



Partecipazione e Conflitto
* *The Open Journal of Sociopolitical Studies*
<http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/paco>
ISSN: 1972-7623 (print version)
ISSN: 2035-6609 (electronic version)
PACO, Issue 8(3) 2015: 845-875
DOI: 10.1285/i20356609v8i3p845

Published in November 15, 2015

Work licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non commercial-Share alike 3.0 Italian License

RESEARCH ARTICLE

ALWAYS AGAINST THE STATE?

An analysis of Polish and Swedish radical left-libertarian activists' interaction with institutionalized politics

Grzegorz Piotrowski

Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden

Magnus Wennerhag

Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden

ABSTRACT: Radical left-libertarian movements are often regarded as primarily seeking ways to accomplish social and political change outside the framework of institutionalized politics. Previous research, however, has paid little or no attention to the question of these activists' actual interactions with institutionalized politics, nor has it addressed the ways these interactions could be understood in relation to their overall strategies and ideology. This article therefore explores whether, and to what extent, such interaction actually occurs and analyzes the meanings and motives radical left-libertarian activists – from anarchist, autonomist, and anarcho-syndicalist groups – attribute to various types of political actions, ranging from voting and lobbying to protests and direct action. We furthermore compare activists in Poland and Sweden, in order to scrutinize whether cross-country differences in “political opportunities” affects the activists' political strategies and ideas about how social and political change can best be accomplished. Contrary to popular beliefs and many activists' own self-declarations, our analysis shows that radical left-libertarian groups do in fact try to achieve political change by interacting with institutionalized politics. While radical left-libertarian activists do in most cases prefer “direct action”, this article explores how a more complex relationship to institutionalized politics allows them to accomplish real and immediate changes at the grassroots level.

KEYWORDS: Social Movements, Radical Left-Libertarian Movements, Direct Action, Poland, Sweden

CORRESPONDING AUTHORS: Grzegorz Piotrowski, email: grzegorz.piotrowski@sh.se;
Magnus Wennerhag, email: magnus.wennerhag@sh.se.

1. Introduction

Radical left-libertarian movements are often regarded as primarily seeking ways to accomplish social and political change outside the framework of institutionalized politics. In such accounts, these movements' skeptical attitude toward the state is understood to be an ideological conviction that shuns all interaction with mainstream politics. This description is often used when discussing late 19th or early 20th century anarchists; but today's radical left-libertarian movements – consisting of various anarchist, autonomist, anarcho-syndicalist, and libertarian socialist groups – are also often characterized in this way. One frequently finds characterizations of this movement milieu such as the following: “[today's] radical political movements are increasingly suspicious of state power and often resistant to formal channels of political representation [...] Instead of working through the state, [today's radical political activism] seeks to work outside it, to form movements and political relationships at the level of civil society rather than at the institutional level.” (Newman 2011, 47–48).

Previous research has paid little or no attention, however, to the question of these activists' actual interactions with institutionalized politics, or to the ways these interactions could be understood in relation to the strategies and ideology of radical left-libertarian movements. The aim of this article is therefore to explore whether, and to what extent, such interaction actually occurs and, furthermore, to analyze the meanings and motives activists attribute to various types of political actions. In particular, we seek to understand how radical left-libertarian activists make sense of their political strategies in relation to their general anti-statist or state-skeptical ideological orientation, and to explore the extent to which such beliefs and values are fundamental for the movement's actual mobilizations.

Our comparative analysis of radical left-libertarian activists in Poland and Sweden, two European countries whose civil societies have developed along significantly different trajectories, allows us to address the ways cross-country differences in “political opportunities” (e.g. McAdam 1996) have affected these activists' political strategies as well as their ideas about how social and political change can best be accomplished. In particular, we analyze activists from anarchist, autonomist, and anarcho-syndicalist groups, whose political orientations include both libertarian Marxist and anarchist perspectives, since these groups are the principal actors within the radical left-libertarian movement in the countries of our study. All of these groups are based on ideologies that express anti-

capitalist, anti-authoritarian/anti-state, anti-racist/antifascist and pro-direct/participatory democracy stances from a radical left-libertarian standpoint (Katsiaficas 1997; Curran 2006; Romanos 2013). Historically, such movement activism can be connected to those ideologies and strategies that emerged within two broader “movement families” (cf. della Porta and Rucht 1995, 230 ff.): namely, the labor movement (in particular during the late 19th and early 20th century) and the “new left” or “new social movements” of the 1960s and onwards. Within these movement families, the groups we analyze here have often been thought to constitute the “radical flank” (cf. Haines 2013).

In the first section of the article, we introduce earlier research on radical left-libertarian movements’ engagement with the state and institutionalized politics. We then provide a brief, historical outline of the specific development of these movements in Poland and Sweden followed by a discussion of the ways cross-country differences between post-communist Poland and the longstanding liberal democracy of Sweden may shape radical left-libertarian groups’ relations with institutionalized politics. After presenting our methodology and describing the data, we analyze the activists’ reported experiences and self-understanding of various repertoires of action, both conventional and unconventional, and identify five main modes of accomplishing social and political change discussed by the interviewees. In the final section we conclude and summarize our findings.

2. Radical left-libertarian movements’ strategies for changing politics and society

Since the 1970s, the dominant view within social movement research has been that social movements are rational and purposeful actors trying to accomplish political change, using both conventional and unconventional means, by challenging institutionalized politics (della Porta and Diani 1999, 7 ff.). The activism of radical left-libertarian movements, however, has frequently been interpreted in different terms than this standard account: either as activism that is disinterested in pursuing political change as such, or as political action that aims for change outside of the realm of institutionalized politics (e.g. Katsiaficas 1997; Williams and Lee 2012). The radical left-libertarian movement’s alleged lack of engagement with existing political systems thus appears to constitute a potentially “deviant case” in need of further exploration. That is, in order to fully explain why, how and when social movements do interact with institutionalized politics, one must also provide an explanation that can account for those groups that deviate from the general social movement pattern.

In many previous studies about social movements' interaction with institutionalized politics there has been a further tendency to overlook the more radical parts of these movements. Activists less prone to engage in dialogue with politicians and the existing authorities, or those who prefer conflict-oriented repertoires of actions, have mostly been seen as "radical flanks" whose more militant strategies and more far-reaching claims may affect – positively or negatively – the possibilities for the broader movement to achieve its goals (cf. Haines 2013). Given the heterogeneity of social movements, both in terms of their political goals and their repertoires of actions, such a focus is indeed important. One might even say that an unspoken division of labor frequently characterizes these movements insofar as the "moderate flank" takes on the role of interacting with politicians and civil servants (engaging in everything from public pressure to lobbying) while the "radical flank" takes on the role of intensifying the level of contention around the issue at stake (engaging in more unconventional, sometimes violent, repertoires of action) (ibid.). The existence of such a division of labor need not, however, exclude the possibility that "radicals" sometimes do interact with institutionalized politics. Like Jacobsson and Saxonberg (2013, 14), our approach stresses "the fact that most social movement organizations and activists in reality employ a variety of repertoires of action" and like these authors we want to "problematize dichotomies such as [...] co-opted versus radical". For this reason, we have sought to avoid the presupposition of such dichotomies in this article and instead to focus attention on the forms of political actions – both conventional and contentious – that radical left-libertarian activists actually employ.

As noted in the introduction, the anti-statist ideology of anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists, autonomists and libertarian socialists has often been presented as evidence that radical left-libertarian activism has no interest in interacting with the institutionalized politics of the state. In some of the previous research on specific radical left-libertarian groups one finds, for instance, claims such as "autonomists are singularly uninterested in what is normally regarded as politics (campaigns, votes, fund-raising, party formation, and so forth)" and that they "want self-determination and 'the abolition of politics'" (Katsiaficas 1997, 196–197). Similarly, Williams and Lee (2012, 561) state that "[a]narchists do not utilize political rights in a conventional activist fashion by lobbying the government or electing favorable candidates".

