandemic could have been a pivotal moment for technological upskilling and building digital literacy, many activists paused their engagement and facilitators witnesses the widening of the digital divide (Flesher Fominaya, 2020a; Pleyers, 2020). Trainers are thus not only an unexplored stakeholder in the field but also a way to gain a first-hand insight into the dynamics of CHKP in the online space.

⁴ Self-created definition influenced by the self-ascribed definitions of various European collectives. /cumulative definition established by researcher based on self-identification of training collectives.

⁵ 15/18 facilitators express that their involvement significantly decreased during the pandemic.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to explore how and to what extent SML facilitates CHKP in an online context, this literature review will give an overview about existing scholarship to situate the research within the gap in the field.

3.1 The Origins of Social Movement Learning

SML describes how movements construct learning processes as well as how movements use learning to organize and educate activists (Holst, 2002; Hall and Turray, 2006). The concept itself is widely traced back to Paulston's (1980) book *Other Dreams, Other Schools: Folk Colleges in Social and Ethnic Movements* but the earliest theorizing appeared in the *Adult Education Quarterly* in the late 1980s (Hall and Turray, 2006; Kluttz and Walter, 2018b). The term SML itself, however, only started to be used frequently in 2009 as it cross-pollinated to general social movement studies, rising in scholarly contribution, with the movements around the 2008 financial crisis, as depicted in Kuk and Tarlau's (2020, p. 596) analysis (Figure 1). They show the emergence of SML, displaying a spike in 2019, correlated to the rise of the climate justice movement. A tentative scoping search, based on their methodology shows a further increase in publications (44 in 2020) as seen in the red pillar in Figure 1.

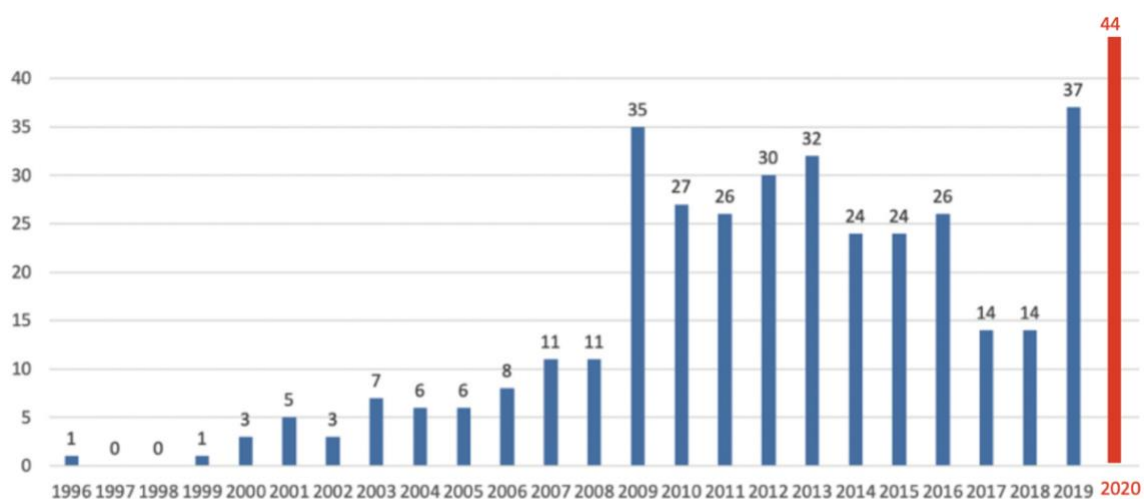


Figure 1: Emergence of the Concept Social Movement Learning 1990-2020)

Extension of Kuk and Tarlau (2020). Number of research using the keyword "social movement learning", Google Scholar. No appearance of the term before 1996.

SML can be historically located at the intersection of popular education and the pedagogies of activism (Boughton, 2005). As an offshoot of radical and critical adult education, SML was influenced by Mezirow's (1997) "transformative learning" and Foley's (1999) notion of "learning in struggle", also known as learning in social action (Holst, 2009; Kluttz and Walter, 2018b). Over the years the discourse shifted from radical adult education to SML (Holst, 2009; Torres, 2013).

It is important to understand the historical discourse of radical adult education for SML, which is based on a debate between those that rely on Marx (Allman, 1999; Foley, 1999; Holst, 2002; Mayo, 2018) and those that rely on Habermas (Welton, 1993; Mezirow, 1997; Finger and Asún, 2001). Those that rely on Marx, believe in political economy as the best analytical tool for SML, while the other group takes a post structural, radical pluralist approach (Holst, 2009). While the former are sceptical of the reformist nature of social movements, fearing co-option by capitalist democracy, the latter believe that movements can lead social transformation (Holst, 2002).

This research aligns more with the radical pluralist approach, but also agrees with Heidemann (2020) and Gouin (2009) who have called for an interdisciplinary, intersectional analysis of SML that "politicises peoples experiences and learning, rather than using "anti-capitalist struggle as the defining leitmotiv"(Kluttz and Walter, 2018a). Despite the distance from a Marxist approach, the anti-capitalist struggle is important to consider as it is an under acknowledged factor within the ECJM (Berglund and Schmidt, 2020).

3.2 Early Manifestations of Counter-Hegemonic Knowledge Production

SML is a rather small field that incorporates disciplines across the social sciences and humanities. While several studies theorise SML, only few empirically engage with it. The two most cited works in the field are Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) and Paulo Freire (1921-1997). Gramsci's counter-hegemony is fundamental to understand the ways in which social movements produce knowledge. Counter hegemony is a process challenging the status quo and normative arrangements of political and economic relation, aiming at the human liberation (Gramsci, 1971). Within counter-hegemony, a key role is ascribed to the "organic intellectual,"

from the ranks of the subaltern group who aims to change the hegemonic views by suggesting new ways to conceptualise the world (Aronowitz, 2009).

When Paulo Freire (1972, p. 126) coined the term praxis as “organised struggle for liberation that must include action, alongside serious reflection to be transformative”, the connection between learning and social action was strengthened. Eyerman and Jamison (1991) and Welton (1993) built on Freire’s (1972) work and established the term “cognitive praxis” that concretely refers to the ways in which social movements produce knowledge. At the time this meant that social movements questioned the hegemonic norms of modernity and thereby contributed to public knowledge (de-) construction (Finger, 1989; Holford, 1995). The recognition of social movements as incubators of knowledge for civil society was a breakthrough in further researching the processes and organisational structures of SML. Despite this recognition, there is limited empirical research on knowledge production in social movements.

3.3 Empirical Studies on (Online) Social Movement Learning

There is not only very limited empirical research on knowledge production within social movements, but even less on how this occurs in an online context (Hall *et al.*, 2011; Choudry and Kapoor, 2012; Cox, 2014; Heidemann, 2019). The spectrum of empirical studies on face-to-face SML ranges from studies that focus on physical skill such as music, dance and performance to exploring group dynamics and the connection between emotions and learning in activism (Beckett and Morris, 2003; Fenwick, 2003; Couch, 2004). Online studies include those that research the relationship between online and offline action (Greijdanus *et al.*, 2020) the impacts of technology and securitization on collective action (Milan, 2015; Casas, 2017) and others that highlight accessibility of online learning (Gatewood, 2020).

The empirical studies offer helpful insights in methodology and contexts that have been studied before but exemplify that there is no existing framework that theorises the contribution of informal and collective learning to (online) CHKP. Crowther *et. al.* (2012) confirm the importance of informal and collective learning in their study of a Scottish community campaign against fish farming. Langdon (2015; 2016) adds to that and shows how learning was participatory and incidental when studying Ghana’s Ada Songor Salt movement. Hoffman’s (2019) work is interesting for this research, as she asserts that learning occurs through informal

ways that are recognised in retrospect. Most recently, Ollis (2020), in her research on coal protests in Australia, affirms the importance of socialisation in the processes of informal learning, contradicting Langdon's (2015; 2016) findings on the immediacy of learning.

All four empirical studies point to the importance of informal learning but neither employ a holistic framework, nor conceptualise informal learning as knowledge production. A forthcoming longitudinal study on knowledge production in social movements of South Africa, Tukey, Nepal and Columbia might change that (Novelli, forthcoming). Preliminary findings suggest that learning occurs between academic, organisational and grassroots knowledge production and is embedded in experiences, reflections and emotions (Novelli, 2021). These developments show that this research's ambitions are fruitful endeavour.

SML in the online context has received even less attention, despite recent trends in digital learning invoked by the global pandemic (Irving *et al.*, 2011; Greijdanus *et al.*, 2020). There are various studies that investigate online activism as a concept itself, researching "clicktivism" and strategies of movements that entirely operate online (Mcgregor, 2014; Ince *et al.*, 2017; Schradie, 2018) These studies are not directly applicable, as they focus on movements that grew out of the online space. Furthermore, no studies offer direct engagement with informal or collective learning and its contribution to CHKP.

Nevertheless, some of the previous findings can be instrumentalised to support the analysis. Della Porta (2020) amongst others argues that online activism can be alienating, enhancing the digital divide reinforcing hierarchies and silos and echo chambers within groups (Burbules, 2009; Greijdanus *et al.*, 2020). Others challenge the perceived neutrality of technology as de-politicising online spaces and exacerbating the private experience, instead of reinforcing the collective nature of learning in social movements (Grayson, 2011; Milan, 2015; Harari, 2016). While some emphasise the increase in accessibility (Gatewood, 2020), others point towards the danger of technology, as it can be employed as a weapon of suppression by the state (Casas, 2017). These insights, alongside Fleischmann (2020) who assesses successful techniques for online facilitation, can aid the understanding of informal and collective SML and explore the possibilities of online CHKP.

3.4 The Gap in the Field: Approaching Informal and Collective Learning

Scholars consider informal and collective learning as crucial for knowledge production in social movements and recognise a gap in the research (Walter, 2007; Hall *et al.*, 2011; Choudry and Kapoor, 2012; Cox, 2014; Kluttz and Walter, 2018b; Choudry, 2020; Ollis, 2020).⁶ They argue that informal learning shapes and reinforces how knowledge is absorbed and constructed, and see collective learning as a driver and condition for group consciousness, necessary for social action (Kilgore, 1999; Steinklammer, 2012). Both forms of learning can be counter-hegemonic in themselves, fostering solidarity and dialogue and challenging the ways people relate to each other and the environment (Scandrett *et al.*, 2012, p. 137). I will briefly review both concepts, before I point to existing conceptualisations and approach the gap that my new framework will contribute to.

