

Power and arguments in GJMs settings¹
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1. Introduction: Power, preferences and values

In this chapter I would like to handle the question of the power of the arguments in GJMs decision-making. To approach this question I propose to consider three correlated dimensions of decision making: power, preferences, and values.

When decisions have to be made, preferences can be aggregated or transformed (Dewey 1927, Elster 1986, Knight and Johnson 1994), but it can also be eliminated or juxtaposed. In principle none of these ways to treat preferences is incompatible with some democratic standards: juxtaposition emerges when preferences happen to be similar from the very beginning, and unanimity is the outcome; aggregation is achieved by voting or bargaining, and elimination can be achieved through some procedures (for instance delegation). Deliberative theorists claim that deliberation, by transforming preferences through rational arguments in open communication, works much better than the simple aggregation, provided that no preference is previously eliminated by the discussion and opinions are not disregarded (or acknowledged) on a different ground than rationality and the common good (inter alia Mansbridge 1980, Habermas 1987, Barber 1984, Fishkin 1991, Dryzek 2000).

This rises the question of what kind of power is used over/in communicative processes when decisions must be taken.

One of the question this chapter would like to answer is, then, to what extent the observed GJMs' groups have succeeded in eliminating some of the obstacles that impede a deliberative communication.

When (and if) we have discovered that a space for deliberative communication is there, we still need to know what is the nature of the "arguments" that produce

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consensus on a given option. In other words, which kind of argument is the “best argument”? Only by accepting Habermas’ conception of deliberative communication (1987), one could be confident that when an argument appeals to a kind of universalistic reason, this will be able to produce consensus. And though Rawls seems to owe a more inclusive conception of “public reason” (Moon 2003), he also speaks of a single public reason as based on the “common human reason”, by claiming that “there are many non-public reasons and but one public reason” (1993: 220).

Yet, some argue that this type of reason is just a myth, since it is not always possible “to achieve general rational consensus on a given normative order” (Pellizzoni 2001: 68). Dryzek (2000), for instance, suggests that an agreement can be achieved even if based on different reasons, without falling back on strategic solution; for Bohman (1996) public deliberation is about solving problems by facilitating cooperation; while Pellizzoni (2001) argues that deliberation is possible by reaching non-strategic agreement on practices.

In this chapter I aim at distinguishing different types of “convincing arguments” according to different decisional settings. By relying on controversies handled in our observed groups I would classify the types of arguments that prevailed when they have been solved through consensus. My point of departure is that the type of convincing arguments can vary according to the types of preferences and values that participants hold in a discussion. To avoid any confusion, let me briefly clarify what I mean with the terms “arguments”, “preferences” and “values” that are the core concepts on which this chapter drawn.

Although in general parlance, an argument implies a discussion involving conflict, argument is mainly used here, in logic terms, as a statement based on meaningful premises (propositions) from which other meaningful consequences derive (conclusions) (see Hurley 1988). I then refer to the term “argument”, when speakers explain the reasons why they agree or disagree on a point discussed, so that the interlocutors can assess their opinions on the ground of those reasons. What kind of rationality speakers use to convince the others is one of the points I discuss in this chapter.²

² But consider that what is “rational” depends on the context in which actors interact; in principle the statement “if we want to follow God’s will we should do this and this...” may be considered rational in some contexts (for instance in a church), and irrational in another context (for instance in a scientific committee) (see Pizzorno 2007 on this point).

The term “preference” is simply used here to mean the position on a issue and/or on a option of a speaker participating in (or of somebody excluded from) a discussion.

Finally, the term “value” is more complicate to define. I refer to Milton Rokeach’s (1972: 124) definition that “considers a value to be a type of belief, centrally located within one’s total belief system, about how one ought or ought not to behave, or about some end state of existence worth or not worth attaining” (see also Zetterberg 1997). As we will see, also norms guide actors’ behavior, but while norms are formal or informal rules, values motivate why an actor should or should not behave accordingly.³

To summarize the content of this chapter, in the next section (2) I will sketch a typology of powers related to communicative processes, which will help clarifying to what extent the power of arguments prevails in GJMs decisional settings; while in section 3 I will build a typology of “convincing arguments” that may facilitate consensus when a decision is to be taken during controversies. By relying on our empirical cases of observed controversies, I will claim that if we overcome the “myth of the best argument”, we can discover that controversies can be solved by appealing to different types of arguments, the nature of which will probably change according to the configuration of preferences and values of the participants in the decision making.

2. The power over/in communication

As suggested by Rucht, Haug and Teune (chapter 2), power can be soft or hard. Soft power is based on communication, and it is basically the power of arguments, while hard power relies on other means, such as force, threat, authority and still others. This distinction is quite similar to what Pellizzoni (2001) call internal and the external power: power based on arguments (internal) and power based on other means (external). Pellizzoni also suggests to distinguish between power *over* and power *in* communication. Power over communication “reveals itself in the admission or exclusion of a person from communication” (ibid.: 60). Preferences are in these cases simply excluded from the discussion by relying on procedures which entitle

³ This distinction between values and preferences relies on Elster (1998), who distinguishes between “fundamental preferences” and “derived preferences”: the latter are opinions about the options available on what course of action one (or a group) should take, or, which is the same, on what is the solution for a given problem. Such preferences however are normally derived from some fundamental preferences (in our words values) which an actor holds.

somebody and forbid somebody else to participate in the discussion, or on impersonal or process-based barriers that impede someone the access to communication. The power exercised in these cases is both hard and *over* communication.

Another type of hard power can be used on the boundaries of the communication, between over and in communication, for instance by manipulating the agenda, silencing or ignoring (not listening to) or using a language/style that is not understandable for all participants: in these cases people are not necessarily excluded, but some people's arguments and therefore preferences and values are.

Sometime, hard power is exercised *in* communication by disregarding or acknowledging others' opinions on a different ground than their contents, their rationality or similar. On my opinion this is to be considered still hard power, yet less hard than the case of exclusion. This because it implies some form of communicative power: the power of disregarding or acknowledging arguments on a different ground than their content ultimately rely on the ability of the speaker to convince the audience that the ground on which she/he is disregarding/acknowledging an argument is decisive. What is more, who is being disregarded can defend him/herself by arguing that this is not "fair".