What Williams and Lee emphasize as central for anarchists' political actions is their praise and use of "direct action". As they express it: "Instead of relying on representatives, one acts directly – either individually or collectively – to immediately accomplish the desired goal, without the facilitation, approval, or agency of elected elites, officials,

or bosses.” (Williams and Lee 2012, 563). Throughout the history of radical left-libertarian groups, the idea of “direct action” has motivated activists to accomplish social change through their own actions, without political intermediation, and without appealing to public authorities to mend the problems addressed (Romanos 2013; Moore and Shepard 2013). When the early labor movement’s dominant groups advocated representative politics, or even state-seizure, as the primary means for obtaining the movement’s goals, anarchists and other radical left-libertarian groups instead called for direct actions and the abolition of the state (Marshall 1992).¹ As a consequence of this traditional skepticism against the state and political authority as such, a wide range of radical left-libertarian activisms have subsequently been interpreted as advocating strategies and repertoires of action that reject institutionalized politics.

As a consequence, the central question of whether and to what extent radical left-libertarian movements do in fact interact with the state structures has rarely been addressed in previous research. A rare exception to this trend is Williams and Lee’s (2012) analysis of whether cross-country variation in “political opportunity structures” leads to different types of mobilization for anarchist movements in six different countries. Their analysis, however, is based on narratives of the movement’s history found at anarchist websites. Using this type of data, they conclude that anarchists “are not interested in affecting state reform” (*ibid.*, 561).²

Our aims, as well as the data we have used in this article, are significantly different from this approach. While it is indeed reasonable to use movement intellectuals’ textual narratives of their own movement’s history as an empirical source when analyzing a specific movement’s general ideas regarding interaction with institutionalized politics (such as Williams and Lee use in their website-based analysis), our approach analyzes a larger sample of interviewed activists. Interviews with activists enable us to analyze more precisely how activists motivate and justify their actions and strategies, and how they reflect upon these collective actions in relation to both ideological convictions and more pragmatic concerns. The activists’ own accounts of and reflections upon various repertoires

¹ It is certainly worth noting, however, that during the Spanish civil war (1936–1939), the anarchists did in fact participate, albeit for short periods, in both the republican and the provisional Catalan government. Similarly, prominent anarchists also took part in the government of the earlier, short-lived Bavarian Council Republic (1919). See e.g. Marshall (1992).

² Williams and Lee (2012) maintain that the successes of the anarchist movement have most often depended on “cultural forces” (such as punk music), while their failures have most often resulted from competition with other radical left-wing movements (in particular Bolshevism). In their conclusions the only forms of political opportunities they see as potentially affecting anarchist movements are basic civil liberties, since “some minimal level of political freedom is required for the movement to exist” (see especially pages 587–589).

of action thus provide insights into how different strategies for bringing about social and political change are discussed within the movements we study. Beyond the textual narratives that movement intellectuals often use to communicate with external audiences, these insights enable us to provide a more nuanced account of how these radical left-libertarian activists' ideological convictions are translated into political practices. Put differently, our approach avoids excluding the option that these activists may sometimes interact with institutionalized politics. Moreover, even if one finds that these activists exclusively use "direct action" to change society, and perhaps also that they express a genuine desire to avoid all contact with the state, it is still reasonable to assume that when activists practice "direct actions" they most certainly do have interactions with institutionalized politics – be they in the form of conflicts and confrontations with state or municipal officials, or party politicians.³ We therefore see it as essential to further investigate the extent to which radical left-libertarian activists really do, or not, interact with institutionalized politics – and what they actually think about this interaction, or lack thereof.

3. Radical left-libertarian movement activism in Poland and Sweden

In both Poland and Sweden, the history of radical left-libertarian movement activism can be traced back to around 1900. The first Polish anarchist group – Walka – was formed in Białystok in 1902 (Antonów 2007). In Sweden, the defining moment was in 1908 when a split occurred between the Social Democratic party and its anarchist-inspired youth organization, followed by the foundation of the anarcho-syndicalist trade union Central Organization of the Workers of Sweden (SAC) in 1910 (Kuhn 2009). Until World War II, the main form of mobilization for both countries' anarchist movements was trade union activism. In the 1930s the Polish syndicalist Association of Trade Unions (ZZZ) had up to 130,000 members (Romanska 2009), with anarchists gaining influence there since 1936 (Marek 2006, 323 ff.). During the roughly same period, the SAC in Sweden at most counted 40,000 members (Kuhn 2009). Following the Second World War, conditions for anarchism became significantly different in the two countries. In state-socialist Poland, anarchist activism was for all intents and purposes non-existent as the leading Leninist party saw anarchism as an ideological aberration. In Sweden, the SAC adapted to the

³ Though the police are an integral part of the state, the analysis of interactions between the police and activists during protests (i.e. the dynamics between various forms of "protest policing" and social movements' protest tactics) falls outside of the scope of this article, as these interactions often follow other types of patterns. They deserve to be analyzed at length elsewhere.

emerging consensus around the Social Democratic welfare state, made a “revisionist” turn and downplayed its previous class struggle-oriented demands (Sjöö 2011, 291–293). Nevertheless, SAC was for a long period the main radical left-libertarian “institution” in Sweden (and continues to play that role today), and its weekly newspaper *Arbetaren* (“The Worker”) ignited important public discussions. And it is worth noting that, in contrast to other Western European countries, anarchism in Sweden did not play an important role in the protests of “sixty-eight”. Maoist and Leninist groups instead dominated the Swedish radical left of the 1970s.

In both countries, anarchism was revived during the 1980s, especially in connection with punk rock music and other forms of counterculture. In Poland, the re-emergence of the anarchist movement during mid-1980s was grounded in punk subculture and a “cultural anarchism” that was “antipolitical, critical towards revolution and revolutionary violence [...] and anti-communist” (Urbański 2009, 100). The first anarchist group to appear in Poland after World War II was the Movement for Alternative Society (RSA), established in Gdańsk in 1983. In 1989, anarchist activists founded the “Anarchist Intercity” (MA), which in 1991 became the Anarchist Federation (FA), today’s most dominant anarchist network of groups and individuals in Poland. Beginning in the early 1990s, a network of antifascist groups also emerged within the movement and since the mid-2000s, these antifascist groups have been organized as Antifa groups that also attract people from outside of the anarchist movement as well as from politicized subcultures. Of these, the most well-known groups today are 161 Crew in Warsaw and Barykada 161 in Białystok.

In Sweden, the movement grew from the mid-1980s onwards mainly inspired by German and Danish autonomist activists, which introduced militant squatting tactics and addressed issues such as anti-fascism (Kuhn 2009; Brink Pinto and Pries 2013). During the 1990s, the Swedish anarchist and autonomist movement attracted activists involved in a variety of social issues, including anarcho-feminism, social ecology, and animal liberation (Kuhn 2009; Peterson 2001). This increasing diversity led to the creation of new organizations and groups, for instance the Swedish Anarcho-syndicalist Youth Federation (SUF), which was founded in 1993 (Kuhn 2009) and went on to contribute significantly to a radicalization of the trade union SAC. The Swedish movement also played an important role mobilizing against militant neo-Nazis, especially through the network Anti-Fascist Action (AFA), which was founded in 1993 and soon became associated in the media with confrontational demonstration tactics (Jämte 2013).

During the emergence of the Global Justice Movement in the early 2000s, Polish anarchists took part in coalitions mobilizing various “counter summits” (for example,

against the European Economic Forum in Warsaw 2004). Similarly, in Sweden, the anarchist and autonomist movement played a crucial role during the mobilization against the EU summit meeting in Gothenburg June 2001 (Wennerhag 2008). After the riots in Gothenburg, the movement lost many allies and much of the credibility it had achieved during the previous decade (Jämte 2013; Brink Pinto and Pries 2013; Jacobsson and Sörbom 2015). Subsequently, the Swedish radical left-libertarian movement has been characterized by its attempts to reorient both the strategies and political priorities, towards less disruptive strategies and an increasing focus on foremost local, “everyday” issues such as trade union struggles, public transport, housing, and urban planning (Jämte 2013; Jacobsson and Sörbom 2015). Key actors during this period have been SAC, SUF, AFA, and *Förbundet Allt åt Alla* (The Association Everything for Everyone), which was founded in 2009. Alongside these recent configurations, there are still many activists within the movement who are not connected to any specific groups but take part in campaigns and networks working with specific issues. While FA has maintained its central role in Poland, a stronger focus on labor issues within the movement since the mid-2000s has also led to the creation of two anarcho-syndicalist trade unions, the Workers’ Initiative (IP) and the Union of Polish Syndicalists (ZSP). In addition, there currently are several groups within today’s Polish anarchist movement whose activities focus on anti-fascism (for instance, the previously mentioned 161 Crew and Barykada 161), or whose members are locally active in squats and social centers (Polanska and Piotrowski 2015).