Informal learning is a lifelong process involving the pursuit of understanding that occurs without the presence of externally imposed curricular criteria (Livingstone, 2007) and in social “political practise, repertoires of contestation and collective reflection” (Scandrett *et al.*, 2012, p. 48). Informal learning has been studied in various academic contexts, in the workplace and social movements. While Masick and Watkins (2001) coin the differentiation between incidental and intentional informal learning, Foley (1999) is the first scholar that applies informal learning to social movements. Tilly (2009) and Foley (1999, p. 3) describe SML as “largely informal and often incidental – tacit, embedded in action and often not recognised as learning.” Masick’s classification remains prominent but other scholars have contemplated other dimensions of informal learning: “self-directed” (Knowles, 1975) “experiential” (Kolb, 1984) “embodied” (Ollis, 2008a). Schugurensky (2000) brought theories together and proposed a framework for informal learning that distinguishes between “self-directed”, “incidental” and “socialisation.” Bennett (2012) added a fourth, non-conscious and intentional dimension to the framework: “integrative learning.”

Collective learning can be traced back to Vygotsky’s (1978) theorising and is defined as “a process that occurs among two or more diverse people in which taken-as-shared meanings are constructed and acted upon by the group.” In recent years, collective learning has become an object of study within Human Resource Development, which explores the collective dimension

⁶ Further confirmed in personal conversation with Dr. Aziz Choudry and Dr. Eurig Scandrett

of skills, knowledge and abilities that improve organisations effectiveness (Garavan and McCarthy, 2008; Sisco *et al.*, 2019). The earliest and most relevant contributions to theorising collective learning in social movements was by Kilgore in 1999, but over the years more scholars have confirmed the collective nature of (counter-hegemonic) knowledge production within social movements (Holford, 1995; Hall, 2009; Cox, 2014; Choudry, 2015; Mayo, 2018).

Previous frameworks do not sufficiently theorize informal and collective ways of learning and have rarely been applied to practise. Choudry (2015, p. 154) calls for a “sound analytical framework” but warns that SML is messy. Before, I propose my framework in Chapter 4, I will revisit existing attempts. Foley’s (1999) pivotal work *Learning in Social Action* challenges the assumptions of learning as an organised and formal activity and builds a framework that connects learning and education, emphasising informal and incidental learning. Gouin (2009) critiques and revises his work, drawing on feminist and anti-capitalist and anti-racists theory. Gouin’s (2009) critique of Foley’s (1999) work build the anti-oppressive core of this research. Other attempts include Hall (2009, p. 46) who highlights the “individual, collective, spontaneous and (re) generative pedagogical nature of SML” and Scandrett (2012) who builds a framework for the micro, meso and macro dimensions of SML. Kluttz and Walter (2018a) propose an extension of Scandrett’s (2012) work, adding a collective/ individual and organised/ unorganised continuum (Kuk and Tarlau, 2020). This extension offers valuable insights for this research, establishing a further understanding of the collective and the unorganised forms of learning, yet all three previous examples fail to draw a link with knowledge production.

Responding to the need for a theoretical framework and more empirical research, this dissertation proposes a conceptual framework for informal-collective SML for CHKP to answer its research question that asks: How and to which extent does social movement learning in the online context facilitate counter-hegemonic knowledge production?

CHAPTER 4: A NEW CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This dissertation brings together informal and collective learning, proposing a conceptual framework that expands on Bennett’s (2012) extension of Schugurensky framework of informal learning and situates it within the collective learning dynamics of social movements. The framework attempts to show how informal learning facilitates knowledge production. Conceptualising these two theories is useful beyond social movements and potentially applicable to other formal and non-formal sites of learning.

Stage 1

Departing from Bennett’s (2012) four dimensions (Figure 2), classified on a spectrum of intentionality and consciousness of learning, I enrich her framework, consulting Kolb’s experiential learning theory for the incidental dimension and Olli’s thoughts on embodied learning for the integrative dimension. Afterwards, I situate the framework within the collective learning space to demonstrate knowledge production.

	Intentional	Non-Intentional
Conscious	Self-Directed	Incidental
Non-conscious	Integrative-Embodied	Socialised

Figure 2: Bennett’s (2012) four dimensions of informal learning

- 1) **Self-directed learning** can be defined as a conscious and intentional learning process initiated by an individual or group with the goal of learning something (Schugurensky, 2000).
- 2) **Incidental learning** is a conscious but non-intentional process that takes place when there was no previous intent of learning, but after the experience, the person becomes aware that learning took place (Schugurensky, 2000). Complemented by Kolb’s (1984) work on experiential learning, it can be divided into four stages that are acknowledged as a continuum: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Jarvis, 1987).
- 3) **Integrative Embodied learning** is “a learning process that combines intentional non-conscious processing of tacit knowledge with access to learning products and mental

images” (Bennett, 2012, p. 28). Bennett describes it as an intuitive leap or a moment of sudden understanding, commonly known as an “aha” moment. Complementing the cognitive focus of integrative learning with an embodied dimension, Ollis (2020) enables the understanding of processes of “pattern matching and mental rotating” that eventually lead the learner to integrate new and existing knowledge, that then surfaces as a light bulb moment or gut feeling.

- 4) **Socialisation** is the unconscious unintentional process defined by the learning of values and behavioural skills that takes place during everyday life, without an awareness of the learning (Schugurensky, 2000).

Stage 2

The overall framework (Figure 3) shows how Bennett’s four dimensions of informal learning (white centre circle), operating as a continuum (dotted line), are situated in the collective learning space (dashed line) and interact with the outer environment and people (arrows). Knowledge production (wavy line) takes place as a collective process (in green space) and is facilitated through the interaction between learner and outer environment. Knowledge production outside the environment signifies action, while still grounded in informal and collective learning. Methods and processes (triangle) are guiding knowledge production.

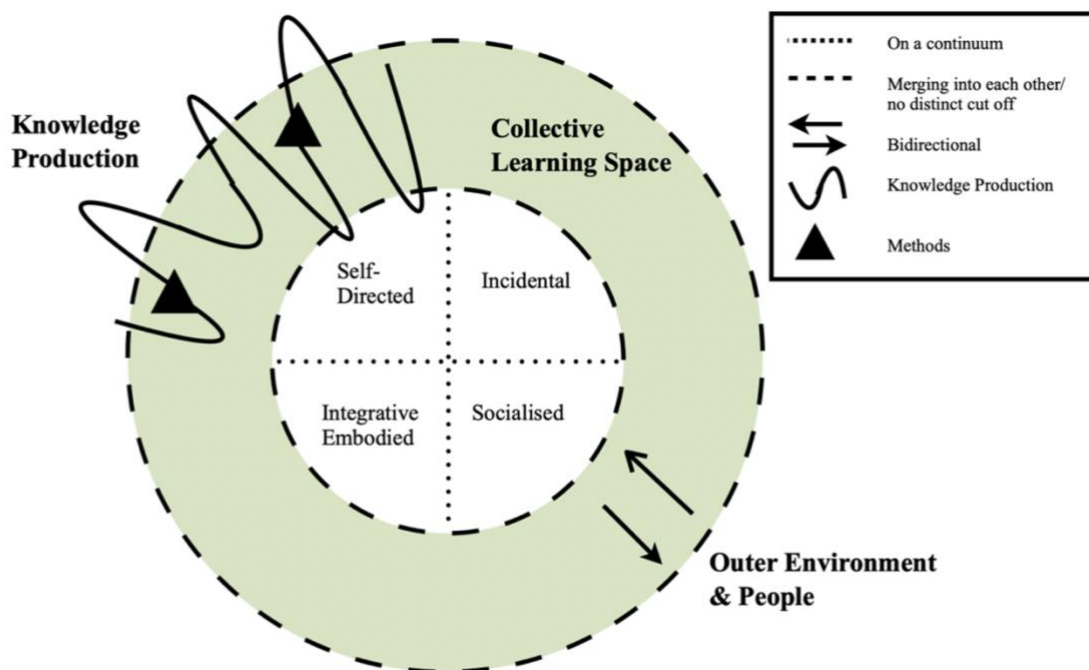


Figure 3: Informal collective learning and knowledge production: A framework

Knowledge production is inherently bidirectional and made up of the interaction among participants and their social/physical environments, occurring through the active the engagement with other people, nature, processes and objects (Vygotsky, 1978; Garavan and McCarthy, 2008). Knowledge production is ultimately achieved in the collective learning space through the co-creation of knowledge and meaning by a group. The four dimensions shape habitus and therefore the mechanisms that reinforce patterns of interaction. As trainers actively shape processes of informal and collective learning, the methods they employ (also in non-formal and formal learning) can facilitate (counter-hegemonic) knowledge production. Eventually, knowledge is not only produced but also renewed and tested in a cycle by acting on established knowledge and theories (Hall, 1978). Trainers formalise, repackage and expand knowledge and “in a short cycle they ensure that each round of theorization is immediately engaged with the materiality of the domain of organizing” (Mathew, 2010, p. 169). In Chapter 6, I will analyse how the four elements of informal SML facilitate (counter hegemonic) knowledge production (Stage 1) and in Chapter 7, I will assess to which extent SML can facilitate spaces for counter-hegemonic discourse and knowledge production (Stage 2).

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH DESIGN

“Scholarly research happens in a messy, nonlinear process.” (Ulibarri et al., 2014)

5.1 Introduction and Purpose of Methodology

The following sections will explain my research design, recognising that a transparent methodology and methods section is crucial to a research process that genuinely recognises the participants’ “social and political ontologies and epistemological practices” (Chesters, 2012, p. 153). Employing a mixed methods approach allowed me to not only explore how social movements facilitate learning but also to what extent respective knowledge production can be counter hegemonic. The sequential time orientation enabled breadth of the quantitative study that gave direction to the qualitative investigation, which dominated the research through its in-depth insights into individual perceptions (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2009). Using a descriptive-interpretative case study approach, this research seeks to provide an “intensive,” holistic description and analysis of a single, bounded unit (facilitators in training collectives) situated in a specific context (ECJM)(Merriam, 2009; Pickard, 2013). Case study research is a popular method to produce “small scale research with meaning” that can accommodate the necessary degree of flexibility in the process and is commonly used in social movement research (Snow and Trom, 2002; Silverman, 2013; Mattoni, 2014; Tight, 2017).