As reported in chapter 2 we can conceive of other kinds of hard power *in* communication, when instead of articulating a more convincing argument, the speaker who does not agree decides to rely on other sources of power to convince the others: instances can be "if you decide accordingly I will leave" (threat), "I'm an expert on this you must trust me" (reputation, expertise, experience), or "my organization represents the people you are talking about, and I don't agree" (representation). Communication is clearly there, yet not used in a deliberative way.

Soft power in communication, finally, reveals itself "in the ability of an argument to assert itself by virtue of its greater forcefulness" (ibid., 62), and arguments are considered for their content.

Deliberation can only be achieved when the power used is soft.⁴ But in this case, as we will see, it still remains open the possibility of a "reasonable compromise" which makes all happy without really changing preferences.

⁴ The use of emotions and symbols as soft power is analysed in a different chapter (10).

Since the typology presented in chapter 2 considers only power *in* communication I need to develop another typology which considers both power over and in communication (see figure 1).⁵

Figure 1. Typology of “power” over/in communication

<i>Over communication</i>		<i>In communication</i>	
Hard power		Soft Power	
Excluding people	Disregarding preferences/values	Making Pressure	Convincing
- Resources	- Silencing/Ignoring	- Threat	- Arguments
- Procedures	- Agenda Manipulation	- Representativeness	- Emotions/Symbols
	- Language/Style	- Experience/Expertise	

The typology I built can also be considered a continuum from hard to soft power, which can be used as an intellectual device to understand how we can progressively remove the obstacles to deliberative communication. Indeed, if a group wants to strengthen the power of arguments within its decision-making, it must first remove the power of exclusion (all potential people and preferences/values should be included), then remove the power of disregarding/acknowledging (all arguments made must be judged for their content), and, finally, it must assure that nobody makes use of any kind of threat or pressure to push his/her preferences. Clearly, to remove those obstacles to deliberative communication, resources must be mobilized and both norms and procedures must be changed.

In what follows, I will provide examples of these kinds of power within GJMs, by mainly relying on the findings of participant observation.⁶

The power of excluding people

In general, all those organizations that accept delegation or representation as decision-making procedures, exclude some people from decision-related communication. Among our observed groups, Attac-France is for instance characterized by a hard

⁵ On the other hand, in order to include this dimension, I had to disregard the other important dimension included by the authors of chapter 2, which is “the degree of symmetry among participants”.

⁶ It is important to clarify that what will be described are “instances” of power, observed in different settings or particular decision-making sessions. To be sure, with the exception of procedures, if a particular kind of power is observed in a session of one group, this does not mean that the use of this power is a “feature” of the group itself.

procedural power over communication: the main decisional bodies are the founders' committee, the scientific council and above all the Attac's board. Those bodies are created either by cooptation or by elections, in both cases the people entitled to participate in the decision making is restricted by procedures. The issue is not irrelevant since these procedures are taken seriously by members of the board. How these formal rules are used to exercise an hard power over communication is evident by reading the following transcript by Nicolas Haeringer during an observation (April, 28 2007):

Jacques C.: *I have to say - and I want it to be included in this meeting's report - that I am opposed to Jacques' presence here. Now that he is here we cannot exclude him but he should not be given the right to speak.*

...

Chloë: *I just want to say that I don't understand why Jacques is sitting here and allowed to speak. He is not a board member, he shouldn't be here.*

Jean-Marie: *the rule is that non-board member can attend the meeting, but they shouldn't sit at the table, so please, invited attendees so as uninvited ones, please move back.*

Jacques: *I'm pleased to obey, but then Pierre has to do the same (smiling).*

The excluding power of some kind of procedure, even in one of the most important GJMs' organization, is particularly telling here. Of course, procedures are decided by the association itself and, as far as members agree upon them, can be considered democratic⁷, but this does not make the hard power over communication less evident.

Procedures are not the only cause of exclusion (from communication) that are at work within democratic settings, including the social movements' ones. Other more impersonal, and more difficult to overcome, causes can be singled out.

It is a common critique to liberal democratic arrangements that they exclude people from participation not only by procedural mechanisms (like political representation and delegation) but also because they are unable to overcome social and economic inequalities that make access to participation much more difficult for some segments

⁷One could, however, object that this was not the case for Attac-France (see Haeringer 2008).

of the population.⁸ Failures on the creation of deliberative settings are reported precisely because of those barriers (see inter alia Sunstein 1988, Mansbridge 1990, Fraser 1992 and Sanders 1997). Something that was also partly found in the GJMs' decision making, especially because of their transnational dimension (see Doerr 2007, Andretta and Doerr 2007).

Members of the No Vox network for instance complain about the difficulty to access transnational events such as the World and the European Social Forum:

“I was at the first World Social Forum, in Porto Alegre. And... you know, there were around 1200 French here. Only the 5 of us were have-nots. Do you realize it? Only 5, among 1200. This is a problem, this is not acceptable. Because social forums, they are meant to be spaces for us. We are supposed to meet, to decide.. We are the voiceless in the society, but we are also the voiceless of the social movement. We are the Social Forums' voiceles.”⁹

It is important to notice that such barriers are not impossible to overcome; as Haeringer (2008: 49) points out, in fact, the social forums could establish a solidarity fund to facilitate the participation of resourceless people in such events.

The power of excluding preferences/values

Sometime, the leader of an organization may embezzle the right to set the agenda and to pre-set the topics to be discussed, thus excluding some preferences and values from communication. This is also an hard power in communication, because the communication is pre-ordered and “managed” (manipulated?). Something that participants report to happen in the Thanet Friends of the Earth (Saunders 2008):

“What's more important than consensus is what is actually suggested in the first place, and how it is suggested, because that is one of the deciding factors about what gets done and what doesn't. And I think most of the suggesting is dictated by Dave and Max.”¹⁰

In other cases exclusion of preferences is determined by “silencing”. Some people may feel inadequate to speak out their voice, or are simply ignored by other

⁸ This problem is usually referred to by mentioning the influence on the electoral outcomes played by exogenous social, cultural and economic asymmetries (Knight and Johnson 1994: 278; see also Sunstein 1988, Fiskin 1991, Przeworki and Wallerstein 1986). The same theory of centrality elaborated by Milbrath (and Goel 1982) for the explanation of political participation points to this.