While the Swedish movement has been highly inspired by anarchist and autonomist ideas and tactics from other European countries (Germany, Denmark and Italy), this has never been the case in Poland (a fact that explains today’s absence of activists that call themselves “autonomists” in that country). Polish anarchists have instead turned to the heritage of classical 19th century anarchism in an effort to fill the void of autonomous leftism and to avoid the inconvenient “left question” in Poland; whereas in Sweden, these “imported” tactics and ideas have enabled the movement to make new connections with other social movements, at times giving them a central role within the extra-parliamentarian radical left of the country. Despite their growing importance in Sweden since the 1990s, autonomist ideas and tactics have never become dominant, and the radical left-libertarian context remains ideologically quite heterogeneous and unorthodox, drawing its inspiration from both anarchist and libertarian Marxist ideas. While the movement in Poland has been at the core of some important mobilizations, it has never achieved the same type of centrality as its Swedish equivalent. The numbers of radical left-libertarian activists of each country reflects this difference. In Poland, that number has been estimated to be around 1,000, a figure that has dropped by half since the mid-

2000s, in a country of 38 million inhabitants. By contrast, the corresponding figures for Sweden, a country with 9 million inhabitants, are around 5,000 activists.⁴

4. Opportunities for radical left-libertarian activism in Poland and Sweden

Within the social movement research that focuses on “political opportunities” (e.g. McAdam 1996), it has often been stressed that institutionalized politics create both opportunities and constraints for movements, and that these affect their prospects for mobilizing and influencing politics and society. The variation we anticipated in this study – which concerns radical left-libertarian movements in two liberal democracies – correlates with the potential political opportunities that exist depending on the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system, as well as the presence or absence of potential allies (cf. McAdam 1996).⁵ Whereas the first concerns how state–civil society relations are usually managed in a country, the second takes into consideration

⁴ This estimation of the size of Sweden’s radical left-libertarian movement is based on several different sources. The interviewees themselves mention figures around 5,000 activists. In a report from Swedish Security Service and Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brottsförebyggande rådet and Säkerhetspolisen 2009: 132), “the autonomist environment” is said to “probably consist of a few thousand activists”. The mainstream media provides another source of information. For 2015, it was reported that in total 5,450 persons took part in SAC’s May Day marches – the Swedish movement’s largest reoccurring protest event – in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö (presumably, not more than 1,000 persons took part in the few other May Day marches staged by SAC in other cities). For Poland, the interviewees mention figures around 1,000 activists. There are no more recent alternative sources for the size of the Polish movement. Mrozowicki et al. (2009) however use data from 2003 and 2009 to estimate the number of activists to be between 1,000 and 2,000. This includes around 300 members of IP and 80 members of ZSP (since trade unions are obliged to report their membership). Depending on the issue, the Polish radical left-libertarian movement sometimes mobilizes up to 2,000 people for a demonstration.

⁵ Within the political opportunity approach, the importance of “[t]he state’s capacity and propensity for repression” (McAdam 1996: 27) is often mentioned as a further constraint for social movements’ possibilities to mobilize (see also Williams and Lee 2012). We however deem this consideration of state repression to be less relevant for the two countries of our study. In the case of Poland, while the country’s constitution provides legal basis for the criminalization of organizations who programmatically subscribe to “totalitarian” (e.g. Communist) methods and activities or advocate the use of violence for obtaining power or influencing the state, the groups considered by our study have generally been regarded as insignificant by the authorities (Eckhard and Thieme 2011). In Sweden, while the constitution does not allow for banning organizations due to their ideological orientation, some of the groups considered in our study have been regularly kept under surveillance by the security service (ibid.). In no case, however, did this surveillance amount to targeted repression by the state. In 2014 (i.e. after the period of our study), however, the Swedish state did initiate a voluntary non-recruitment program to be carried out by local municipalities — a program that today is specifically targeting some of the groups of this study.

the general availability of allies for issues raised by the radical left-libertarian movements among more influential civil society organizations and political parties.

Regarding these state–civil society relations, previous research has shown that openness tends to lead social movements to prioritize advocacy through established institutions, while political closure tends to encourage more confrontational strategies outside of established policy channels (Kitschelt 1986, 66). In cases where such political closure predominates, it becomes even more important for movements to find suitable allies for influencing politics (della Porta and Diani 2006, 211–212). For radical left-libertarian movements, such potential allies could be trade unions and various civil society organizations mobilizing on the same issues, and perhaps also the parties of the political left, which often tend to be more open to engaging in dialogue, or even forming alliances, with new social movements (*ibid.*, 214). At the same time, the likelihood of radical left-libertarian movements influencing politics and society through such allies, would in the end also depend on the strength of the political left of the country in general, and the extent to which traditionally “leftist” issues dominate the political agenda.

In this respect, Poland and Sweden represent two very different European experiences of how relations between institutionalized politics and civil society have developed over time. This difference has also affected the availability of opportunities for radical and left-oriented forms of social movement activism in each country. The East–West divide of Europe led to very different conditions for radical left-libertarian movements during much of the second half of the twentieth-century, but even after the fall of the “iron curtain” and Eastern European countries’ transition to liberal democracies, the differences between the two countries seem to persist. For this reason, our study relies on a “most different” logic of comparison (della Porta 2002).

Sweden, on the one hand, stands out as highly representative of the “Scandinavian model”: a longstanding liberal democracy with stronger corporatist traditions than many other parts of Western Europe, characterized by a strong integration between civil society actors and the state, and a population with high trust in political institutions and a very high degree of memberships in various civil society organizations. For a long time, Swedish civil society was marked by strong political ties and institutionalized links between the labor movement, other social movements and the Social Democratic welfare state, organized through a largely consensual political culture that shunned conflicts and contentions (Trägårdh 2007; Ekman Jørgensen 2008). As in other Western countries, the new social movements of the 1960s and the 1970s introduced new political conflicts as well as increased the use of more contentious forms of activism in Sweden (Ekman Jørgensen 2008); but compared to similar movements in other parts of Western Europe, the actions of the Swedish movements were much less confrontational. Many of the new

social movements' main concerns – for example, environmentalism and feminism – were quickly adopted by established political parties. This phenomenon has been interpreted to show how the traditional Swedish corporatist model, developed mainly in relation to the class cleavage, was able to channel – or co-opt – these new conflicts into mainstream politics (Jamison, Eyerman and Cramer 1990). The political culture and political cleavages that were formed in early 20th century Sweden have thereby continued to influence how social movements and the state interact. While the political left–right division is still very central for Swedish civil society and politics, and mainly understood in terms of the class cleavage, highly confrontational activism is often regarded as something that goes against the consensual political culture of the country.