5.2. Role of the Researcher

The anticipated outcomes are influenced by the researcher’s positionality and perspectives. I am a white, European, middle class, young cis women from a lower educational background, enrolled in a Master’s degree, with more than six years of experience within social justice movements, four in the ECJM. My positionality makes me a writer within an “identifiable centre of production of dominant knowledge” (Escobar, 1995, p. 224). Active within a range of social and climate movements, I have witnessed the pandemic’s influence on civil society and the general turn to the online space.

While I acknowledge the benefits of online learning exacerbated by the global pandemic, previous conversations with activists and my own experience have made me wonder and doubt to what extent CHKP is possible online. Scholars warn about “going native” in the field, becoming too involved in the community of study, losing objectivity and distance and

therefore developing researcher bias (O'Reilly, 2009). My biases include general sympathy towards the research subjects and a personal ambition to produce useful outcomes for the social movement. I see it as an ethical obligation to give back to the movement as a potential activist academic (Apple, 2019; Choudry, 2020). I mitigated these biases taking a break from my involvement in the respective movements and by approaching the research from the angle of the trainer. To avoid 'going native' I engaged in regular exercises of self-reflection, acknowledging my positionality and privilege as an activist academic/student throughout the research (Choudry, 2020).

5.3 Ontology and Epistemology

Although this research employs a descriptive – interpretative case study approach, its underlying ontology is critical realism. Situated in the post-positivist paradigm, critical realism provides a “a nuanced version of a realist ontology” (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2009; Torre *et al.*, 2012; Zachariadis *et al.*, 2013). Critical realism sees the world as theory-laden but not theory-determined and acknowledges that human knowledge “captures only a small part of the deeper and vaster reality” (Fletcher, 2017, p. 182). This ontology is useful for social movement research, as it allows the researcher to distinguish the empirical, the actual and the real (Bhaskar, 1975; Volkoff *et al.*, 2007; Oliver, 2012).

The epistemological perspective, nature of knowledge, of the researcher combines an interpretivist with a pragmatist approach. Epistemological pragmatism is relatively flexible and often used within mixed methods (Denscombe, 2010). The approach admits that reality is always negotiated, no objective reality, while still analysing occurrences through a solution-oriented way (Creswell, 2008). I agree to the voices activist educators who challenge the notions that research design, including specific sampling techniques and data gathering methods are required for “knowing” (Hill, 2003, p. 33). Overall, critical realism and epistemological pragmatism are useful approaches to researching the complexity of SML (Hoddy, 2019).

5.4 Methods

The mixed methods approach allows for flexibility to understand the complexities of how and to what extent SML facilitates CHKP in an online context. I used an online survey including quantitative and qualitative questions and semi-structured in-depth interviews. While the initial quantitative survey indicated overall trends and produced more general and structured data, the

qualitative interviews provided rich, contextual and generally unstructured, non-numerical data (Mason, 2002). Following the sequential design, the online survey served for scoping and breadths to prepare for the right framing within the interviews. The limitations of the mixed methods approach will be discussed below. The overall tentative population for this research is difficult to estimate and very dependent on the country. From the data gathered I estimate between 1-4 collectives per European country, with approximately two full time staff, various part time and freelance staff and a wide range of volunteers. This would account for very roughly 200 active trainers, excluding the volunteers.

The Survey

The online survey was, after a piloting phase, available from mid-October to the end of November 2020, shared in English on the platform Survey Monkey and intended to reach (climate justice) activists that identify as active facilitators or trainers. While the platform is known and accessible to most activists, the English language might have been a limitation for access and completion, which also applies to the interviews. The intention of the survey was to get a general overview of the facilitator's perception of SML, to scope themes, recruit participants and prepare thematically for the qualitative interviews. Themes included the awareness and ambitions for SML, the influence of the pandemic and the ways in which facilitators perceive SML as different to formal learning, thus counter hegemonic.

Sharing the link through a variety of European training collectives and EJCM mail serves as well as through specific social networking, I engaged in a mix between voluntary and snowball sampling (both non-probability) for the survey. My personal link to gatekeepers in the field allowed for snowball sampling, as trainers encouraged each other to share the survey. Voluntary sampling allowed for a wider reach beyond my access points. I cannot rule out sampling bias but tried to reduce it through criteria for filling out the survey and monitoring the demographic data, which confirmed that the respondents stem from a particular silo. Technology and language barriers and time constraints could have reduced the ability and chance for facilitators to partake in "yet another survey".⁷ With an average completion time of 11 minutes the survey was timely and gathered 23 responses, of which 18 are full responses. The desired sample was 30 people in a tentative population that approximately accounts for 200 people in Europe.

⁷ Exclamation of a respondents in the "any other comments" section.

The survey demographic is mixed in terms of age, gender, years of involvement and life background. About half of the respondents were between 25-35 and while the majority identifies as very active, 5 are trainers on the side. All but two facilitators identified as white, and one person said that they are from a discriminated background. While a majority of respondents are active as trainers or in social movement education, their tactics for change vary from advocacy work to civil disobedience and mass protest.

The Interviews

Analysing the micro-dynamics of conversation, agency and ideational factors like learning, perception and norms, interviews have proven as useful tools to capture individuals subjective experience of the world (Marshall and Rossman, 2006; Creswell, 2013).

The interviews were piloted with two activists, assessing accessibility and operationalisation of the concepts (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012). Conducted in a semi-structured way, they lasted between 40 and 50 min and included 12-15 questions. Covid-19 determined, seven interviews were conducted over the video conferencing tool Zoom and three over the phone, all in the English language between November 2020 and February 2021. With permission of the trainers, interviews were either video or audio recorded and stored safely (see section 5.9 for ethics). The interview guide was slightly adjusted to the participants and overtime, sticking to the main theoretical frameworks and indicators.

The research and sample focuses on the European region, based on my cultural experiences and positionality, discussed in Chapter 1. Researching a context, I am familiar with and actively refraining from a Global South focus was a conscious decision based on my conviction to not reinforce colonial and neoliberal, racist, ableist etc. forms of oppression in such a short-term research project. The research population for the interview was selected based on logical inference rather than statistical generalization, common to qualitative research (Small, 2009). Case study research has a preference for information-rich cases that are selected based on their ability to represent a larger phenomenon (Guba, 1981). Therefore, my qualitative research used non-probability sampling techniques, employing a mix of snowball and purposive/criterion-based sampling (Weiss, 1994; Blaikie, 2000; Patton, 2002).

Sampling occurred in a two-stage process, which others have called “initial sampling and theoretical sampling” (Charmaz, 2006). In the initial sampling process, participants were

reached through mailing lists, personal connections and references (snowball sampling). The outreach phase reached 27 participants who were available for an interview. However, with the Covid outbreak the sample shrank significantly, leaving only 19 participants interested/ with capacity to be interviewed. From the remaining 19 participants a group of ten was selected through purposive sampling based 1) geographical diversity within Europe and 2) diversity of angles on climate justice activism. The number of participants aligns with the interpretative case study method, which is relatively small and makes up between six and ten participants (Holloway, 1997).

Following my established sampling criteria, the interview sample consists out of ten trainers who originate from seven countries: Scotland, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and Austria. They were all interviewed in English. The majority of them (nine) have worked in several European countries. All of the participants centre their work on climate justice activism, combined with an individual priority. These priorities diverge among the trainers and include: LGBTQIA+, disability justice, strategy, power and anti-oppression, anti-militarism, non-violent action and regenerative activism. None of the participants focuses on anti-racism work, which shows the systematic oppression of BIPOC activists in climate justice activism (Sengupta, 2020; Lobo, 2021). All participants identify as activists and active trainers in the ECJM. The ten interviewees are between 24-49 years old, nine out of ten identify as white and eight out of ten as cisgender. Interviews were conducted with six self-identifying women, three self-identifying men and one self-identifying trans-gender person. All the interview participants are anonymized (see Figure 3 and a gender-neutral pseudonym with the pronouns they/them is used in their place. No demographic data is revealed for security and because the sample is too small make conclusive remarks about demographics (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012).

Overall sample demographics approximately represent the perceived and experienced dynamics of ECJM, which is overly constituted of white people (based on historical discrimination), tends to engage more women and has in the recent years focused particularly on justice around LGBTQIA+ rights, hence attracting more individuals from diverse gender identities and sexualities (Whittaker, 2020).

5.5 Analysis and Synthesis of the Data

Approaching the field as an exploratory case study, I started the inductive data analysis early in my data collection phase. Using the sequential convergent design, I broadly began my analysis after the first five survey results and after three interviews (Creswell, 2013; Pickard, 2013). Initial findings influenced the subsequent interview process and observations were facilitated by a fieldwork diary, memos and short narrative summaries for cross-case analysis (Lempert, 2010, p. 245).

Quantitative Data

The survey included Likert scales and multiple-choice options, which were analysed using basic descriptive analysis and graphing tools. I analysed data using Excel and integrated tools such as bar and pie charts offered by Survey Monkey. Aware of the potential revelation of the identities of the participants but recognising that the answers themselves are not very indicative of identities, this research works with absolute numbers instead of percentages. This research is limited by its small sample but offers a small contribution to the need for more systematic quantitative research, depicted in a review that shows only six out of 228 articles in a 25 year sample use quantitative methods (Niesz *et al.*, 2018, p. 9).