⁹ Interview with Nicolas Heringer, 2nd of May 2006, in Athens, before the ESF.

¹⁰ Kylie, interview by Clare Saunders, July 2006.

participants, as reported in an interview by a woman participating in a European Preparatory Assemblies (EPA):

“This wasn’t a European assembly! Neither was this a consensus decision. It was not ok. Many people have been simply not been listened to and ignored, not only from Eastern Europe, but also from other delegations. There are a small number of people who have the power. They come from France, Italy, Great Britain and Greece. They make the decisions”¹¹.

Other times, the moderator who should facilitate the communication, may, whether intentionally or not, ignore some speakers, as it happened in one meeting of the No Vox network:

F.: I just want to say that I wanted to speak, I’ve been waiting for more than 20 minutes, but nobody gave me the floor.

Vamos member 1: I’m sorry, I forgot you...

Fr.: Yes, but you didn’t do the right gesture; you should have done that (shows).

JY.: No, no, it’s the other one.

Fr.: oh god, I don’t know.

F.: Well, I wanted to speak, and I asked several times...

Vamos 2: What was your point?

F.: I wanted to suggest adding a point on the agenda, but it is too late.

Vamos 1: No, no, tell us now, now you have the floor. Tell us what is your point.

F.: Well, no, it’s too late now.¹²

Besides silencing and manipulation, especially in transnational meetings, an important barrier is language. It seems that the European Social Forum process provides a case in which multilingualism becomes a resource for, rather than a barrier to, deliberative democracy (Doerr 2008). However, even when the problem of language is removed in some settings, it is the particular style of communication that makes the participation to the discussion of some people more difficult, like in the case of the Berlin Social Forum (Teune and Yang 2008), while language becomes a problem also when it is too specialized, as Teune and Yang report for the Financial Market group of Attac-Berlin.

¹¹ Interview at the European preparatory meeting in Paris, September 2003 in Doerr (2007: 71).

¹² Meeting observed by Nicolas Haeringer in April 2006 in Athens during the fourth European Social Forum.

If hard power that excludes people from communication can be removed by changing exclusive procedures, or overcoming potential barriers, the power that excludes preferences can be removed by changing the norms¹³ (whether formal or informal) that do not prohibit participants to manipulate the communication, to silence somebody, or to use a difficult language style.

Hard power in Communication

When people and preferences are not excluded, there remain however other forms of hard power that need to be removed for a deliberative dialogue to work: to begin with, some arguments can be disregarded on other ground than their contents. Once again, we can refer to Attac-France for an illustration. During an observation of the association's board meeting, it has been reported the following discussion on the troubles occurred in 2006, when in the occasion of the general assembly elections of the president and the board, some accused the winners of electoral fraud:

Laure: how you are going to address the problem? I would say how the problem was born. Because if we speak of how elections went, then why not telling members the truth? That there were three lists, that one tendency is the majority and that the voting procedures makes it much more important than it should.

Jean: ok, she is being jealous.

Laure: this is unfair. You monopolize the speech.

Jean: because you create problems here.¹⁴

As we can notice, an argument is clearly made, but it is disregarded by another participant on the ground of the supposed jealousy of the speaker, without any reference to the problem she raised. It is not a case of exclusion, because who has been disregarded could defend herself (*this is unfair, you monopolize the speech*), yet the content of the argument is not considered at all.

In still other cases, speakers may push forward one option not because derives from some meaningful premises, but because their preferences are so strong that they would rather opt out, if they are not satisfied. The latter is a tricky case in decision

¹³ Norms are (formal and informal) rules that guide actors' behaviours and define what is appropriate or inappropriate to do in a given context (March and Olsen 1989).

¹⁴ Observation by Nicolas Haeringer, 21st July 2007.

making and it is especially problematic when consensus is required to reach a decision. It is in this case in fact that veto power can be used by anybody.

Again, a meeting of Attac-France provides some evidence of hard power when arguments are considered as such:

Gérard: *we should mention income.*

Wilfried: *this is the next point.*

Gérard (angry): *if I cannot talk, then I vote against.*¹⁵

Obviously, there are procedures that allow to overcome this kind of veto power, the most obvious ones being voting, or bargaining. Voting is, according to Clare Saunders (2008: 38) “the most common means of resolving controversies” in the University of Kent’s Conscious Consumers group, and one of its members is convinced that ‘it’s just an easy way to resolve it [conflict], because otherwise you’re just going to be talking forever ... I think it’s just better to get a vote out of the way, really, it’s the easiest way’. According to another member ‘if you can’t get agreement then it’s kind of the only way’. And still another, similarly agreed that ‘otherwise I don’t see how [you can come to a decision]. I mean we could have hidden ballots so that everyone could still vote’ (ibid.: 39).

In Attac-France, it seems to prevail a kind of compromise, which includes the preferences of all participants, although when a compromise is not found a voting procedures is foreseen (Haeringer 2008: 62).

These two ways are substantially different, since in the first case there will be (in principle even large) minority’s preferences excluded from the decision, while compromise is always based on an inclusive outcome.

Both those devices however impede the power of arguments to be fully disclosed, and according to deliberative theorists, the chosen option would remain sub-optimal, leading to the opting out of those who did not agree (see the case of Kent’s Conscious Consumers group)¹⁶, or leaving the latent conflict that undermines the group unresolved (as in ATTAC-France).

¹⁵Observation by Nicolas Haeringer, July, the 21st of 2007

¹⁶Interestingly enough, one opting out is reported to happen precisely because one participant did not agree with a decision: “Well, one disagreement was about doing ‘this Coke machine is ethically out of order’ signs everyday on the Coke machines, and one person ... seemed to have a problem with it, and so we had a vote, and she was outvoted, and that was how it was resolved. She said how, like, it was biting the hand that feeds us, like, and sort of going against the Union. Well, we just totally disagreed, and we thought, ‘well, if we’re going to get anything done here we need to do action and not pussy foot around and try to please the Union. Otherwise we’re in the wrong society. And I never saw her here again after that, funnily enough.’” (Saunders 2008: 32).