By contrast, Poland can be seen as a typical case of an Eastern European post-communist state. Despite large anti-regime mobilizations during the early 1980s, the democratic transition in Poland did not create a flourishing civil society (Załęski 2006). In comparison with other post-authoritarian states in Southern Europe and Latin America, post-communist European countries in general today stand out as having “distinctly lower” figures of participation in voluntary associations and trust in political institutions and civil society actors (Kopecký 2003, 5). The only significant mobilizations have been based on a “disappointment towards the new elites”, due to the increasing economic cleavages resulting from neoliberal economic “shock therapies” (Howard 2003). The general lack of mass mobilizations in the region has also been explained by the prevalence of “transactional activism”, i.e. civil society actors seeking direct contacts with politicians and the authorities to promote their goals without using more contentious forms of activism or striving for high membership rates (Petrova and Tarrow 2007). It has furthermore been stressed that disruptive forms of protests are very uncommon in Central Eastern European countries and that the authorities in general have a low tolerance for such repertoires of actions (*ibid.*; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013, 257). The few movement contexts where more contentious or violent tactics are used consist of the radical left and the radical right, which are both generally regarded as making socially unacceptable demands (Císař 2013). According to Císař (*ibid.*), radical left organizations in these countries “are unable to get any resonance for their anticapitalist demands” since such demands have been “discredited by the former communist regimes”. In addition, the experience of state socialism has also made the left–right distinction less central for Polish civil society and politics. In cases in which this distinction is still used, it is less clearly related to the class cleavage and socio-economic issues (which is the more common Western European pattern). And such left–right semantics are almost entirely used in connection with party politics.

In sum, these two countries display significant differences concerning the general population's level of participation in voluntary associations as well as their trust in institutionalized politics. Not only are state–civil society relations structured very differently, but left–right distinctions and the class cleavage has very different meanings in the two countries. Nevertheless, the public tolerance for more contentious forms of activism is, in general, quite low in both countries. We discuss below the extent to which we believe these similarities and differences in political opportunities affect activists' choices of strategies and how these activists make sense of their actions.

5. Data and methods

The main empirical material analyzed in this article is semi-structured interviews. This method was chosen in order to focus attention on the activists' own narratives about their political activities, as well as their principal concerns about strategies and overall conceptions of politics. The interviews usually lasted between one and two hours and they were conducted using a standardized interview guide. This guide covered a wide range of topics, including the interviewees' activist biography, their characterization of the movement (its main mobilizing issues, collective action frames, organizational features, preferred repertoires of action, main allies, etc.) and how it had developed over time. The interview guide also focused on the interviewees' perceptions of the political opportunities that the surrounding political context could possibly provide the movement, as well as their reflections on the practical meaning of various central concepts (such as democracy, politics and direct action).

We primarily chose activists with longer experience (more than five years) in the movement context, in order to ensure a historical perspective on the movement's development, though a few more "fresh" activists were also interviewed. The names of the interviewees have been changed to preserve anonymity. The interviews in Poland were conducted in 2013, and in Sweden 2008–2011. In Poland, 8 individual and 4 group interviews (totaling 17 persons) were made, with activists from Poznań, Kraków, Szczecin, Warsaw and Kostrzyn. In Sweden, 10 individual and 6 group interviews (totaling 22 persons) were made, with activists from Stockholm and Malmö. In both Poland and Sweden, most activists were between 20–35 years of age, a few of them older than 40. In Sweden, the interviewees were either currently, or had previously been, active in the SAC, Everything for Everyone, SUF, *planka.nu*, AFA, and various anarchist groups. In Poland, the interviewees were either active in FA, IP, ZSP, Kolektyw Kostrzyńskich Anarchistów, Antyfaszystowska Warszawa, or were not currently affiliated with any specific group. We

have thus focused our study on those activists who had been and, in most cases, who continue to be active in the radical left-libertarian groups that have been most significant in both of the countries in recent years.

After transcription in their original languages, all interviews were coded using a standardized list of codes derived from our original theoretical concerns but adapted to the understanding of the movement context that grew out of our fieldwork and interviews. After this coding, we translated illustrative quotations regarding specific themes into English and we made more general summaries of how the interviewees of our country-specific cases had discussed these themes, which allowed us to compare our data. For this article in particular, we focused codes concerning the interviewees' attitudes towards and experiences of social and political change (including the use of specific repertoires of actions and interaction with institutionalized politics), and discussions that showed what they perceived as important political opportunities for their movement (or lack of such opportunities). Of particular interest, were those moments when the interviewed activists reflected on the motivations and justifications of the actions and strategies of the movement in relation to perceived political opportunities as well as more general ideological concerns. Through our analysis of these codes, we discerned what we see as five major modes for accomplishing social and political change that the activists relate to, a typology that will structure the disposition of our empirical analysis below.

Apart from the semi-structured interviews, we have also used website content from the movement's own media in order to support our findings from the analysis of the interviews. In addition, in order to verify factual matters, we have also sometimes contrasted the information provided by the activists with external sources, including reports from mainstream media and governmental agencies.

6. Empirical analysis

In this section, we examine the radical left-libertarian activists' ideas about how political and social change can best be achieved according to the five main modes of accomplishing these changes that we identified when analyzing our interviews: (1) influencing general elections; (2) influencing politicians and civil servants through lobbying and campaigns; (3) influencing public opinion; (4) co-staging broader protests with political parties; and finally (5), repertoires of actions meant to accomplish "direct change" that are not mediated by institutionalized politics. Of these five modes, 1–4 involve interaction

with institutionalized politics, but also – as we demonstrate – mode 5 is sometimes regarded as part of a strategy to influence institutionalized politics as well. In particular, this section looks at the activists' ideas about and experiences with political actors such as politicians, civil servants and political parties. In what follows, direct quotations from the interviews are presented together with contextualizing descriptions in order to provide a broader picture of the movement's situation in each country.

6.1. Influencing general elections

Anti-authoritarian and direct/participatory democratic ideas have been central to radical left-libertarian activism for a long time. Accordingly, representative democracy – insofar as it delegates political power to a few indirectly elected citizens – has consistently been one of the main targets of critique as well as the actions of this type of activism (Katsiaficas 1997; Curran 2006; Romanos 2013). Our interviews show that the critique of representative democracy, and sometimes actions that seek to block its unquestioned operations, is still a central feature for this type of activism.

The persistence of the critique of representative democracy is very evident in the Polish case. For instance, in 1991 the country's first free election after communism was targeted by an electoral boycott campaign – “Boycott the elections” (*Bojkot Wyborów*) – organized by the newly founded anarchist group MA.⁶ Today, activists within the movement still regard general elections as “serving the elites, both politically and financially”⁷. In general, voting in elections is thought to be at odds with the movement's goals insofar as it legitimizes a political system that the anarchist movement opposes in principle. As the website of the anarcho-syndicalist trade union, Związek Syndykalistów Polskich (ZSP) explains in the article “Why the Anarchists do not Vote”: “The whole truth about voting can be summarized in one sentence: by voting, you give someone else power over yourself. By selecting one or many masters, whether for short or long, you give up your own freedom”⁸.

Nevertheless, one still finds exceptions to this general skepticism towards the electoral system amongst the Polish activists. Local and city council elections are generally regarded as more democratic, as party politics play a lesser role in them. For instance, activists from the Inicjatywa Pracownicza syndicalist trade union and self-declared anarchists took part in the 2014 local elections, an action that caused heated Internet de-

⁶ Polska Kronika Filmowa 90/48 newsreel.

⁷ <http://www.rozbrat.org/dokumenty/parlamentaryzm/2765-bojkotuj-wybory-nie-ufaj-ELITOM>

⁸ <http://wybory.zsp.net.pl/dlaczego-anarchisci-nie-glosuja/>

bates within the movement over the topic. A communiqué about elections on the website of the Anarchist Federation states: “As such, participatory democracy is in opposition to representative democracy, it is a different way of making decisions and shaping the world around us. They are two completely different worlds, worlds that are inimical”⁹.

Some of the Swedish activists we interviewed also mentioned former campaigns against general elections. For instance, two long-term activists that have been involved in the movement since the 1970s discussed a sit-in they staged in 1994:

On Election Day 1994 we dragged a lot of sofas there, loads of second-hand sofas and then we had our “non-voter day”¹⁰ as a public protest on Plattan [i.e., Sergel’s Square in central Stockholm]. That drew a lot of attention. (Emil).