Qualitative Data

The qualitative findings from the survey, as well as the interviews were analysed using a mix of qualitative and *a priori* descriptive coding through the software Nvivo (Kuckartz, 2014, p. 62). Combining inductive and deductive coding establishes a strong connection between data gathering, analysis and concept building, thereby connecting theory and practise (Coe *et al.*, 2013; Mattoni, 2014). The coding process involved open coding and selective coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). I analysed initial data for similarities and differences after the third interview. Then, I established preliminary categories, which were sub-consciously influenced by previous research on the topic (Saldaña, 2013). For the second stage, I used a priori coding, through which I tentatively established codes from the literature, operationalized them and merged them into conceptual categories. Nvivo aided this process with several functions such as word clouds and key word search, which quantified the need for particular categories (see Appendix D). After nine interviews I reached a first level of theoretical saturation valid for the scope of this research project (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Triangulation

Triangulation is a process of verification, increasing validity by “incorporating several viewpoints and methods” and reducing researcher bias (Creswell, 2013; Guzmán-Valenzuela, 2016). Triangulation, especially important in case study research, can enhance credibility or show “disciplined subjectivity” (Meyer, 2011). Triangulation occurred throughout, cross checking quantitative with qualitative findings at several stages within data collection and analysis (Yeasmin and Rahman, 2012). Despite the intention for a rigid mixed methods approach, triangulation revealed that I did not combine the methods well. Based on the time distance within the sequential data collection, or due to my lack of research experience, the quantitative part did not complement the qualitative findings as intended. Using the survey as a scoping tool for the interviews was beneficial, yet the original survey questions ended up being too broad to triangulate with the very specific outcomes of the qualitative findings. In the future, narrowing and re-running the survey after the interviews and aligning the questions more closely with the findings would be useful. Besides, less time distance would allow for more rigid triangulation and therefore ensure that the quantitative and qualitative findings complement each other adequately. These limitations reveal that triangulation could only to a certain extent enhance the validity of the research.

5.6 Interpretation, Rigour and Plausibility

A mixed methods approach from a critical realist perspective tries to ensure that the complexity and subjectivity of an issue is upheld, while designing a rigid, empirical study (Zachariadis *et al.*, 2013; Salmons, 2016). Ensuring methodological diversity and flexibility, the parameters to establish trustworthiness of the research are assessed by post positivistic notions of reliability and validity (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012; Denscombe, 2014).

Credibility – how far the researcher’s portrayal matches the participants perceptions – is guaranteed as participants were able to review the data and quotes after the interviews. My engagement with my positionality also encourages credibility and confirmability. Dependability – quality of data collection and analysis – was upheld because the research was conducted systematically, and codes were checked for consistency, establishing a matrix of operationalized themes and codes. Transferability evaluates how far the findings can be applied to other situations. Here, it is important to acknowledge that this research has a small sample size, which is not statistically representative and very context specific. Nevertheless, this

interpretative case study can provide an in-depth view of the sample population, providing early insights and the foundations for future research.

5.7 Limitations

In this section I acknowledge the limitations and propose strategies to mitigate them. The key limitations of this study are the small sample size, the sampling methods and the reliance on online data gathering techniques (Charmaz, 2006). Researcher bias, cultural context and reactivity also need to be acknowledged. The sample population is very small and not representative. The strategy to reach and invite participants are based on the researcher's approach to the field and hence limited to the online network of activists. Silos are likely and could have encouraged participants with similar profiles to participate in the study. A limitation of the research methods includes the technical literacy to conduct an online survey, which restricts the survey to a certain demographic, and the English language as an access barrier. Interviews are limited in their representativeness, as they are very context dependent and involve participants going off track. A lack of previous research in the field and aforementioned limitations make this study less transferable.

The Covid-19 pandemic had a major influence on the research and the quality of the findings (Lupton, 2020). Not only were social movement facilitators oversaturated with online engagement, but also frustrated about the pandemic and its consequences for social movements. Conducting a grassroots research in an online context is very difficult, as trust building cannot take place. Relationships are negotiated by technology and disembodied, anonymous, and contextual settings do not facilitate conditions of mutual confidence (Schoenenberg *et al.*, 2014; Gordon-Smith, 2020). The lack of understanding of the energy in the room could have done potential unintended harm to the participant. Due to lack of time, skill and capacity, I decided not to include non-verbal observations into the analysis, which could have revealed more layers of the participants identity, as Salmon suggests (2016). This, however, is an opportunity for further research. Conducting online research with activists, requires additional knowledge of online data protection of participants' digital identities, especially relevant as activists highly value privacy online (Burbules, 2009; Gubrium *et al.*, 2015; Salmons, 2016).

5.8 Risk Management

The limitation section outlines a range of risks, which need to be managed to the extent possible for the safety of the participants and the rigor of the study. The piloting phase itself and pre-assessing contexts and codes of conduct are a mitigating strategy for potential triggers, especially around Covid-19. The emotional risks of researching in a global pandemic are at length discussed by others.⁸ Considerations included participant vulnerability and their previous exposure to structures of oppression, which have both been exacerbated by the pandemic and the climate crisis. Climate activists are particularly likely to be subject to eco-anxiety or other forms of (in)visible mental health issues, that need to be acknowledged to ensure safety (Church et. al., 2016). Some of the risks are mitigated, as the study focuses on adults and long-term instead of what Ollis (2020) calls “circumstantial activists.” Participants had at least four years of experience as trainers and in most cases over ten in social movements (Choudry and Kapoor, 2012). Risk factors were also mitigated by personal engagement, careful interview techniques and follow up conversations with participants over email and phone.

5.9 Ethics

The dissertation was approved by the University of Glasgow’s ethics committee and regards honesty as its guiding principle, refraining from any form of plagiarism. Reciprocity and trust are crucial for social movement research, especially in an online context. Every participant gave their consent. Participant data was anonymized and all data collected including survey answers, recorded videos and transcript was stored safely and will be destroyed after the research, following GDPR guidelines (Wiles, 2013; Salmons, 2016; Casas, 2017).⁹ Ethical activist research is not only about “a researcher’s political credentials or using a self-proclaimed “engaged” or “emancipatory” method or methodology, but also about the reasons the research is produced and how it can be used” (Choudry, 2015, p. 123). The purpose of this study should hence not only serve academia but be grounded in its usefulness for social movements and grassroots activism (Gillan and Pickerill, 2012).

The combination of adequate methods with rigid tools for analysing and interpreting the data, framed the research that actively engages with risks and ethical considerations along the way.

⁸ Further reflection from the researcher can be found in the fieldwork and data analysis diary, upon request.

⁹ Further concrete ethical considerations can be accessed in the researcher’s ethics application, upon request.

CHAPTER 6:

INFORMAL LEARNING & COUNTER HEGEMONIC KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

“Learning is very emergent, informal and intuitive” (Survey).

This section responds to the first part of the research question, analysing how social movement learning facilitates CHKP in the online context.¹⁰ European training collectives express that learning in social movements is not only about and for oneself, but “also about being together with other people: as part of a community” (Marin). Scholars agree to these sentiments and claim that having “interactivity” and a “learning community” significantly contributes to the learning experience (O’Shea *et al.*, 2015; Buck, 2016).

The quantitative findings of this study show that while learning might not be a key priority when joining a social movement, it certainly animates people to stay.¹¹ Irrespective of how facilitators perceived the importance of learning, all of them agree that participants learn either “much” or “very much” and change their values and attitudes through the involvement in the movement.¹² The pandemic has drastically changed the ways in which learning takes place.¹³ Yet, the large majority of facilitators (17/18) agree that SML is about group discussions “learning from somebody” and learning “in an experimental way”. In this section, I will not only analyse the effects of moving online on informal learning, but also discuss how aforementioned trends of collective and experiential learning are reflected in the qualitative findings. Relatively few facilitators (7/18) report that activists learning against the status quo occurs through “learning in reflection” and even fewer (5/18) express that people learn through “audio and video material”. Rather this speaks in favour of experiential and against self-directed learning and how far respective processes contribute to CHKP, will be discussed. I will analyse self-directed, incidental, integrative-embodied learning and socialisation as forms of informal learning to reveal trainers’ perceptions of SML and argue that while informal learning is

¹⁰ For reference see operationalization of CHKP in introduction.

¹¹ “Learning was a priority when joining the movement”: 3/18 high priority, 4/18 priority, 6/18 medium priority, 5/18 low priority.

¹² “Since you joined the social movement, do you feel like you have learned a lot?” 18/18 “much” or “very much” “Do you think your attitudes and values have changed since you joined the social movement?” 4/18 fundamentally changed, 5/18 changed 7/18 slightly changed, 2/18 haven’t changed much.

¹³ 15/18 report that involvement decreased, 3/18 it stayed the same. Four people went from 10-14h or involvement to less than 4h/ week. “A huge thing that drove people to activism was doing something with their body” (Aiden).

important to facilitate (counter-hegemonic) knowledge production, its potential is significantly complicated by the online context.

6.1 Self-directed learning

Self-directed learning is one of the most explored fields of adult education, as it defines a conscious and intentional learning process. Recent studies show that most online learning is described as self-directed in nature (Anderson Holland, 2019; Curran *et al.*, 2019). Easy to measure, self-directed learning is defined as any process that is initiated by an individual or a group with the goal of learning something (Schugurensky, 2000). Examples from the findings include reading a book, initiating a conversation or engaging in an active personal reflection (Choudry, 2015). Learners take charge of their own learning, when they are given “the opportunity and responsibility to figure it out” because “no one is telling [them] what to do” (Marin). Kami expresses how movements give participants the time and space to “step into their own agency and propose and do new things”, which they call “Do-ocracy” (Kami). This process breaks with the hegemonic authority of the educator and hands agency to the participants, thereby engaging in what Rene calls “democratizing democracy” (Isaac *et al.*, 2020). No one waits “for the boss to tell them what to do” (Kami). The majority of facilitators express that reflection supports learning, resonating with Aiden who states, “the constant culture of reflection and learning - I think it is essential.” Scholars agree that a healthy culture of self-directed learning and reflection eventually leads to knowledge production through cognitive praxis (Holford, 1995; McGregor and Christie, 2020).

Mezirow (1981, p. 21) argues that a self-directed learner is aware of “the constraints of [their] efforts to learn [...] involving reified power relationship embedded in institutionalized ideologies which influences one’s habits of perception, thought, and behaviour as one attempts to learn.” While facilitators generally affirm a critical learning ambition, the majority of them question the extent to which activists can use self-directed learning to deconstruct power relationships. Mo shares that people might be aware of the “so-called system” but in many cases “don’t actively connect it to their positionality and privilege” when they initiate learning, such as reading a book on fossil fuel extraction. The general claim of “take down the system and create a new one” does not mean that activists instinctively and independently engage in counter-hegemonic forms of self-directed learning (Survey).