Sometimes, preferences are forced by the speakers' putting forward their experience, competences or expertise, or by referring to other people they represent, as it is reported to happen in the Lemanic Social Forum (Bandler, Giugni and Nai 2008).

For instance, in their mailing list, Attac-France' members give the number of their membership card, which establishes if the membership is recent or dates back to the association's birth. As Haeringer (2008: 50) concludes: "The lowest it is [the number], the more impact it is supposed to give to the one speaking, as it proves an involvement in the whole association's history". In the Financial market group of Attac Berlin, experts are expected to weight more than the others in some cases. As Teune and Yang (2008: 79) remark: "In case of conflict about factual questions the opinion of experts has more weight".

It is clear that members give the number of their membership card, or use their reputation of experts to exercise some kind of pressure. However, even though this is a form of hard power, the ground on which this power is based must be shared by the other participants for it to be decisive in a discussion: one speaker may put forward her/his expertise (or her/his membership card's number) but the interlocutors may simply ignore her/his reference to it.

Take for instance what is reported to happen in a discussion within Attac-France board on the organization of the summer university:

Jacques (angry) : *it is completely false to say that the summer university is "in terms of methods an educational aberration".* (people start laughing - Jacques is known for bawls). *Participants always tell their satisfaction with the summer university. Jean-Louis spoke about the questionnaires that we always circulate, and they show this satisfaction.*

Lionel, quite loud : *Jacques, you can not use such questionnaires to justify how it's organized. Of course people say their are satisfied, if they are not they...*

Marc : *Lionel, it's not your turn, I have a list, you have to respect the list*

Lionel (very angry) : *yes ok, don't speak to me like that, I'm not a moron, I can understand, it's ok, go ahead.*

(...) nobody reacts on this issue.

It's again Lionel's turn to speak. He denies the interest of the questionnaires, being quite sarcastic towards Jacques. Then: "*Educational methods, it's what I do for years, so I'm quite good at that, I know what I'm talking about, you know. And there are studies that have shown that if you don't use several of your five senses, then you don't take it much of what you're supposed to learn* (many talk while Lionel is speaking, he speaks louder and louder).

A working group is set up. Lionel doesn't want to be part of it - even if some explicitly ask him to."¹⁷

Lionel, in short, tried to put forward his expertise on educational method, but “many” didn’t even listen to him, and he had to speak louder and louder. Eventually, he decided to not be part of the working group, probably because he got offended by the way participants did not take his status of expert seriously.

In general, our discourse protocol data show that a form of hard power in communication clearly or rather prevailed in about 28% of the observed controversies; and was anyway present in more than 50%: in 22% by pointing to the representativeness of others, in about 9% by relying on reputation, in about 11% by using some procedural authority, in 4% by putting forward the speaker’s commitment, and only in 15% by threatening the group.

All those forms of hard power in communication can be removed by a process of meta-communication that allows participants to reflect upon the way they discuss and thus decide.

3. Soft power: How many “best” arguments?

In many cases, however, our observed groups have strived to communicate and deliberate through convincing arguments, that is by exercising the soft power that deliberative democracy foresees. In about 70% of the controversies soft power rather or clearly prevailed, and at least some participants relied on it in 88% of them, by mostly elaborating arguments (67%) or through agitation or empathy (15%). Not surprisingly, this means that some controversies were characterized by the use of both hard and soft power depending on the speakers. However, about 45% of the

¹⁷ Observation by Nicolas Haeringer, 23rd August 2007.

controversies have been dealt with the only use of soft power, in 43% with both soft and hard power, and only 7% were characterized by the only use of hard power.¹⁸

To figure out how arguments operate in these cases of communication is the aim of this section.

When the power of arguments is disclosed, deliberative theorists contend, consensus can be found because an open communication makes the most convincing argument emerge.

If deliberative theorists are right, then, in the GJMs observed settings the chance for consensus should be very high in general and even higher when soft power prevails. In order to check this out, we must isolate the controversies that produced an outcome in terms of decisions. To be sure, only 34% of the observed controversies have been judged by the coders as “definitely decision-oriented”, about the same only as “somewhat decision-oriented” and as much as 32% as “non decision-oriented”. As a consequence, in 32% of the controversies no decision was taken, in 8% a decision was postponed and 3% decisions have been delegated: only in about 55% a decision was taken, but in as much as 46% of those cases (allowed or rather) consensus was the outcome, and mostly nodding (66%) or unanimity (19%) the mode of decision.

Table 1 shows that consensus rather than compromise is more likely to happen when soft power is the only power used by participants in a controversy, and the mode of decision is in this case mostly nodding or unanimity. Moreover, out of the 34 cases in which consensus was followed by unanimity (full consensus), about 57% happened in settings characterized by the only use of soft power.

Table 1. Outcome and Mode of decisions by type of power used during decision- oriented controversies (Column %, total cases=81)

Power	Mode of decision			Outcome		Consensus and Unanimity
	Majority	Nodding	Unanimity	Compromise	Consensus	
Hard power	0.0	5.5	6.7	16.0	5.6	5.9
Both	87.5	41.8	20.0	56.0	33.3	32.4
Soft Power	12.5	52.7	73.3	28.0	61.1	61.8
Column cases	8	55	15	25	36	34
Cramer's V	.29**	n.s.	.25*	.31**	.25*	.24*

However, the nature of the argument that produced consensus, varied in different settings.

¹⁸ While in the remaining 5% no kind of power could be observed by the coders.

My point is that to make sense of this variation we should look at the configuration of preferences and values that participants held in the decision making settings.

Preferences can be “open” or “closed”: they are “open” when are formulated in a cautious way and their bearers show the willingness to accept other points of view; they are “closed” when they are asserted in a strong way and their bearers are convinced that they are “superior” to the others’ ones from the very beginning¹⁹. But a decisional setting is not only characterized by preferences, and, even when they are not explicitly mentioned, values are there as well. To put it in a simple way, a setting may be characterized by participants with homogeneous or heterogeneous values, with evident implications for the decision making.