The other activist explains why they did this:

If we cast our vote, it is all the time on the street. That is our alternative [...]. Because if you vote, you somewhere have accepted that this system represents you. [...] My motivation, both for myself and to others, is that the more I engage in extra-parliamentary activity, the more I can tell other people there are alternatives to voting. This is real democracy. We practice it every day, every week, all the time. Out in the streets, in our associations, in our neighborhoods, in our milieus. Where we live and where we work. This is the alternative. (Bosse)

Younger Swedish activists, however, express more pragmatic notions. They still share the critique of representative democracy, and see direct or participatory forms of democracy as superior, but this critique doesn’t necessarily lead to abstention from voting. This is how Helena, a member of SUF, reasons about it:

I do think that people should vote, I absolutely think that. But when people start doing things on their own, and when one doesn’t become passive... that’s the kind of people we need, that dare to say what they think is wrong, and try to do something about it.

Other interviewees justify their voting by saying they want to avoid having the “wrong” parties come into power. For them, the fear of right-wing politics outweighs the

⁹ <http://www.federacja-anarchistyczna.pl/artykuly/dzialania-fa/item/496-o%C5%9Bwiadczenie-w-sprawie-wyborow>

¹⁰ The Swedish expression for a non-voter – *soffliggare* – literally means somebody laying on sofa, i.e. a “couch potato”.

principled critique of representative democracy. Overall, the interviewed Swedish activists tend to discuss voting in general elections in very pragmatic terms (for instance, viewing electoral boycotts as a strategy that would be detrimental to the movement's goals). This general picture also finds support in a survey made in 2004 at three local social forums in Sweden (by one of the authors of this paper), where only 25 per cent of the anarchist and autonomist activists (that were old enough to vote) said they abstained from voting in the last election because of ideological conviction, while 70 per cent reported that they had voted (the remaining 5 per cent didn't vote for other, non-political, reasons).

6.2. Influencing politicians and civil servants

In our interviews we asked the activists if they had ever approached politicians or civil servants during campaigns in order to influence them. Examples of how the activists try to co-operate with local politicians were found in the Polish case. However, the activists stressed that these types of co-operations run far from smooth. Contacts are mostly made regarding single issues and through personal connections rather than officially approaching party organizations. A Polish anarcho-syndicalist trade union activist explains how this is usually done:

We sometimes influence the politicians [...]. We meet directly with councilors, we have a kind of tactical alliance with them [...] They are only part of our broader strategy to produce a specific result. So if we want to have someone speak to the city council, for example, such as about tenants in a particular case, you must have a councilor to cast a vote. He or she then puts pressure on that person, usually with success, and then the councilor casts a vote on the city council.

This attitude towards local politicians is also found in a conversation between an anarchist and a city council member from the conservative party Law and Justice that was published in *Głos Wielkopolski*, a local newspaper in Poznań. Responding to the journalist's question about whether the two antagonists did have some common ground despite their ideological differences, the anarchist activist stated:

An awful lot of things divide us, especially in the cultural and moral realm, and in connection to this, agreement is not possible. As anarchists we will never collaborate with the authorities and politicians, regardless of whether they are red or green. But we do go to the meetings of the city council. Last time, we went to one dedicated to environmental

issues, and on those issues we had converging views. This does not mean however that we are together, or that we will be smiling at the cameras together.¹¹

In the Swedish case, activists also mentioned efforts to change particular local policies through contacts with politicians and officials. This is often done during broader single-issue campaigns that seek to mobilize activists and “ordinary citizens” outside the movement. One telling example is the Stockholm-based network Planka.nu, founded in 2001 by SUF. The network’s main goal is tax-financed, zero-fare public transport (“*planka nu*” literally means “fare-dodge now”). The network’s main strategy is to encourage people to evade paying public transport fares, an action that takes inspiration from Italian autonomist ideas about “self-reduction” and the tactics employed during the 1970s based on the notion that the prices on social services should be morally fair (cf. Wright 2002, 158 ff.).

Despite its name, Planka.nu does not only propagate direct action. It has also created an “insurance” for those evading transport fares, which compensate evaders if they get caught without a ticket. This arrangement has made the network very popular amongst young people in particular. Such actions are combined with lobbying and opinion work. One of the activists in Planka.nu, Thomas, offered this description:

We combine this with working with the media, the broad opinion, and those in power [...] at the same time we still have got our feet on the ground, in a movement, in which it is very easy to be inclusive, and call people to participate in. [...] [If] the identity politics of the nineties was much about “we don’t talk with the establishment”, we instead stick our necks out and say, “yes, we really do” – in order to make us understood, and to communicate beyond the already blessed. [...] We have seen loads of [our] reports having huge impact [...] We have had talks at the Left Party, the Green Party, and things like that around the country, and we’ve been invited to all sorts of conferences.

As can be seen in the above quotation, Thomas distances himself from “the identity politics of the nineties”, underlining the deliberate change in the Swedish movement’s identity and tactics that has been increasingly focused on everyday economic issues such as social welfare, housing and working conditions. Since the mid-2000s, this new direction has gone hand in hand with increasing attempts to influence mainstream politics. Another example of this transformation can be seen with the launching of the website *Dagens Konflikt* (“The Daily Conflict”) in 2008. According to the activist Lage, the website

¹¹ <http://www.gloswielkopolski.pl/artykul/6564372,radny-pis-i-anarchista-ideowo-dzieli-nas-przepasc-ale-potrachimy-razem-dzialac,4,id,t,sa.html> [accessed September 24, 2015]

was a way to connect “everything from left-wing social democrats to extra-parliamentarian small, nutty, networks, and be able to discuss things in a way which makes everybody part of the same discussion.” Lage also remarked that the forum initially “got a lot of attention in particular within the broader parliamentary left”. Other Swedish activists however see such involvement with party politicians as far more complicated, as can be seen in this quotation from Johan, an activists engaged in SAC:

It’s good if they [i.e., the politicians] enforce things, but if things are to be enforced there must be a pressure from below [...] There can be hints [from left-wing politicians] that, “for us to maintain this position, there must be someone else who push the framework of the debate to the left”. In that way, you become a “useful idiot” in this game, but in another way you make sure you really affect the limits of the public debate.

Quotations like this one indicate that the Swedish activists do conceive of themselves as being the primary “radical flank” of the broader left, and furthermore that they are well aware of both the advantages and pitfalls involved in such intra-movement dynamics.

6.3. Influencing public opinion

When it comes to influencing public opinion in order to spread the movement’s ideas, the Polish activists primarily discussed how their ideas gain traction with the broader public through specific social conflicts (for example, housing and the privatization of public services). Involvement in such conflicts is seen as an occasion to “promote the movement’s ideas and make conflicts more ideological”. For instance, the activists talk about anti-privatization protests as an opportunity to reject both specific neoliberal policies and neoliberal capitalism in general. This position is exemplified in the slogan “the city is not a company” (“*miasto to nie firma*”), which was first used by activists in Poznań around 2005 and later picked up in mainstream political discussions 2007–2008. As the activists mention in a report summarizing 2013: “thanks to our publishing of violations of tenants’ rights, a large part of public opinion today perceives tenant issues differently, especially when it comes to forced displacement and ‘cleaning’ of houses. This practice is now massively condemned and rarely justified with the right to freely dispose one’s property”¹². But the Polish activists also provided examples of specific political proposals

¹² www.rozbrat.org/publicystyka/kontrola-spoeczna/4082-raport-dziaania-lokatorskie-w-2013-roku [Accessed October 18, 2014]

that have entered the public debate and later been picked up by politicians or officials. Janusz, a long-time activist, sees “participatory budgets” as such an example:

Today you can find many things that anarchists have been propagating for many years. Look at the recent discussion about participatory budgets. We were talking about such things ten years ago or more. Rafał Górski wrote a book about it [...]. But this is some kind of weird mutation of this concept, you only have 10 million złoty [approximately 0.35 per cent of the city budget] to spend and the projects proposed are some kind of a joke [...]. So on the one hand it is our victory, but on the other that’s not what we wanted to achieve, so I have mixed feelings about it and it convinces me to keep doing my work and not looking at how the authorities are using our ideas.

Originally, the idea of participatory budgets came to the Polish anarchist movement through the emerging global justice movement in the early 2000s, especially after the first World Social Forum in 2001, and it was more extensively discussed in the anarchist author Górski’s book *Bez Państwa* (“Without the state”) that was published in 2006. However, many of the anarchists are ambivalent about the recent introduction of participatory budgeting in numerous Polish cities when they assess the impact of an idea that they themselves brought into the Polish debate. All interviewees were not as skeptical as the one quoted above; in fact, some of them are excited over their ability to influence politics and the public discourse.