In contrast, several trainers argue that it needs facilitators and leaders to establish truly critical dialogue and allow activists to “radically rethink the system [they] live in,” such as imagining “alternative economic institutions and futures” (Gouin, 2009). Scholars agree and argue that online learning needs more deliberately orchestrated opportunities for learning, than face-to-face interaction (Delahunty *et al.*, 2014). Taking this role, a facilitator resembles what Gramsci has described as the organic intellectual, who articulates the movements’ philosophy of praxis and can suggest new ways of conceptualising the world (Aronowitz, 2009). How are these opportunities orchestrated in an online context?

Online spaces are more curated learning spaces and therefore arguably even more self-directed (Anderson Holland, 2019). While they provide less opportunity to initiate the spontaneous physical learning moments that Kami calls “Do-ocracy”, they pave way for extended learning through the internet. “There are a lot of online tools to enhance self-learning” (Mo). “It allows you to write with 20 people on the same flipchart” (Sam). An advantage of the online space is not only large group collaboration but also that learners can be supported to take initiative, as their learning process takes place at home, which is safe and comfortable (Noa, Surveys). Online spaces allow for higher rates of participation but can also enhance silos and echo chambers, as facilitators report (Greijdanus *et al.*, 2020). What might have been a direct question to a neighbour is now delivered to the group in the chat or researched/googled individually. Survey respondents express that “there is more freedom for people to seek the information and experience by themselves”, but also fear that online spaces divide the collective and risks oversimplifying concepts into “bite-sized quotations or divisive sound bites” that suit everyone. While some share that self-directed learning becomes more efficient online, others have criticised it as overly outcome-oriented, capitalist and inadequate to examine learning processes for social change (Collins, 2020; Dreamson, 2020).

While self-directed learning facilitates agency and cognitive praxis among the activists in their safe and comfortable online space, the facilitation through training collectives adds crucial direction, necessary for CHKP to take place, especially in the online context.

6.2 Incidental Learning

SML is “hands-on, based on trial and error” as people “learn by doing things [...] in order to make an action happen” (Survey)

Incidental learning takes place when a person becomes aware of their learning after an experience took place, will be aided by Kolb’s (1984) ideas on experiential learning (Schugurensky, 2000). There is wide agreement among the facilitators that the best action preparation is through real life scenarios, action or in struggle (Foley, 1999; Zuber-Skerritt *et al.*, 2020). “Learning about direct action happens best on the street” (Survey). When not on the streets, trainers use role playing games to recreate experiences and initiate and provoke moments of incidental learning. Following Kolb’s stages of experiential learning, most facilitators agree that learning occurs after an experience through individual or collective reflection whereby “knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 7). “Activists learn most [...] when they are forced to think on their feet and respond to different inputs and real scenarios” (Survey). These scenarios combine action and reflection in what Freire has called praxis and engage activists beyond the intellectual on an emotional level (Kami)(Freire, 1972; Choudry, 2015). This form of learning is counter-hegemonic in its methodology because it does not predetermine learning outcomes. “I think a pretty big part of it is having faith and let go of knowing the outcomes” (Aiden). Training collectives “create brave spaces” (Kami) “in which it is safe to fail” (Mo) that foster a situation of non-intentional experiential learning (Zia). Aiko shows that many participants are not aware of the importance of the role-playing games and expresses how activists complain about “all these silly games, but they often forget how important they are in terms of creating that connection between people” (Aiko).

Although previous findings suggest that incidental learning takes place on the streets, in games and conversations, a majority of educators agree that important learning also takes place during informal conversations, over lunch or during general breaks (Sam) (Scandrett *et al.*, 2012).

“I know that a lot of the learning and making sense of things takes place in the breaks. It is the space where people have time to settle or if they are struggling with things-people start to talk to each other and make sense of things” (Aiko).

Noa, Marin Mo and others share these thoughts and underline that breaks an important structure for accessibility and safety, that can hold the group together when the training has pushed

activists into a discomfort zone. Breaks and informal conversation are perceived as breeding grounds for radical learning, allowing for counter-cultural unorganised learning during rest, as (Kluttz and Walter, 2018a). How do these processes occur online?

While role playing games already imitate real life scenarios in face-to face meetings, many facilitators perceive them as “even more staged” in the online setting (Aiden). Methods that are now mediated by technology can no longer allow for “moving around and changing the setting” (Zia). Trainers report that online anonymity makes it more difficult to read expressions, necessary to know when to instigate group reflection processes (Salmons, 2016). Furthermore, it complicates the follow up (Mo), which is crucial for reflection to sink but also for the facilitators to understand incidental learning (Sam, Noa). Sam expresses that there is a general lack of follow up, which is important to prevent harm and ensure that learning is not only being half realized, as Foley warns (Foley, 1999). Several trainers shared that feedback forms from online trainings have a much smaller reach. Breaks remain an important element in online spaces for accessibility and to prevent Zoom-fatigue (Collins, 2020; Labrague *et al.*, 2021). Contrary to the importance of breaks in face-to face learning, however, “online breaks are very individualistic and do not facilitate trust and learning” (Mo). Marin shares that “online you don’t have the spontaneous conversations that are literally the most important thing when getting people together” (Marin, Survey). Can incidental learning then, facilitate CHKP in the online context?

Learning that relies on experiences, spontaneous conversations and discursive encounters with material and activists, is limited in all four stages of Kolb’s experiential learning online (Choudry, 2015; Earl, 2018). The online environment significantly hinders the collective elements of incidental learning and thereby its potential to generate CHKP.

6.3 Integrative-Embodied Learning

SML is not only cognitive but also embodied, embedded with passion, anger and commitment to social change (Beckett and Morris, 2003; Ollis, 2008b). In this section, I investigate how facilitators perceive embodied learning and how they make sense of the epiphanies, gut feeling and light bulb moments within SML, and their potential for CHKP (Choudry, 2015, p. 102).

Bennett (2012) describes integrative learning as an intuitive leap or a moment of sudden understanding, which can happen when people turn their attention away from a problem, during sleep, a break, training exercises or other activities that distract the conscious mind so implicit processes can occur. From the embodied dimension this is especially visible through sudden light bulb moments that can determine learning and action, after the person has gone as far as they could with conscious thought. As a non-conscious process, integrative learning is deeply embedded within socialised ways of behaving. Various trainers use the phrase “post-doing aha moments” and confirm that learning is not always conscious. SML is a permanent process, it “occurs all the time whether [activist] want it or not” (Noa, Survey)(Shor and Freire, 1987, p. 137). The intentional nature of the process “pushes answer to the surface at unexpected times” (Bennett, 2012, p. 28). A psychological study shows that the brain’s area that is associated with making connections between remotely related information, shows intensive neural activity prior to sudden insight (Jung-Beeman *et al.*, 2004). How do these sudden leaps of understanding happen in an online context?

Facilitators and scholars argue that online spaces offer a constant level of engagement, even when people only passively participate in a meeting (Labrague *et al.*, 2021). Although Bennett (2012) argues that images and colours of digital technologies can trigger non-verbal cognition, the online space cannot serve for the distraction that occurs in collective face-to-face meetings. Aiko shares that observing and determining group dynamics and potential aha moments are much more difficult online. “I observe people’s gestures and bodily behaviour – the small moments – all of that is gone” (Aiko). This shows that integrative learning is hindered online.

Embodied learning can be a pre-stage of the integration of new and existing knowledge but can also be a facilitator thereof. Ollis (2020) has written extensively on embodied learning and argues that “outside the comfort zone” moments fuel learning. “These disconcerting moments, these edgy moments of tension that occur through praxis, provide opportunity and produce an agency to learn”(Drew, 2014, p. 148). Noa explains how learning took place as they as “put their body in line” and Mo articulates that in these “intense moments the real learning happens” when you “feel the buzzing, when 500 people are shouting the same thing and are all focused on one goal” (Zia). The buzzing contributes to collective learning, what Kilgore describes as building collective identity and embodied consciousness (Kilgore, 1999; Collins, 2020) but can also enable the mind and body to integrate new and existing knowledge through what Bennett (2012) calls “pattern matching” (Foley, 1999).

Transferring embodied learning to an online context appears to be very difficult. Aiden expresses that “the emotional driving force has been massively tamed.” This intrinsic connection between emotions and learning is a key driver for how knowledge is produced through the physicality of action (Price and Shildrick, 1999; Fenwick, 2003). The “lack physical or tangible output is demotivating” (Aiden). Although online learning allows for more physical accessibility, others argue that technology heightens barriers of access and alienates people who “need their body to learn” (Survey)(Bennett and Mcwhorter, 2019; Zhang *et al.*, 2020; Aboagye *et al.*, 2021). Some facilitators express how they use movement, stretching and even dancing during online meetings. However, most of them agree that “you don’t feel that buzzing”, “you don’t get the energy of an online interaction” (Noa, Zia). Exactly that energy that is crucial for learning and hence, knowledge production, is missing. “Discussions are not so personal because they don’t work with emotions or the body” (Noa). Embodied learning is hindered not only because of a lack of a shared physical space but also because working with difficult topics online can be triggering and fail to catch vulnerability and emotion (Sam, Noa, Survey). Eli expresses that “it is difficult to get people to interact more deeply” and various facilitators describe their concern over “Zoom Out” and physical consequences, which can literally hinder participation, shown in a recent study (Rene, Survey)(Christan, 2017; Labrague *et al.*, 2021).¹⁴

The online space offers less moments of distraction for integrative learning, less emotional and physical learning opportunities, thereby limiting the potential for CHKP.

6.4 Socialisation

As a fourth level of informal learning, Schugurensky (2000) describes socialisation, also called tacit learning, as the learning of values and behavioural skills that takes place during everyday life, without an awareness of the learning. Socialisation is a non-intentional and non-conscious process that is difficult to research. Nonetheless, Schugurensky (2000) explains that people can become aware of their learnings through retrospective recognition. Despite no *a priori* intention and active consciousness of learning, facilitators recognize that activists internalise values, attitudes and behaviours when participating in SML (Mo, Aiden, Aiko)(Schugurensky, 2000). Social movements processes and the internal culture become part of what Bennett (2012) calls

¹⁴ Technology risks according to Christian (2017) include cyber security and computer related injuries – vision problems, headaches, obesity, mental health problems.

the hidden curriculum of socialization. Social movements develop their own processes to “unlearn their own ways of oppression”, which define the extent to which a movements questions hegemony (Aiko).