If we cross the types of preferences with the types of (configuration of) values, we find four ideal-typical settings (see figure 2). Consider that, in this case, we take for granted that preferences diverge, since we are focusing on controversies. This does not mean that when preferences do not diverge, arguments play no role. To the contrary, participants may not be aware that their preferences are similar at the beginning of the discussion, and the process of deliberation consists precisely in finding this out. Also in this case, people may find that their preferences are similar for different reasons, and not necessarily because they appeal to the same kind of public reason (Dryzeck 2000).

Figure 2. Typology of “convincing arguments” when preferences diverge (controversy)

Values	Preferences	
	<i>Closed</i>	<i>Open</i>
<i>Homogeneous</i>	Rhetoric/Identity-oriented argument (Agitation)	Argument that re-defines the problem by (re)interpreting the shared values (Meta-level consensus)
<i>Heterogeneous</i>	Argument that maximizes the preferences of all (Compromise)	Argument that includes each point of view, by neutralizing the conflict of values (Consensus on practices)

When preferences diverge, instead, the easiest situation is when values are homogenous. While in presence of closed preferences participants will probably appeal to rhetoric or identity-oriented arguments, which lowers the possibility of

¹⁹ I owe to Luigi Bobbio this classification of preferences, though I use different labels. Bobbio (2008) distinguishes between “strong/weak” and “aware/unaware” preferences. For the purpose I aim at here, it is sufficient to condense these distinctions in a simple dichotomy: closed/open.

innovation and may result in agitation²⁰; when preferences are open, participants may find interesting solutions by reinterpreting the common values. In the latter case, the search for consensus may in fact shift the discussion on the problem at stake to a meta-level (Pearce and Littlejohn 1997), which would help the group to adopt new courses of action or even to adopt new frames of the situation. Generally a controversy is more complex when values are relatively heterogeneous. The solution is often found in a “reasonable compromise”. It is in that case, to me, that “dialogue should produce a result acceptable to everyone, though for different reasons, so that co-operation is not interrupted” (Pellizzoni 2001: 75). This is possible by neutralizing the conflict on values, and by focusing on practical things. In any case, the condition is that preferences are open. When preferences are closed, and values heterogeneous, the most likely positive outcome is a strategic compromise, and the most convincing argument to achieve it, is the one which is able to show that the solution satisfies all participants. To be sure, a strategic compromise must not be regarded as regrettable, since it does not prevent the group to reiterate the cooperation. As some games theorists contend, the reiteration of cooperation may end up in a shift of perspective that produces new values (Binmore 1994 and 1998). The ideal situation is when through reiterated cooperation participants can learn to trust each other enough to “open” their preferences.

From what I said it should be clear that although “values” can be fixed in a ideological position of an individual or of a group, they are relevant when they emerge during a discussion. Some settings may apparently be homogenous in terms of some core values, but still, depending on the issue discussed, a divergence of values may emerge during the discussion; on the contrary other settings may apparently be heterogeneous in terms of core values (because participants come from different ideological groups, countries, religions, etc.), but still a convergence on the same value attached to the issue discussed may emerge²¹. To be sure, in a setting characterized by homogenous core values a divergence of values is less likely to emerge than in a heterogeneous setting, but the point is to single out in which cases

²⁰ It is important to notice that agitation can be used in a context where the power of the actors is asymmetric, while compromise (which results from bargaining), and the two types of consensus foreseen in this typology imply that the power is symmetric (see chapter 2).

²¹ Take the examples of a Muslim who talks with a Christian, their values would diverge on a lot of issues but they would appear to have homogenous values if the issue of the discussion is “Does God exist?” and “Is there only one God?”.

values are relevant –and with what consequences- in a controversy on a particular issue.

In what follows I will show one example for each ideal typical situation described above.²²

Closed preferences

Despite their struggle for democracy, social movement activists are sometimes seen as ideologically oriented people who define the political reality by relying on radical frames, thus, as unable to pursue deliberation in practice (Simon 1999, Young 2001), and even when they call for direct democracy, their lack of formal procedures and structures has been sometimes accused of tyranny (Freeman 1970). The data we have shown on the decision making practices observed within GJMs groups clearly reject those stereotypes. However we also found some instances of hard power both over and in communication. This is likely to happen when activists hold closed preferences, and are not willing to change their opinion by including other points of view. The most interesting case in this respect is found in some sessions of the Attac-France board. Participants seem to hold preferences that are anchored to the interests of the sub-groups related to the control of the association: sometime the discussion is then characterized by a high degree of competitiveness, and the “most convincing argument” is the one which shows the point of equilibrium, that is a strategic compromise. As Hearinger reports, there are two sub-groups that hold different visions of the association: one is perceived as wanting to use Attac as “a back-office for the LCR”, the French Trotskyite Party, and the other as wanting to create a new political party : “Due to its success, Attac [France] became an important stake. In the competition for the leadership in the association (sanctioned by the vote of members) these demands had to be addressed. Dramatizing the differences between two visions was bound to competition” (2008: 56).

We have already reported some instances of Attac-France sessions, where it is clear that participants make use of some form of hard power over and in the communication

²² Just as for the types of power, let me before clarify that, here too, instances do not make the whole picture of a case; and also this typology must be understood in a dynamic way. In the same group, or even in the same setting, the situation may hypothetically shift from one type to another: preferences could (in principle) be opened through a reiterate dialogue, and values could (in principle) be transformed and become less heterogeneous.

process to support their opinions, which is a clear sign of “closed preference”. Take for another instance the following piece of discussion:

Jean-Marie: *I won't make any synthesis because I don't want that you get used to it; I'm not a wooden language specialist, but at the point where we stand, I think that we should show a new style in the facilitation of the association, and this requires that we abandon the war language, I don't want use to engage in pale imitations of Nikonoff's language. If we hammer out that there is a guerilla, then we will have it.*

...

Pierre: *it is a pure non-sense. These are formulations, words that have their political importance. If we mention "usurpation" then we have to say which one it is.*

JMC: *let's stop being morons, let's be clearer.*²³

Clearly the speakers present their opinion in a closed way: they don't show any sign that they are willing to accept the others' point of view. This is a typical situation of a session characterized by both heterogeneous values (two different ways to value the association) and closed preferences. The compromise is accordingly the most likely way out.