The Swedish activists also take credit for having introduced new political issues in the broader public debate. They stress that these issues were once thought to be very controversial, but today they are part of mainstream political debates. As an example, the activist Niklas describes how the movement during the mid-1990s became an important nexus for radical feminist activism: “We were very fast; we were the first ones to catch this.” But the growing importance of feminist issues in the mainstream political debate in the end meant that the movement lost its role as the prime facilitator of radical feminism. Niklas continues: “The feminist movement was a part of the anarchist and autonomist movement as long as nobody else discussed it. But when all political parties became feminist, and the LGBT movement grew enormously, then people went there instead.” This shows the ambiguity of being the primary “radical flank” of the broader left; when the radicals are the only ones making controversial claims, these claims give them opportunities for mobilizing new groups, but when these issues become mainstream and are taken up by established organizations, this “success” also tends to rob the radicals of their mobilizing issue.

6.4. Co-staging broader protests with political parties

The activists of both countries discussed how they co-operate with political parties during preparations of common grass roots-organized protests. Importantly, this type of interaction with political parties differs from the contacts made during lobbying or opinion work. During co-staged protests, the political parties are not primarily regarded as representatives of the system that needs to change, but instead as co-actors in the staging of a common protest. However, the interviews indicate that in practice, political parties and radical left-libertarian activists have disparate interests in these joint projects, including the disproportionate resources they can contribute to these efforts. Such differences often create conflicts and mutual suspicion.

Overall, the Polish activists are skeptical about co-operating with political parties during protests. In particular, they see a risk that the political parties gain further political capital from such co-organized events, while the activists end up doing a disproportionate amount of the grass-roots level work. Paweł, an activist of the Anarchist Federation, recalls a meeting about such a co-operation on “the People’s March” (*Marsz Ludności*). It had been decided that a “no logo” strategy should be employed, meaning that flags or banners of the co-operating groups should not be displayed during the demonstration, and instead only a common “logo” for the event should be used.

And they resisted it all the time and said that they want banners [...]. Well, after discussing it at our meeting, next time we went, and I said, “ok, let’s do it ‘logo’”. They breathed a sigh of relief. But I said, “there is a hundred of us and every one of us takes a flag”. And the reaction was “Oh no!” [...] “But if you arrive in hundreds it’s a problem!” That’s when it turned out that in the end they wanted “no logo”, and it was “no logo”.

The Polish anarchists have enforced the “no logo” rule even within broader coalitions as, for instance, happened during the anti-ACTA protests of early 2012, when party members from the liberal and anti-clerical party Palikot’s Movement, *Ruch Palikota*, (which since 2013 is called Your Move(ment), *Twój Ruch*) were often denied access to microphone during the protests because the anarchists were afraid party members would use this occasion to only promote their own party.

This skepticism towards co-operating with political parties about common protests is shared by the Swedish activists. One of them, Niklas, talks about his experiences (during the 1990s) of co-organizing mobilizations with political parties. He underscores a situation in which the youth organization of the Left Party entered discussions about upcoming mobilizations with very specific demands. In order to facilitate the involvement of

the youth organizations of the Social Democratic party and the center-right Liberal People's Party, the Left Party organizers wanted to avoid involving more radical left-wing groups:

They still had this idea about the "popular front", to get more, open up, invite Liberal Youth and Social Democratic Youth. To involve them, we had to go. They always entered with their first demand: close the meeting for AFA, for the Anarchists, for the Trotskyites [...]. Then we were kicked out, and Liberal Youth and Social Democratic Youth were written on the posters. But they had no people, no mobilization [...] Young Left complained a lot about it, that "if something had to get done, you had to involve the Anarchists, because they had the activists, and then posters came up and people were mobilized". But they aimed higher. To be respected, one had to involve Liberal Youth and Social Democratic Youth. But then not a soul showed up at the demonstrations.

Both the Polish and Swedish examples show how political parties and the radical left-libertarian movement more often get into conflicts during common protests, as opposed to when movement activists try to directly influence the representatives of the same parties. In such situations, the unspoken division of labor between left-wing politicians and the "radical flank" does not seem to work, which also suggests that these actors function according to a different logic when they co-operate about common protests. While parties want to make the protests into broad "respectable" coalitions in order to avoid becoming marginalized within the arena of party politics (ultimately aiming at increasing their share of voters), the radical activists seek to distance themselves from the political mainstream and/or the political establishment in order to mobilize more people for grass roots actions.

6.5. Accomplishing "direct change" that is not mediated by institutionalized politics

Hitherto, we have shown how the radical left-libertarian activists employ a wide range of strategies for achieving social and political change that involve interactions with institutionalized politics. The activists often justify this interaction along "pragmatic" lines, noting that they cannot always freely choose political strategies in accord with their ideological convictions and that in some instances the actions' efficacy need to be prioritized over these convictions.

The types of actions the activists we interviewed value most highly (both from an ideological perspective and regarding their perceived efficacy) are those actions that allow them to accomplish direct – real and immediate – social changes at the grassroots level without political intermediation. Sometimes, these types of actions are given the label

“direct action”, but at other times the activists talk about such actions without reference to this term. The Swedish activist Oskar explains the centrality of these types of actions for the movement:

what we really aim at is self-organizing, and to accomplish direct change. And from which power positions can we do that? What kind of threat can we use? The trade union movement can threaten with strikes. Irrespective if you enter a negotiation, you can always threaten with strikes and stoppage. We have been trying to convert this into [other types of situations], and irrespective if it has been these direct confrontations, or material damage, blocking buildings, or disobedience, everything is about finding situations outside of the working place, where you actually can obtain a power position.

In this quotation, it is obvious that “direct change” is contrasted with activism that uses conventional channels to influence institutionalized politics. At other times, the activists describe a somewhat different relationship that sees these types of actions as important preconditions for institutional social or political changes. Such actions to accomplish “direct change” may later be confirmed through changes in laws or public opinion, but originally they are initiated on the grass roots level. The Swedish SAC activist Johan discusses this:

It is extremely clear when it comes to labor laws. Those laws are most often decided afterwards, when they already have been enforced on the labor market. Of course, changes to the better can come from above, from the parliament, but the other come from the grass-roots movement, that enforces things and draw attention to the problems. [...] It is a sort of extra-parliamentary reformism. You want to achieve small victories that are confirmed through practices or laws.

Actions that aim at “direct change” are thus seen as distinctly different from strategies that address demands to policy-makers (to make them change policies and laws). Nevertheless, such actions are regarded as vehicles for simultaneously accomplishing reforms at the level of institutionalized politics. This thinking can be interpreted as an acknowledgement that when the movement succeeds, there will be laws that confirm and protect the achievements made through grass-roots actions. At the same time, however, the main focus of their activism remains on building a power position “from below” in order to make such changes possible. Even confrontational and violent repertoires of action are related to possible changes in mainstream politics and public opinion. The autonomist activist Rickard reflects upon this:

in a way it is a kind of violent opinion work. In lack of masses, we've got spectacular forms of actions, but it is still a matter of highlighting an issue or creating an opinion. We never think that it's possible to enforce a change on our own.

The Polish activists also stressed "direct action" as a central method for social and political change. Unlike the Swedish case, these discussions are more deliberately connected to the specific ideological tradition of anarchism and the centrality given to "direct action" within that thought. For the Polish activists, such actions are understood as part of a repertoire that allows them to act in accordance with their ideas of participatory or direct democracy, as opposed to being seen as a strategic means for accomplishing changes in institutionalized politics. Nevertheless these acts are rare, as the activists fear that such a repertoire of action will have far too high a "cost" for the movement (in terms of increased repression), given the small size of the movement.

7. Understanding the differences and similarities

The above presentation reveals both differences and similarities in how activists from the Polish and Swedish radical left-libertarian movements conceive of the five major modes for accomplishing social and political change.