Social movements can contribute to alternative ways of socialisation, as they provide spaces that actively interrogate power dynamics. “By being exposed to a different social environment, a person can be prompted to recognize that [they have] certain prejudices and biases that were the product of primary socialization“ (Schugurensky, 2000, p. 5). Facilitators refer to several of these moments of recognition but explain that the online space makes it more difficult because reading people’s expression and following up is more difficult. The group size online might intensify socialisation through silos, yet the embodied processes of socialisation no longer take place.

Social movements can not only proactively promote processes of retrospective recognition, but also create counter spaces that influence socialization. Eli shows the potential of such a space and explains how they were socialized into a role – which fits “into a pattern of historically just be given random power [...] as white guy who can speak confidently.” Other facilitators reflect on processes of socialization. Zia emphasizes the role of songs, games, gestures and music for learning and explains how they are subtle and “way more informal but more extreme in dragging you further into the ideology because it is being done backstage- sneaky”. Mo expresses “the kind of jokes that are in the room... are a certain way of socializing into what is legitimate.” Scholars agree that that songs and humour are driving factors for ideology, which do not only hold memory, describe feelings and communicate ideas but also are “one of the most potent, portable and transmissible vehicles of thought and human experience” (Howard, 2010; Choudry, 2015).

Socialisation is an often unacknowledged but highly influential part of CHKP production in the online and offline context, which can be influenced by language art, humour and other ways of interacting. It happens as activists internalise values and behaviour and are socialised with a hidden curriculum and appears less potent in the online context.

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Chapter 6 revealed how self-directed, incidental, integrative-embodied and socialised informal learning take place in social movements. While self-directed learning promotes individual agency, the facilitator remains crucial to instigate counter-hegemonic thought. I showed the importance of spontaneous conversation, sudden leaps of understanding, buzzing during action learning and the hidden curriculum of socialisation and argued that the online context hinders CHKP in social movements, especially the incidental and integrative-embodied dimension.

CHAPTER 7: THE COUNTER HEGEMONIC POTENTIAL OF SOCIAL MOVEMENT LEARNING

This section shows to what extent informal SML facilitates CHPK the online space. I propose that there are five components (see Figure 4), *Nourishing Collective Agency*, *Working Against Systems of Oppression*, *Decentralising Power*, *Countering Productivity* and *Creating Alternatives* that seek to define to what extent SML facilitates CHPK. I argue that online SML can only fulfil these components to a limited extent. Therefore, it hinders knowledge production, capable of challenging power relations and engaging in alternative ideas to what is dominant and legitimate.

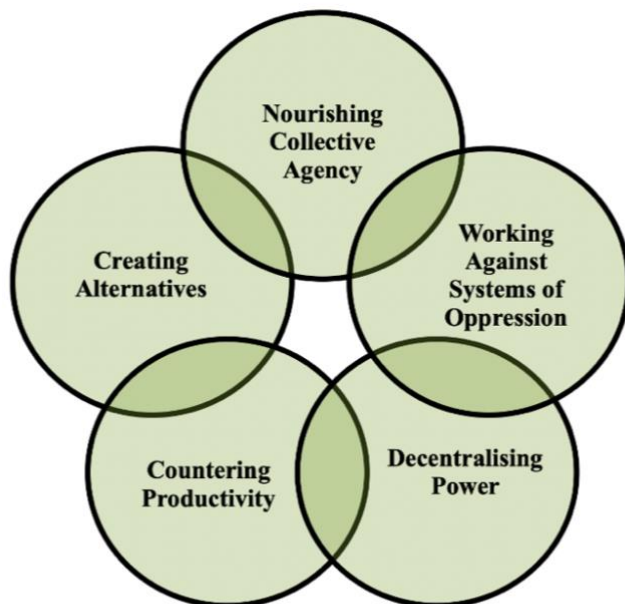


Figure 4: Five components of counter-hegemonic knowledge production

Activist educators are aware how their practise challenges the status quo and know that “the old ways are not working – so we have to find new ways” (Kami), by “trying to do things in a way that haven’t been done before” (Rene). These new ways do not only play out through non-formal learning but especially manifests through the methods and subtle processes of informal learning that ultimately instigate, ingrain and convey emancipatory forms of resistance in the pursuit of social justice (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991; Heidemann, 2020). It is the role of the trainer or the organic intellectual to make sure that action includes critical reflection and is productive to counter-hegemonic practises (Fusaro *et al.*, 2017, p. 54).

7.1 Nourishing Collective Agency – Building the Resistance

“It is harder to build relationships needed for real solidarity” (Survey).

SML is described as relational, intuitive and embodied, supporting people to become a “piece of the puzzle”, the community (Survey, Kami). It is counter-hegemonic in the way it allows people to relearn how to relate through collective learning (Sam).¹⁵ A range of scholars confirm that collective learning is crucial for SML, as it fosters agency, connectedness, worthiness and eventually collective identity, a precondition for collective action (Kilgore, 1999). Trainers facilitate this sense of collective identity through relationship building and trust – through reflection and feedback processes, open discussions, sharing circles and moments of rest and regeneration. Against the common conception of learning enhancement of skill, most educators express how they prioritize trust and relationship building over practical skills. Trust allows for vulnerability, enables learners to try new things and dare to act outside their comfort zone (Marin, Aiko, Eli). Climate camps are mentioned as an example for spaces that “can create a lot of cohesion”, where “people grow a lot” (Aiko). How is trust-building facilitated in the online space?

“The online connection does not substitute the trust and humanness of life interactions” (Kami). For some their personal environment is safe and comfortable, while others are hindered to learn “at home” and benefit from the physically “safe havens” that can allow them to remove themselves temporarily from the dominant structures of society, including the world mediated by technology (Sisco *et al.*, 2019). The individualisation of online interaction requires social movements to manage “fragmentated identities” and provide a social anchor for their participants (Kavada, 2010) “Relationship building takes a lot of time” but is fundamental to establish safety and solidarity within a group, especially when confronted with repression (Aiko, Mo, Sam). The online space in its political nature can reinforce the individual or be employed as a weapon of suppression and therefore, hinder collective learning (Casas, 2017, p. 114)(Grayson, 2011; Milan, 2015; Harari, 2016).

Socio-emotional bonds are created “through a collaborative discovery of common experiences, anxieties and aspirations” (Heidemann, 2020, p. 357). Some facilitators share that online interactions can instil feelings of distrust and negativity, driven by anonymity, isolation,

¹⁵ “We are so trained to not relate in that way” (Sam).

physical disconnection and the ability to “remove oneself” by e.g switching the camera off (Survey, Mo)(Delahunty *et al.*, 2014; Aboagye *et al.*, 2021) The online space creates not only spatial distance but also a “facelessness” that reduces accountability (Fleckenstein, 2005, p. 152). This disconnection does not happen in face-to-face interaction, as people are bodily present and therefore even as passive observes part of the group (Mo). “If someone is anxious, they can retreat to the back or the bathroom, but they remain part of the group” (Rene). This ability to negotiate the space based on needs is not possible in the online context. Leaving and coming back excludes a person from the meeting and retreating to the back can only be done through verbal passivity or switching off one’s video (Rene). Social needs are stimulated in a variety of ways in face-to face interaction but online meetings struggle to satisfy physiological and emotional needs (belonging, esteem, self-actualization), consume energy and cause dissonance (Maslow, 1943; Sklar, 2020). “As humans we have social needs that are not being satisfied by smiling at the screen (Kami). Neither the interaction with the environment, nor the collective “cocreation of knowledge and meaning” is possible in a relational way in an online context (Garavan and McCarthy, 2008; Schwartz, 2014). Nourishing collective agency is central for CHKP because “social change, liberation... will be achieved only by collective as distinct to individual responses to oppression” (Thompson, 1983, p. 170).

7.2 Working Against Systems Oppression

Working against systems of oppression is the second component for CHKP because movements constantly interact with their social and physical environments and need to critically interrogate the ways in which they themselves reproduce unequal power dynamics, against the pursuit of social justice. Movement educators use methods to not only to actively raise awareness about Anti-Oppression but also to facilitate engagement with power structures and active solidarity in an informal way (Brown and Strega, 2005; Gouin, 2009).

“Facilitators need to develop space and time for activists to unlearn their own ways of oppression” (Aiko). Movement educators agree that engaging with internalised forms of oppression is complex and difficult to do in a self-directed way. Instead, they use experimental or embodied methodologies, like Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed which facilitates incidental and integrative learning (Choudry, 2015). Learning from direct experience or through aha moments “goes much deeper but is harder to quantify” (Survey). It is more personal and

intuitive than formal learning, in which a difficult topic can “put people quite on the edge” (Aiden). Un- and re-learning obliges activists to engage with collective identity and trauma, that is usually stored in the body (Rene)(Kilgore, 1999). Working with the body online can be difficult, potentially triggering or even harmful (Mo).¹⁶ In an online space, certain methodologies can be “way too exposing and really sensitive for people,” especially because there is no way to adequately support the person (Sam)(Ulex, 2020). Sam concludes that “online trauma work usually only works with white cis gender middle class people who haven’t been traumatised”. Engaging roots of historic trauma and inequality is crucial for CHKP, so limiting the space to the privileged does not conform with social movements ambitions for social justice. Hence, this section shows that online spaces are unable to adequately facilitate working with structures of oppression, a crucial component of CHKP.