The data we have collected on the controversies reveal that when a certain degree of competitiveness has been observed - which can be considered as a proxy of closed preferences, though not necessarily of heterogeneous values – and a decision was actually taken, compromise resulted in 42% of the cases (against 18% in case of absence of competitiveness)²⁴, while consensus in 32% (against as much as 75% in case of no competitiveness).²⁵

In Attac-France compromise is often reached through what Haeringer (ibid.: 62) calls a “deductive decision making”, which aims at “exploring every arguments, engage in a deep debate so that positions are made clear. This process enables to see what could be the consensus, deducting the potential common decision from all the arguments discussed” (ibid.: 64) . As we can see in the illustration below, this process is nothing more than a compromise, since the decision is the point of equilibrium, that is the common denominator of all positions.

²³ Observation by Nicolas Haeringer, 21st July 2007.

²⁴ The Cramer's V of the cross-tabulation between absence/presence of competitiveness and absence/presence of compromise is .24, significant at .05 level.

²⁵ Cramer's V is .41, significant at .001 level.

An example of a compromise reached through this process is the following discussion on the possibility to organize a seminar on Venezuela:

....

Bernard :*So I proposed to organize a seminar, an "Attac-saturday", that could raise interest beyond Attac, that would analyse the bolivarian revolution in Venezuela, and also Bolivia and Ecuador. This would last half-day. ...*

board : noise, side discussions

....

Bernard : *And for the debate it would be very important to invite anti-chavist.*

....

Jean-Marie : *well if you want, we leave you a blank check and you invite whoever you want...*

Julien : *no no no, this can't be done that way.*

....

....

Gérard : *it is a pity that we completely exclude Mexico from our discussion, the Zapistas, the landless movements, etc. Attac is not adressing the repression they face daily, in the same way that we ignored "la otra campana". This is a big mistake from the international commission not to relay what is happening in Mexico and to concentrate only on Brazil and Venezuela.*

Then Aurélie propose a decision, mentioning not only the Bolivarian revolution in V. but also Ecuador and Bolivia, stating that the debate should reflect different sensibilities.

But this was not yet the point of equilibrium:

Gérard (quite angry) : *so what I just said was useless... you didn't take into account my suggestion.*

Bénédicte : *we should integrate his proposal.*

...

Wilfried : *so the seminar on Venezuela would be the first step in a series of initiatives on Latin America.*

....

Jean-Marie : *a consensus is emerging that we do things about this : social transformation processes in Veneruela and Latin America.*²⁶

After that speakers made clear their positions on the issue, Jean-Marie finds the point of equilibrium, which was at the end the option on which participants converged.

When participants share the same values on the issue at stake, on the contrary, a kind of “soft” pressure toward an option may be used to convince the others, but, in this case, speakers will appeal to the identity of the group through some forms of agitation, or persuasion through symbols or emotions. Data show that agitation/empathy has been used as a major source of soft power in 36.4% of the observed controversies (52 out of 143). However, only when the values are homogenous, the use of agitation may result in a consensus, since in a more heterogeneous setting, the symbols or the emotions agitated by some speakers would not be appealing for those who do not share the values attached to them. This is why the only 3 cases of controversy that resulted in consensus through the use of agitation are found Ecologistas in Accion-Cordoba (1), and the No Vox network (2), both characterized by a radical ideology (Calle and Robles 2008, Haeringer 2008). A verbatim example of this kind of arguing, or convincing can be found in one No Vox session, when a discussion started on the participation in the 2007 World Social Forum:

J.: It is better to be involved in grass-roots campaign, to be with... like the CADTM, people we resemble to.

D.: We still have to be there, we go there and we will bug them [NGOs]. What you explained, it doesn't surprise me. I'm not surprised when I'm told that it will be an elitist forum. But what the fuck? Never mind, we go there, as soon as we arrive, we start confronting them.

*A.: it is still a good opportunity for us to meet among us, to build concrete solidarities, etc.*²⁷

We can notice that participants share the same values, a radical political ideology, and their critique to the social forum process hardly would change if a different vision was there. However, a divergence of opinion emerged on whether the group must not participate altogether or participate to confront the forum. The second option

²⁶ Observation by Nicolas Haeringer, 21st July 2007.

²⁷ Observation by Hearinger, December, 16th 2006.

prevailed by some form of agitation: “*we go there and we will bug them*”, “*what the fuck we go there and... we start confronting them*”.

Open preferences

In many cases, however, in our observed sessions, preferences have been presented in an open way, by showing a willingness to cooperate in order to find out the most convincing argument, a condition that increases the possibility of consensus. Our data for instance show that in 32% of the observed controversies, all speakers were cooperative, in 72% opinions have been exchanged with a highest degree of civility, while only in 15% the atmosphere was characterized by a negative emotional tension, even though in as much as in 34% of the controversies it was observed a mix of positive and negative tensions: in as much as 31% full cooperativeness, complete absence of incivility and of absolute lack of negative tensions have been observed together. If this reveals that speakers presented their preferences in an open way, when a decision was taken, consensus, followed by unanimity or tacit agreement, was reached in 74% of such cases, while only in 35% when at least one of them was absent²⁸.

The following example is taken by a session of Attac-Florence. The group is very small and quite cohesive, participants know each other very well and, as a consequence, developed a common perspective on political problems. In this session (15 June 2006), a member reported to the others that the group was invited by the Italian Communist Refoundation Party (PRC) to participate in a public assembly in solidarity with a squatted public building (Luzzi) in Vaglia, a small town close to Florence. Roberto raised some worries about the multiplication of the initiatives supported by the PRC, by wondering if this multiplication of initiatives was due to the process of constitution of a new left party-or federation of leftist parties.²⁹ He considered this process of constitution as a top-down process- “more image than substance”- which would undermine social movements’ autonomy. He expressed his worries in a cautionary way, and anticipated that he was expressing only an opinion

²⁸ The Cramer’s V of the cross-tabulation between the presence/absence of the “openness” conditions and the presence/absence of consensus followed by unanimity or nodding, is .36, significant at .001 level.