One striking similarity between the activists in both countries is that they are all very skeptical about co-operating with political parties during common mobilizations. This skepticism however is not ideologically motivated, but rather expressed by way of reference to concrete experiences. Even when the parties share the activists' political objectives, the activists tend to suspect the parties of opportunism and of mainly using the common mobilization to increase the party's visibility for the broader electorate.

When asked about general elections, both Polish and Swedish activists are critical towards this type of political participation. They often asserted a general critique of representative democracy as not democratic enough and as a system that makes ordinary citizens passive; by contrast, the activists argue for more participatory forms of democracy. But whereas the Polish activists organize boycotts of national elections (and justify such actions as refusal to legitimize the system), the Swedish activists take a more pragmatic stance in these matters (arguing, for example, that voting prevents the "wrong" political parties from winning the general elections). In fact, the Polish anarchists, in direct contrast to their Swedish counterparts, did not see the possibility of the "wrong" party being elected as a problem; one of the interviewees ironically quoted Trotsky, saying that the "worse the situation is in the country, the better it is for the movement and

its cause". The Polish activists do however still take part in *local* municipal elections, in some cases even with their own candidates.

The Polish activists also describe how they sometimes pressure local politicians. Overall, they regarded their interventions in local conflicts as vehicles to spread their political ideas and critique of society. Despite this, the Polish activists have quite pessimistic expectations about whether such diffusion of their ideas actually leads to the changes they want. In the end, they believe that their original ideas, the few times they have been adopted by politicians, only become "watered down" in the process. By contrast, the Swedish activists have a more optimistic outlook about the impact of their campaigns on a broader scale. They give many examples of how they have been amongst the first to mobilize on certain issues, and how issues they have raised have later been picked up in the mainstream political debate. Overall, they see their campaigns as broader vehicles for putting pressure specifically on the parliamentarian left in Sweden, and they view themselves as the "radical flank" of a broader left that works for shifting the political "hegemony" and for introducing new ideas in politics. To accomplish these goals, and to be able to communicate to and mobilize broader groups in society, the Swedish activists say that they strive to use a wide range of repertoires of action, and not only more conflict-oriented repertoires such as direct action. At the same time, they believe it is primarily through their more "spectacular" and confrontational strategies – such as direct actions – that they gain a position from which they can best accomplish political change in arenas other than the streets.

The Swedish activists do not however only see the use of direct actions as a strategic "tool" for achieving changes in public policies and decision-making; they also regard this mode for accomplishing social and political change as one that has intrinsic value. Accomplishing "direct change" is contrasted with institutionalized politics, and regarded as consistent with ideas of participatory or direct democracy. Sometimes, "direct change" is also regarded as part of a broader social change that first have to be accomplished on the grass-roots level, before it can be institutionalized through laws and state regulation.

The Swedish activists' notion of using direct actions *strategically*, as a way to pursue "radical flank" politics and affect the claims of the broader political left, is not shared by the Polish activists. For them, direct action is seen more as a repertoire allowing the activists to act *in accordance* with their ideas of participatory democracy. The lack of discussions about playing the game of the "radical flank" amongst the Polish activists seems to suggest that there are much lower expectations amongst radical left-libertarian activists in Poland to find allies amongst the broader left (which is also quite small), an expectation that the Swedish activists, by contrast, appear to take for granted.

Some of these differences between the radical left-libertarian activists in Poland and Sweden can be regarded as reflecting differences in the political opportunities that each movement faces in their respective country. The general population's high trust in institutionalized politics and long-term experiences of formalized corporatist relations between state and civil society (that even absorb more radical demands into mainstream politics) probably contributes to the – relatively speaking – optimistic exactions of Swedish radical left-libertarian activists to influence the public debate and political decision-making. In contrast, the more pessimistic outlook of the Polish activists reflects a situation where state–civil society relations are more fragmented and more dependent on external resources. As shown above, in this context “transactional activism” dominates as the main way to influence politicians and civil servants. These types of opportunities may also explain why the Polish activists primarily try to influence local politicians.

Another difference between the two countries that appears to affect the radical left-libertarian activists' opportunities is the way in which civil society and public opinion is structured politically. This difference in particular affects the availability of potential allies, both amongst other actors in civil society and within institutionalized politics. Here it also appears that the larger importance of the class cleavage, the labor movement's traditionally central role in corporatist arrangements, and the mainstream political focus on the left–right division in Sweden are factors that combine to make it easier for the Swedish radical left-libertarian activists to find allies that enable greater access to institutionalized politics. In contrast, Polish politics and state–civil society relations are much less structured along the class cleavage, and it is more problematic to identify with the “left” given the association of the term with the former state-socialist dictatorship. To complicate matters further, the fact that the Polish anarchist movement emerged as an anti-communist dissident movement and yet simultaneously makes anti-capitalist demands, probably contributes to the difficulty of finding suitable allies.

8. Conclusions

In this article, we have examined the main modes of accomplishing social and political change that radical left-libertarian activists in Poland and Sweden are involved in, and how they make sense of these actions in both ideological and strategic terms. Previous research has often claimed that this type of activism exclusively strives for political and social change outside of the realm of institutionalized politics, and tends to base this claim on the premise of the activists' anti-statist ideology. Our analysis instead demonstrates that radical left-libertarian activists also use repertoires of actions that involve

interacting with the state and, in some cases, participating in institutionalized politics (e.g. contacts with politicians and civil servants, campaigns aiming at policy changes, voting, and co-operation with political parties). These types of interaction with institutionalized politics are most often motivated by pragmatic concerns such as the perceived efficacy of various strategies. While it is true that on the ideological level the activists still raise a general critique of representative democracy and argue for more participatory forms of democracy, such a critique and ideological conviction does not – in most cases – correlate with abstaining entirely from more “conventional” forms of political participation.

That said, our analysis still shows that the types of actions that the radical left-libertarian activists value most highly – both in ideological terms and with respect to their perceived efficacy – are those that allow them to accomplish a real and immediate change of society at the grassroots level, without having to first convince politicians to change the relevant policies. Such types of actions are sometimes labeled “direct action” and connected to a specific ideological heritage, but other times the activists discuss such actions without this ideological reference. “Direct action” has long been central for the participatory/direct democratic ideas of radical-left libertarian thought (Romanos 2013; Moore and Shepard 2013), as well as the idea that the actions used to accomplish a political goal should prefigure or be in accord with that goal (Leach 2013). David Graeber (2009, 11) even claims that for contemporary radical-left libertarian activists, direct democratic practices has become an ideology. Trying to achieve social change through direct action is probably valued higher – than accomplishing it through lobbying or influencing politicians – because it has transformative power on those who take part in the process.

But, as we have seen, reference to ideology is not the only way in which the activists discuss actions aiming at “direct change”. The Swedish activists also see direct actions and other confrontational strategies as a more instrumental vehicle for achieving a political position and power “from below” in order to accomplish changes in institutionalized politics. By playing the game of the “radical flank”, they believe that they can contribute to a leftward shift of the general political discourse, in order to push the “moderate” parts of the broader political left (political parties, trade unions, etc.) toward more radical demands. The Swedish activists also sometimes see “direct change” as a type of social change that is accomplished first through grass-roots level activism, and only after the fact becomes institutionalized through state action (policy, law, etc.). Our analysis thus shows that the motives for accomplishing “direct change” are complex and ambiguous, and by no means reducible to maintaining ideological purity by abstaining entirely from interaction with institutionalized politics. At the same time, as our analysis shows,

the degree of this interaction as well as activists' ideas about it varies between the two countries. In the Polish case, activists mainly talk about "direct action" as a repertoire of action deeply connected to their ideological heritage.

Our examination has pointed to differences between the radical left-libertarian activists in Poland and Sweden in other senses as well. Overall, the Swedish activists perceive more political opportunities than the Polish activists do, and the Swedish activists do in general have a more optimistic outlook about making an impact on political decision-making and the opinion of the broader public. The Polish activists, by contrast, mainly interact with institutionalized politics on the local level. A variation that most likely reflects historical differences in the way each country structures the relations between state and civil society, especially regarding the general openness/closure towards grassroots initiatives and popular protests. In addition, the degree to which civil society and national politics are structured according to the class cleavage and the left–right division, was shown to affect the radical left-libertarian activists' perception of available potential allies, and thereby their overall chances of influencing institutionalized politics.