7.3 Decentralising Power

Methods that encourage the four dimensions of informal learning, do not only require adequate methodologies but also changes in organisational changes to actually create “counter-spaces”: “places of meeting, or emotional spaces of voice, resistance” that affirm the experiences and realities of marginalised people (hooks, 1992, p. 113; Schwartz, 2014). Creating counter-spaces that are able to socialise activists through counter-hegemonic forms of informal learning relies on facilitators to build spaces that challenge oppression, by e.g. centring marginalised voices. Sam expresses how they bring queer voices to the front of the learning process. “I am really tired of cis men always dominating the spaces” (Sam). Some consider the online space as safer, sharing that single speaker interaction dilutes side talk and express that online speaker lists and other methods can empower marginalised voices. Standing (2011, p. 127) describes the “connectivity” of the internet as a defining feature of the precariat, they use to “retrieve virtue in order to re(gain) public sphere” (Jandrić, 2014, p. 89). Yet, the complexity of any intersectional identity does not come across online and is in the worst case – tokenised to a specific identity characteristic, discriminated against in an unmonitored breakout room or disregarded when a person makes a quick click to exit an uncomfortable situation (Rene, Eli).

Aiko articulates how they refrain from using certain methods of group learning because it reinforces macho dynamics. Another example was given by Eli who explains that training for

¹⁶ “For example, for transgender people working with the body is much more complex; People that had traumatic experiences so it can trigger things.” People with physical disabilities or body types that might not fit general beauty standards or people who have mental health issues around anxiety, people of colour. Body work is quite exposing” (Sam).

police violence should caution reinstating able-bodied, racist and gendered dynamics of protection and violence. Rene shows that anti-oppression goes beyond formalised learning because “covering content around liberation is one thing” but “experiencing it goes much deeper”(Kolb, 1984). The tacit, incidental, experiential and incidental forms of learning are hence what allows for what Aiden calls a “true engagement with injustice that strengthens solidarity”, or what Heidemann (2019) and Boler (1999) declare as the pedagogies of solidarity and discomfort.

This also includes active self-reflection by the facilitators, balancing their “power authority” because they do not want to “impose ideas or marginalise people” or reinforce the hegemonic relation between teacher and student (Mo, Noa) (Isaac *et al.*, 2020). Online interaction can reinforce hierarchies and is prone to return to the dominant conception of learning, heightening the educator as an authority (Della Porta and Diani, 2006; Sisco *et al.*, 2019; Greijdanus *et al.*, 2020). Social movements require a constant interrogation of their hidden mechanisms of domination to adequately decentralise power to the extent necessary that would build counter-spaces capable of stimulating CHKP. These processes are limited online.

7.4 Countering Productivity

Despite the urgency of the climate crisis and intersecting structures of oppressions, social movements require and use rest and regeneration as a tool to resist hegemony and build structures for CHKP. bell hooks reminds us on the interconnections of capitalism, productivity and suppression and argues that “Rest is Resistance” (hooks, 1994; The Nap Ministry, 2021). The ongoing investment with structures of oppression and the continuous cycle and perceived demand of knowledge production require what Ulex has called “sustainable activism.” “Building resilient organisations is an act of resistance and emancipation from neoliberalism” (Ulex, 2020). Going slow, taking one’s time, allowing for rest and consciously curating space for more breaks, feedback and debriefs are common features of informal and collective learning in the findings.

Widening accessibility and inclusivity requires space and time; especially when approaching difficult topics like oppressive behaviour, fear or trauma, as expressed by the majority of trainers (Eli). Trainers share that although online learning is more accessible and self-directed learning can enhance personalisation and pace, for socio-economically disadvantaged and especially disabled communities physical access does not mean actual access (Bennett and

Mcwhorter, 2019; Zhang *et al.*, 2020) Especially rest and regeneration are perceived difficult in the online space (Aiden, Rene, Kami). Although online trainings are more structured and usually include more punctual breaks, they miss the crucial spontaneous conversations. These physical breaks do not only allow for rest and regeneration, as “they hold people” but also enable incidental and integrative learning (Aiko).

Online spaces were often perceived as under more pressure with goals of effectiveness. “People are just longing to get off their computer again” (Mo). Facilitators are negotiators of space and time regulate this sense of efficiency. Aiko shares that in real life, they spend at least half of the time on relationship building but believes that online spaces are less personal and less able to facilitate trust, “no matter how much time you spend in breakout rooms” (see 7.1). Rene explains how they deliberately leave space at the beginning of the meeting to sense connection. While some processes online allow for rest and regeneration, the online environment, cannot convey adequate space for cognitive and embodied reflection, that makes learning “purposeful and nourishing instead of overly outcome-oriented and competitive” (Survey).

7.5 Creating Alternatives

A final essential dimension of CHKP in social movements is creating alternative visions and futures. Living these alternatives can change the habitus that occurs through the four dimensions of informal learning. Movements do not only discuss alternative theories for coexistence, but they also live them – “explore, plan and execute creative and transformative acts of resistance and solidaristic action” (Hall, 2009, p. 58). Facilitators must have the capacity to reimagine (Aiden). Reimagining ways of coexistence is embedded in processes like sociocracy that empowers marginalised people not only through representation but also in the long term through informal processes of recognition and socialisation. Alternative visions can be enacted, experienced and socialised through role games or residential events like climate camps. Aiko describes how climate camps are places where people come “together and form a kind of Utopia [...] a different kind of society for the short term” (Aiko).

In these spaces’, facilitators use alternative methodologies to encourage informal learning on a deeper level. While visioning exercises and even climate camps can be transferred online, most facilitator argue that physical experiences create a different level of understanding for experiencing utopias. Hence, they foster a different potential for CHKP. “People must touch

and taste an alternative way of doing things, they must however briefly live inside that hope, in order to believe that an alternative might really come true” (Staughton Lynd, 2009).

This instinctive and embodied element is also shared by Marin, Eli and Sam, who expresses that “I still dream of groups and realities where we understand each other at an intuitive level” (Sam). Visioning itself is used as a general method by a range of facilitators that enables imagining alternative futures, emancipation and liberation (O’Brien and Meadows, 2001).¹⁷ Mo says that “visioning itself is an act of resistance”.

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The five components discussed set the frames for collective and informal learning processes that play out through methods and subtle processes and ultimately define to what extent CHKP takes place. Online spaces do not provide the necessary humanness, social needs, levels of trust and relationship building that are essential for the respective components to unfold their counter-hegemonic potential. Although the online space can provide anti-oppressive tools, certain integral embodied methodologies cannot take place. The accessibility of the online space provides safety, yet allows for different ways to discriminate through technology, while imposing productivity and limiting regeneration. Interaction mediated by technology alienates the collective, develops its own politics and limits prefigurative visioning and living of alternatives. Therefore, informal SML in an online context can only to a limited extent facilitate CHKP because it does not fulfil the necessary components that produce collective structures, values and material domains that question hegemony and offer counter-spaces for visioning and living the resistance.

¹⁷ Often involving: current situation, external environment, desired future state and connection of the future to the present state.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

"This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection" (Freire, 1972, p. i).

This study used a mixed methods approach to show the importance of the under-researched processes of informal and collective learning within social movements. I showed that although formal and non-formal ways of learning might be more explicit in questioning the established relations of power, informal learning is a more subtle but no less potent way to engage in CHKP. Exploring the perceptions of training collectives on SML in the ECJM as a case study, this dissertation firstly analysed the self-directed, incidental, integrative-embodied and socialised ways of learning to show how informal SML contributes to knowledge production (Chapter 6). The proposed conceptual framework contributes to the gap in the literature by connecting theories of informal and collective learning and situating them within a framework of knowledge production, facilitated by processes and methods.

Overall, collective learning is identified as a driver and facilitator of informal SML. While the self-directed dimension emphasises the autonomy ascribed to the learner in SML, it also reveals the importance of trainers to orchestrate and push activists to think beyond the status quo, outside the hegemonic system. The buzzing moments of learning in action, as well as reflection are crucial for incidental learning that depends strongly on spontaneous conversations. These are hindered by the online context. Learning through aha-moments and the body happens through incidences of distraction and embodied methodologies. SML online is unable to bring forth the necessary space for collective CHKP. Finally, socialisation continues to be a dimension difficult to grasp, but of importance to the online and offline context. It is arguably enhanced through technology, but ultimately driven by human interaction.

The second part of this research assesses to what extent SML in the online context facilitates CHKP by proposing five components that determine CHKP in social movements. The "Nourishing collective agency" is a central component of building relationships and collective identity necessary for social action that questions the hegemonic discourse. Such relationships are complicated by the individualised, anonymised online space. Actively challenging the status quo requires movements to "Work Against Oppression", "Decentralise Power" and "Counter

Productivity, “Creating Alternatives” for the future (Components of CHKP). These components are reflected in processes and methods that trainers use to facilitate social movements, but clearly play out as less potent in the online space. Although the online space can provide anti-oppressive tools, the online environment does not sufficiently facilitate trust, relationship-building, emotional and embodied learning. Although accessibility is a milestone of online interaction, the political, physical and emotional impacts of interaction mediated by technology are often underestimated, potentially overpowering such benefits. The relational nature of learning is hampered by the online space, which hinders exactly that cycle of learning that produces knowledge and forges personal and communal commitment for sustained engagement” and solidarity (Hall, 1978, pp. 13–14).

The qualitative and quantitative findings show how and to what extent the cycle of learning, producing, resting, renewing, regenerating and testing knowledge is disrupted by the online space. Online interaction is not capable of generating radical counter-spaces, necessary to nourish, educate, diffuse and strengthen counter-hegemonic discourse (hooks, 1992). I conclude that the online space complicates informal and collective learning to an extent that limits social movements capability of CHKP and therewith their potential to generate social change.

Does education without social action have no true power potential, as MLK (1967) suggests?

CHAPTER 9: IMPLICATIONS

What happens if the counter-hegemonic learning potential of social movements is hindered by the online context? Movements will endure but how will they continue to organise and learn, despite the restrictions to informal and collective learning? This research is of interest to social movements themselves and to scholarship exploring the consequences of the pandemic for learning, social movements and democracy. I deliver a modest theoretical, methodological and empirical contribution that can be of relevance to academia, policy and practice.

Theoretically, I propose a new conceptual framework of use to those seeking to connect informal and collective learning in a framework for knowledge production, such as researchers of Human Resource Development. Methodologically, mixed methods have proven useful for this research, yet could be expanded to a larger population. Rigidity could be enhanced through additional surveys after the interviews and by observing non-verbal cues in the online fieldwork, as Salmon (2016) suggests. The empirical contribution can gauge interest and channel insight to social movements and their ways of learning, as well as general dynamics of informal and collective learning within education.