²⁹ Which would include the PRC, the Greens, the PCDI – the other Italian Communist Party - and the left wing of the Left democrats, which quitted the party after its decision to merge with La Margherita- a rather centrist party- to establish the new Democratic Party.

to open the discussion. In the following I report a nearly verbatim transcript of the discussion that followed:

Roberto: *“well, I just express an opinion that maybe we want to discuss, but in a mere zapatist spirit, which means that we reflect on this issue and we take a common and shared position, by consensus. Obviously this refers to the position of the group as whole, while as always within our group, individuals can decide whatever they want- that is obvious.”*

[The other members said that a discussion on this was worth doing, and in general agreed with the expressed worries].

Andrea: *“I see what you mean, but if we prejudicially avoid those kinds of meetings we risk to isolate ourselves from the rest of the movements in Florence...I participated in the first meeting for the association of the left in Florence, on behalf of myself only, and I found that almost everybody [meaning social movements activists] was there, but I think, not because everybody is ready to participate in the process of constitution, but because they want to understand what happens...”*

Caterina: *“participating in the events like this [the latter] can be done individually, but in other situations like the public assembly for the Luzzi, we should go, if we agree, as group, since we should express our solidarity, and because, even though parties are involved, the process is a social movement one... shall we not give our solidarity to the poor people who are squatting the Luzzi only because some parties are there?”*

Sauro: *“I agree, this is the point...”*

It seems, then, that participants solved the question by distinguishing between two processes: social movements initiatives where parties are involved, and parties initiatives for party politics. On the basis of this distinction a consensus was found and Roberto declared his availability to go as representative of Attac to the Luzzi initiative.

It is interesting to notice that the discussion implied a re-definition of the group's values. If autonomy from political party politics is often taken for granted, this value is however always challenged in practice. One member of the group started the discussion by being very critical toward the situation, but at the end of the process a new boundary between social movements and party politics was established. This

new distinction was able to redefine the situation, and the members preferences adjusted accordingly.

When values on the issue at stake are heterogeneous this re-definition of values is much more difficult. Some deliberative theorists claim that in such a situation an open and rational communication should bring about not only a convergence of preferences but also of values. However I agree with those who think that this is not always possible, nor useful or desirable. The examples we have speak of a cooperative search for the right solution of the controversy. In one case this meant to avoid a deep discussion on the values, and to accept that participants value an option for different reasons. In the Italian Water Campaign network, there was a discussion on whether to meet institutional actors in a national forum devoted to the issue of water management. The controversy was started by a young women (Sara), who raised the question of the autonomy of the movement, and of the forum. The people who disagreed with her, did it kindly by always referring to her statement:

Sara (young member of a students organization): *“...I’m against the meeting with politicians in the forum, the forum is the autonomy of the movement which should be protecte ...*

Walter (Young member of Communist Refoundation): *...I see what Sara means, but I think that there is nothing bad in a final meeting with institutions...*

We should avoid the idea of the “autonomy of the social”, which actually re-proposes the idea of the autonomy of the political; this is dangerous, we should link the social and the political, otherwise no change will occur...

Marco Bersani (45 years old, President of Attac-Italy): *... I understand Sara position but also Walter is right... What I would propose is that while preparing the forum, we also see when after it we can meet with the institutions ...*

Severio (55 years old): *I think Marco’s proposal is a good one*

Francesco (young, Attac-Italy): *...the law is the instrument of the political autonomy of the movement which we use to influence the*

electoral campaign – but we should be able to impose it in the agenda, and I think Marco proposal goes in this direction.

Young woman: *I think that this solution goes also in Sara's direction...*
(Sara approves with gesture)

Adult man: *I agree with Sara and I think we should find a solution to increase the mobilization around the law first, than we can meet the politicians...*

...

Marco then asks if everyone is happy with this solution: first the forum-mobilization and then the meeting with institutions, parties and unions, where they will ask a clear position, before the elections.

Everybody agrees!³⁰

As we can notice, the discussion did not rely upon shared values. If autonomy from institutions has been referred to by Sara, Walter, as member of a political party, cannot share the same vision and overtly criticized the “autonomy of the social”, which in his view reproduces the “autonomy of the political”, meaning the growing separation between institutions and civil society. Had the discussion been based on this “conflict” of values, the outcome would not have been a consensus, probably. Only by bringing the discussion back on the terrain of the strategic options³¹ (incoming national elections, necessity to negotiate with institutions, etc.), and by separating the two phases of the movement constitution (national forum) and (later) the relationship with institutions, this was possible. After all, this solution can be considered “fair” for both Sara and Walter, but for different reasons: while to the former, the autonomy of the movement is protected in the first phase, to the latter, this does not prevent the communication between movements and institutions.

The last example shows a similar device to reach consensus in a setting where participants do not share the same values but hold open preferences. During one Conscious Consumer (Kent, UK) session, a controversy raised on a campaign against

³⁰ Nearly verbatim transcription (observation, Pescara, 14 January 2006).

³¹ It is important to understand that a consensus on a strategic option (or on a practice) is substantially different from a strategic compromise: in the former participants really believe that the option is the best one for them, while in the latter, participants believe that the option is the best they can get in a particular situation, by calculating loses and gains.

a phone mast that most participants would like to remove from the students camp, but somebody raises the question of the contradiction between the widespread use of the mobile phone among students and the campaign aim:

Conor: *I don't really understand the campaign against the phone mast because surely everyone of us here has a mobile phone?*

Clare: *I haven't.*

Conor: *I do, I swear by it. I couldn't live without it.*

Daniel: *That's another thing I think that we need to get across is awareness of the dangers of mobile phones, that needs to be our next thing really, and how dangerous that is and how we should probably use them sparingly.*

Matt: *We should do that to try to minimize the risks and pass it on to consumers*

Dan: *Their shouldn't be a mobile phone mast so close to students.*

...

...

Conor: *So, do you want the phone mast removed, or for it to be scrapped completely?*

...

Clare: *There are plenty of places where it could go where it could be at least 500m from the nearest residential accommodation and that would be safer than 25m.*³²

Clearly, some participants do not hold the same values: namely Conor would not live without a mobile phone, while Clare firmly claims she already lives without.³³ Daniel understands that on this ground the discussion would not lead anywhere, though he reckons that a deeper discussion on this issue will be worth doing in the future. It is Clare that finds the convincing argument by stating that if other people/students use the mobile phone then the correct solution is to move the mast to avoid the diseases it may causes, though Daniel correctly suggests that then it must be put at a safe distance from all kinds of residents. Besides the fact that also in this case the most convincing argument is the one which includes all points of view and avoids a conflict

³² Transcript by Clare Saunders (observation 14 March 2007).