Contrary to popular beliefs and many activists' own self-declarations, our analysis shows that radical left-libertarian groups do try to achieve political change by interacting with institutionalized politics. Notwithstanding this fact, radical left-libertarian activists do in most cases prefer "direct action", as it allows them to accomplish real and immediate changes at the grassroots level. The tensions rising from such a mix of repertoires of actions thus oscillates between pragmatic attempts to achieve real political change and the desire to maintain the ideological consistency necessary to their own identity.

References

- Antonów R. (2007), *Pod Czarnym Sztandarem: Anarchiści w Polsce po 1980 Roku*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego.
- Brottsförebyggande rådet and Säkerhetspolisen (2009), *Våldsamt Politisk Extremism: Antidemokratiska Grupperingar på Yttersta Höger- och Vänsterkanten*. Stockholm: Fritzes.
- Brink Pinto, A. and J. Pries (2013), *30 November: Kampen om Lund 1985–2008*, Lund: Pluribus.
- Císař O. (2013), "Postcommunism and Social Movements", in D. Snow, D. della Porta, B. Klandermans, and D. McAdam (eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

- Curran G. (2006), *21st Century Dissent: Anarchism, Anti-Globalization and Environmentalism*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- della Porta D. (2002), "Comparative Politics and Social Movements", in S. Staggenborg, and B. Klandermans (eds.), *Methods of Social Movement Research*, Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 286–313.
- della Porta D. and M. Diani (1999), *Social Movements: An Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- della Porta D. and D. Rucht (1995), "Left-Libertarian Movements in Context: A Comparison of Italy and West Germany, 1965–1990", in J. C. Jenkins, and B. Klandermans (eds.), *The Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Perspectives on States and Social Movements*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 229–272.
- Ekman Jørgensen T. (2008), "Scandinavia", in M. Klimke, and J. Scharloth (eds.), *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956–1977*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 239–252.
- Graeber D. (2009), *Direct Action: An Ethnography*, Oakland CA: AK Press.
- Haines H. (2013), "Radical Flank Effects", in D. Snow, D. della Porta, B. Klandermans, and D. McAdam (eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Howard M. (2003), *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Jacobsson K. and S. Saxonberg (2013), *Beyond NGO-ization: The Development of Social Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, Farnham: Ashgate.
- Jacobsson K. and A. Sörbom (2015), "After a Cycle of Contention: Post-Gothenburg Strategies of Left-Libertarian Activists in Sweden", *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest*, published online 13 April 2015, doi: 10.1080/14742837.2015.1027763
- Jamison A., R. Eyerman, and J. Cramer (1990), *The Making of the New Environmental Consciousness: A Comparative Study of the Environmental Movements in Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Jämte J. (2013), *Antirasismens Många Ansikten*, Umeå: Umeå universitet.
- Katsiaficas G. (1997), *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life*, Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press.
- Kitschelt H. (1986), "Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-Nuclear Movements in Four Democracies", *British Journal of Political Science* 16(19): 57–85, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S000712340000380X>

- Kopecký P. (2003), "Civil Society, Uncivil Society and Contentious Politics in Post-Communist Europe", in P. Kopecký, and C. Mudde (eds.), *Uncivil Society?: Contentious Politics in Post-Communist Europe*, London: Routledge, pp. 1–18.
- Kuhn G. (2009), "Anarchism, Sweden", in I. Ness (ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Leach D. (2013), "Prefigurative Politics", in D. Snow, D. della Porta, B. Klandermans, and D. McAdam (eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Marek P. L. (2006), *Na Krawędzi Życia: Wspomnienia Anarchisty 1943–44*. Kraków: Dąb.
- McAdam D. (1996), "Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Directions", in D. McAdam, J. McCarthy, and M. Zald (eds.), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures and Cultural Framings*, Cambridge: Cambridge university press, pp. 23–40.
- Moore, K., and B. Shepard (2013), "Direct Action", in D. Snow, D. della Porta, B. Klandermans, and D. McAdam (eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Mrozowicki A., K. Pędziwiatr, and P. Antoniewicz (2009), *Alter-Globalism a la Polonoise: A Story of an Activist*, Project Europe Rebelle, Paris: L'Université Paris-Est Marne-la-Vallée, Institut Hannah Arendt.
- Newman S. (2011), "Post-Anarchism and Radical Politics Today", in D. Rousselle, and S. Evren (eds.), *Post-Anarchism: A Reader*, London: Pluto, pp. 46–68.
- Peterson A. (2001), *Contemporary Political Protest: Essays on Political Militancy*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Petrova, T. and S. Tarrow (2007), *Transactional and Participatory Activism in the Emerging European Polity: The Puzzle of East-Central Europe*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University.
- Polanska D. V. and G. Piotrowski (2015), "The Transformative Power of Cooperation Between Social Movements: Squatting and Tenants' Movements in Poland", *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action* 19(2–3): 274–296, doi: 10.1080/13604813.2015.1015267
- Romanska M. (2009), "Anarchism, Poland", in I. Ness (ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Romanos E. (2013), "Anarchism", in D. Snow, D. della Porta, B. Klandermans, and D. McAdam (eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Sjöö I. (2011), *Fackliga Fribrytare: Episoder från Hundra År av Svensk Syndikalism*, Stockholm: Federativ.

- Jesse E. and T. Thieme (eds.) (2011), *Extremismus in den EU-Staaten*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.
- Trägårdh L. (2007), "The 'Civil Society' Debate in Sweden: The Welfare State Challenged", in L. Trägårdh (ed.), *State and Civil Society in Northern Europe: The Swedish Model Reconsidered*, New York: Berghahn Books, pp. 9–36.
- Urbański J. (2009), "Anarchizm – Kryzys i Transformacja", *Przegląd Anarchistyczny*, no. 9/2009: 78–111.
- Wennerhag M. (2008), *Global Rörelse: Den Globala Rättviserörelsen och Modernitetens Omvandlingar*, Stockholm: Atlas.
- Williams D., and M. Lee (2012), "Aiming to Overthrow the State (Without Using the State): Political Opportunities for Anarchist Movements", *Comparative Sociology* 11(4): 558–593, doi: 10.1163/15691330-12341236
- Wright S. (2002), *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism*, London: Pluto.
- Załęski P. (2006), "Global Non-governmental Administrative System: Geosociology of the Third Sector", in D. Gawin, and P. Glinski (eds.), *Civil Society in the Making*, Warszawa: IFiS Publishers.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers of the journal, as well as Donatella della Porta, Christian Fröhlich, Kerstin Jacobsson, Jan Jämte, Mari Kuukkanen, and Adrienne Sörbom, for very insightful comments and criticisms at various stages in the writing of this article. The authors would also like to thank Michelle Koerner for an excellent proofreading of the article. Finally, we wish to thank Adrienne Sörbom who, together with Wennerhag, conducted the interviews with the Swedish activists.

Funding

This work was supported by The Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies (grant number 1561/42/2911) and the Swedish Research Council (grant number 421-2007-8782).

AUTHORS' INFORMATION:

Grzegorz Piotrowski is a project researcher at the School of Social Sciences, Södertörn University, Sweden, where he is involved in the research project "Anarchists in Eastern and Western Europe – a Comparative Study", led by Magnus Wennerhag. Grzegorz has

defended his PhD in social and political sciences at the European University Institute in 2011 with a dissertation about the alterglobalist movement in post-socialist context in Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. His research interests revolve around the issues of anarchism, alterglobalism, social movements, post-socialism and urban movements.

Magnus Wennerhag is Senior lecturer in Sociology at the School of Social Sciences, Södertörn University, Sweden, where he have led the research project “Anarchists in Eastern and Western Europe – a Comparative Study”, funded by The Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies (2012–2014). Magnus’ research interests include social movements, political participation, protests, social theory and theories of modernity.