This research can be useful for education policy makers and practitioners in the lifelong learning field, showing the ways in which informal and collective learning happens online, in a time when life and work for many takes places online.¹⁸ This research is limited by its small number of participants, the specific context and the online nature of the research, which restricts transferability. Nevertheless, this study offers a small but meaningful contribution, that can not only support movements through the activists toolkit (Appendix A) but also inform citizens about informal and collective ways of interacting and learning in the online environment. Zoom Out might be a reality, but it is no state of defeat.

Avenues for future scholarship include researching how activist learners perceive online SML and the further elaboration and application of the framework. It would be useful to gain further insight on especially the integrative, embodied and socialised ways of learning to extract the connection between SML and CHKP. Furthermore, research could focus on understanding the

¹⁸ Policy examples on the European level include the Lifelong Learning Competency framework, DigiComp, Lifecomp and upcoming GreenComp. Capacities include digital literacy, cultural awareness, civic skills and personal and social capacities – learning to learn.

role of SML in changing activists' attitudes and values, as well as how movement's CHKP informs societal discourse. How has and does social movement's knowledge production shape the international push for a Green New Deal, or what is the role of informal learning empowering people to take action? On the path to a just recovery, it is crucial to include voices from the grassroots to foster critical thinking, democratic social action and drive development of civil society. Bridging the gap between policy and practice – academia and activism;

“We must be armed with knowledge as they. Our policies should have the strength of deep analysis beneath them to challenge the clever sophistries of our opponents” (King Jr, 1967).

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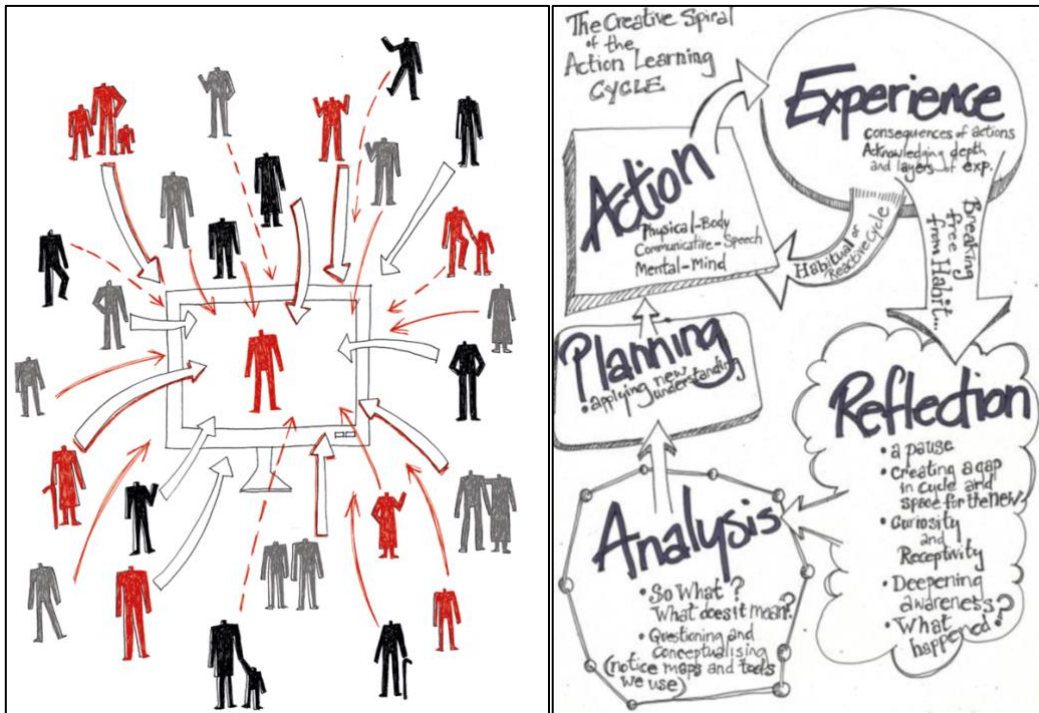
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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Inspiration for Activist Toolkit



Are we all Narcissus now?

But Narcissus neither saw nor heard her; he was spellbound by the handsome stranger in the water. He did not know that it was his own image that he had fallen in love with and he sat smiling at himself, forgetting to eat, forgetting to drink, until he wasted away and died (Ovid's *Metamorphoses*).

"Most of our days now are spent watching ourselves being watched, bent like a digital Narcissus over thumbnails of our own faces, learning just how painfully oxymoronic it is to try to appear unobserved. That self-consciousness is exhausting" (Gordon-Smith, 2020).

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. How would you describe learning in social movements?
2. Is learning different to formal institutions., how so?
3. Are there any particular moments/spaces you associate with learning?
 - a. Spaces
 - b. Relationships
 - c. Beyond Workshops
4. Do you think activists are aware of the learning processes... how, examples?
5. How does the group/ the dynamics influence learning?
6. Which role does learning have in the moments facilitate for?
7. What changed when learning moved online during the Covid-19 pandemic?
8. Where do you see the advantages and disadvantages of online learning?
9. Are there any particular methods you use, engaging in the online context?
10. How does learning online happen, how is it different from formal and previous ways of SML?

Appendix C: Selected Online Survey Questions

1. Is "learning" a priority for activists when they join the social movement?
2. Do you think the social movement involvement changes the participants attitudes and values?
3. How many hours a week did you spend with the social movement active in your facilitation collective?
4. Think about a moment in which learning happens in a social movement – How would a participant describe learning?
 - I learned from someone else who actively taught me
 - I observed someone else and copied what they did
 - I read an article / a guidebook
 - I learned in self reflection
 - I learned during an action, in an experimental way
 - I learned from watching a video or listening to an audio
 - Other (please specify)

5. Do you think the ways in which you learn in a social movement are different from learning in formal education institutions (e.g. schools, training centres)?
6. Do you think learning is influenced by the spaces people learn in (e.g learning on the streets, in the field compared to learning in a classroom) How?
7. How many hours a week do you spend with the social movement /our facilitation collective during the pandemic?
8. Can briefly you share how your engagement changed through the consequences of Covid-19?
9. Do you see any advantages/disadvantages of engaging online?
10. Can you point to any methods/ tools /and processes useful for facilitating online learning?

Appendix E: Participant Information Form



Knowledge Production in European Environmental and Social Justice Movements

.....

Researcher: Jana Ahlers
Supervisor: Dr. Queralt Capsada-Munsech
Course: Education Policies for Global Development

You are being invited to take part in a research project into social movement learning in European Environmental and Social Justice Movements.

Before you decide if you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the information on this page carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. I hope that this sheet will answer any questions you have about the study.

1. What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to find out how learning takes place in European social and environmental justice movements. What do people learn and how do they acquire their knowledge, skills and attitudes. The setting of this research is to explore how these things occur/ have occurred since the social movements were forced to move their entire activities online.

2. Why have I been chosen?

You are being asked to take part because you are an adult and most likely part of a social movement. You have probably engaged in some form of learning or knowledge production in a social movement before. I am curious to talk to you about your experiences, opinions and ideas on this topic.

3. Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part in this study. If you decide not to take part, that is totally fine. If, after you have started to take part, you change your mind, just let me know and I will not use any information you have given me in my writing.

4. What will happen to me if I take part?

If you take part, I will ask you some questions about what you think about your experiences in your social movement in relation to learning, training and education. You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to. This will take about 30-40 min. I will record the

answers using a video recorder if you consent or an audio recorder if that is better for you; so that afterwards I can listen carefully to what was said. I will be finished gathering data by the February 2021.

5. Will the information that I give you in this study be kept confidential?

I will keep all the data I collect about this topic in a locked cabinet or in a locked file on my computer. When I write about what I have found, your name will not be mentioned. You may choose a pseudonym which I will use when writing up the final assignment.

However, if during our conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that you might be in danger of harm, I might have to inform relevant agencies of this.

6. What will happen to the results of this study

I will analyse the data I collect from participants and present this in the dissertation which I am writing for my qualification, MA in Education Policies for Global Development. All participants will receive a written summary of the findings and I will also present the information to colleagues. I will also create a little activist toolkit, which I hope to share among activist after. I will destroy the data at the end of the project.

7. Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been reviewed and agreed by the School of Education Ethics Forum, University of Glasgow

8. Who can I contact for further information?

If you have any questions about this study, you can ask me, Jana Ahlers
2507369a@student.gla.ac.uk or jana.cm.ahlers@gmail.com

or my supervisor, Dr. Queralt Capsada-Munsech
Queralt.Capsada-Munsech@glasgow.ac.uk

or the Ethics officer for the School of Education,
barbara.read@glasgow.ac.uk

Thank you for reading this.

_____ End _____

Appendix F: Participant Consent Form



Consent Form

Title of Project: Online Learning in European Social and Environmental Justice Movements

Name of Researcher: Jana Ahlers

----- Please tick as appropriate -----

General Participation

Yes No I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Yes No I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

Recording

Yes No I consent to interviews being video recorded

Yes No I consent to interviews being audio-recorded

Yes No I consent to interviews being note-recorded (researcher is taking notes)

Yes No I acknowledge that copies of transcripts will be returned to participants for verification upon request

Confidentiality

Yes No I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym.

Yes No I would like to be asked for permission if my quotes are used, even when referred to by pseudonym.

Yes No I acknowledge that no personal data will be shared with third parties.

Yes No I acknowledge that my participation or non-participation will not be shared with anyone.

Data Usage and Storage

-----Select all that apply-----

I agree that:

Yes No All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.

Yes No The material will be treated as confidential as possible and kept in secure storage at all times.

Yes No All personal information will be destroyed once the project is complete.

Yes No Only anonymised and general content will be retained in secure storage for use in future academic research.

Yes No The material may be used to publish an activist toolkit, linking together best practises from online learning in social movements.

Yes No I waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this project.

Yes No Other authenticated researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.

Yes No Other authenticated researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form

Privacy Notice (is attached to this document)

Yes No I acknowledge the provision of a Privacy Notice in relation to this research project.

Consent Clause

I agree to take part in this research study

I do not agree to take part in this research study

Name of Participant Signature

Date

Name of ResearcherSignature

Date