³³ Actually these positions reflect the conflict between a radical ecologist and a sustainable development approach.

on values, it is also interesting to notice how participants try to put on the table as much information as possible, so that participants can decide on a rational basis:

Conor: *But surely if every student in Darwin has a mobile phone, the surely that generates the same amount of microwaves as the phone mast itself?*

Eva: *Adam Burgess reckons that the nearest you are to a mast the less hard your phone has to work for a signal, therefore it's less dangerous.*

Daniel: *They say that ...*

Matt: *The thing is, the mobile phone only generates waves when you receive a phone call, whereas the phone mast emits lots of waves throughout, it never stops.*

Eva: *Plus this one is for the new video technology, so it's actually stronger waves.*

Clare: *It pulsates at a higher frequency, it's part of the new 3G network.*

Matt: *So it's the latest one. It would be good if we could find out the actual frequency of the mast.*

...

Matt: *We can't rush into this without knowing a lot, basically. If we do this we need to know what we're saying, what we're attacking. I think it would be a bit risky to jump into it without having a clear picture.*

Eva: *The thing is, it is difficult. It is just contradictory.*

...³⁴
...

This reveals another important function of deliberation, which Dewey (1938) would call “public inquiry”. As Lanzara (2005: 56) puts it, the function of the “inquiry” is to make an action possible by reducing the uncertainty of a situation (see also Argyris and Schoen 1996). If deliberation is about dealing with uncertainty (Pellizzoni 2005), the latter can be reduced either by relying on a “public inquiry” (as Conscious consumers do), or by brainstorming on best strategies (as in the case of the Italian Water Campaign), or, finally, by re-interpreting values and comparing them with facts (Attac-Florence). In all those cases, arguments can be justified on the basis of different kinds of reason, depending on the types of preferences and values of the

³⁴ Transcript by Clare Saunders (observation 14 March 2007).

participants, but they are found convincing especially when they are able to reproduce the collective cooperation on valued practices.

4. Conclusions

In this chapter I addressed the question of deliberative communication within our selected GJMs' organizations by looking at the power of arguments. In order to do so, I had first to isolate the sessions in which soft power prevailed, by distinguishing them from others, where hard power was used. Accordingly, I elaborated a typology of power both *over* and *in* communication. Over communication power reveals itself mainly in the form of exclusion: some people are simply not there because of some barriers to access (lack of resources) or exclusive procedures (delegation, cooptation, representation). Even when people are there, some speakers may impede their arguments to be discussed through processes of silencing (ignoring people), agenda manipulation or because they use a language style which is difficult to understand. And even when an argument is made, this can be disregarded or acknowledged on a different ground than its content. Finally, speakers may decide to use some forms of hard power (threat, reputation, representation, expertise, etc.) to push forward one option. Soft power is the pure power of the arguments and reveals itself when all the obstacles to communication are removed. When I contrasted this typology with the empirical cases, I found that the power of arguments largely prevailed. At the same time, our participant observation makes clear that hard power over and in communication had not disappeared; a finding that should be reflected upon by both scholars and activists. Scholars should continue to clarify in which cases and why hard power prevails, and activists should find practical solutions to remove the hard power from their communication.

If the power of arguments prevails, however, what was not clear, both theoretically and empirically, is what types of arguments convince participants to converge toward one option during a controversy. In order to understand this, I suggested going beyond the "myth of the best argument" based on an universal public reason, supported by deliberative theorists such as Habermas or Rawls. My point is that the type of convincing argument may depend on the types of preferences and values that participants bear into communication. As we have seen, preferences can be open,

when their bearers are willing to question them on the basis of other arguments; or closed, when their bearers believe from the very beginning that they cannot change at all. Preferences, however, are supported by values, which may (or may not) be shared by all participants in a communication. By crossing the types of preferences with the configurations of values attached to the issues, I singled out four types of communicative settings in which specific types of arguments are more likely to convince participants during a controversy. If participants bear closed preferences, in a context where values are shared, the convincing argument is likely to appeal to the identity of the group, by mobilizing shared symbols, or emotions, through agitation. On the contrary, if values are not shared, the only way out is a compromise based on the argument that is able to find the point of equilibrium. In many cases, this strategic compromise is not regrettable because may produce new norms of cooperation through reiteration. The most promising setting for deliberation is, however, when preferences are open, and participants do want to cooperate for a fair solution of the controversy. But, while when values are shared, they can rely on common values to define and re-define the problems, when values are not shared, this is more difficult to do. In the former case, a meta-communication on the values participants share is likely to produce an argument that solves the controversy, and consensus is reached not only on one option but also on the interpretation of the values. In the latter, consensus is more likely to be achieved when arguments are able to neutralize the conflict of values, by allowing participants to agree for different reasons (and values). In the chapter, I have shown that indeed when participants bear closed preferences (competitiveness), compromise is much more likely than any other outcome, while consensus prevails when they bear open preferences (cooperativeness, civility, lack of tensions). However, the discourse protocol data on which I drew my quantitative analysis does not allow us to distinguish between settings with different configurations of values (homogenous/heterogeneous), nor it allows to find out the nature of the arguments. Therefore, I have illustrated some qualitative instances of those different settings by singling out the relative convincing arguments that solved the controversies in some of the selected GJMs' groups/networks. The findings confirmed that different arguments are used in different ways according to the types of preferences and the configuration of values. By recalling that "instances" do not tell the whole story of the group from which they have been taken, we can summarize the findings as follows: the No Vox network provided an example of agitation in a

context of closed preferences and shared values; Attac-France, an example of strategic compromise among different closed preferences supported by different values; Attac-Florence, an example of meta-level consensus on the interpretation of a common value; and both Kent's Conscious Consumers and the Italian Water campaigners, an example of consensus on practices, reached through arguments that were able to neutralize the conflict of values, to include all points of view and to let participants agree for different reasons. Interestingly, the "reason" beyond the arguments in those cases has not been necessarily the "universal public reason", but a local, context-specific reason based on the will to cooperate for solving common problems.

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