13. Social movement organizations' agency for sustainable organizing

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INTRODUCTION

Public outcry over environmental issues has taken on stellar proportions in the past few years. We currently witness an intense struggle over meaning around climate change between economic, political and civil society actors and it is not clear which narrative will win (Augenstein & Palzkill, 2016). Conceptualizations range from populist views of climate denialism (Brulle, 2014) to neoliberal views of technological progress and faith in the efficiency of capital markets (Ekins, 2000), and from idealist views of mobilization and the potential for positive disruptive change of the climate movement (Buttel, 2003; Della Porta & Parks, 2013) to critical realist apocalyptic views (Bendell, 2018, 2020) which call for deep adaptation to the probable (if not inevitable) breakdown of industrial consumer societies. All these narratives are advanced by a variety of social movement organizations (SMOs). Social movements, in brief, "are one of the principal social forms through which collectivities give voice to their grievances and concerns about the rights, welfare, and well-being of themselves and others by engaging in various types of collective action" (Snow, Soule & Kriesi, 2004: 3).

In this chapter we focus on such civil society actors and their agency for sustainable organizing because their influence has been significantly amplified over recent years, and these organizations increasingly attract scholarly interest across academic disciplines. Indeed, next to the growing attention in management and organization studies (den Hond & de Bakker, 2007; Soule & King, 2015; Yaziji & Doh, 2013), environmental sociologists have suggested that social movements and activism may be "the most fundamental pillars" of environmental reform (Buttel, 2003: 306). The links between social movements and climate concerns, for instance, are regularly studied (Caniglia, Brulle & Szasz, 2015; McAdam, 2017), attributing an important role to SMOs in shaping and influencing debates around climate change. Our focus on SMOs spans a variety of initiatives of collective action to advance environmental concerns, even though in practice many movements nowadays focus specifically on the grand challenge around climate change. Examples include Fridays for Future, 350.org, transition towns, buen vivir and Extinction Rebellion. In this chapter, we provide a subjective review of the organizational literature on sustainability SMOs, building on a set of articles about sustainability social movements over the past decade. To contextualize this overview, we first offer a brief overview of the SMO field more generally, which has developed in organizational analysis since the late 1990s.

For a long time, social scientists have studied social movement organizing, the factors enabling collective action, and their potential to effectuate societal change. We know much about how political opportunities, framing, and the mobilization of resources characterize and enable social movement agency and success (Della Porta & Diani, 1999). We may generally distin-

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guish between a stream of research that focuses on the internal organizing dynamics of SMOs, on one hand, and a stream that focuses on SMOs' impact on external organizations, on the other (de Bakker, den Hond & Laamanen, 2017). Traditionally, and mainly grounded in sociology, the focus of the former was on how social movements and SMOs recruit members and mobilize resources effectively. More recently, trends of partial organizing and online activism have led a wider variety of scholars to focus on less complete forms of social movement organizing (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011; de Bakker et al., 2017; den Hond, de Bakker & Smith, 2015). Scholars also increasingly study the collaborative or contentious relation between SMOs and other organizations as SMOs target more and more economic authorities such as (business) organizations, industries and markets (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; McDonnell, King & Soule, 2015). Moreover, due both to engaged scholarship (Van de Ven, 2007), academic activism (Chowdhury & Willmott, 2019; Contu, 2020) and academically informed activism (Bendell, 2018; Hallam, 2019) the boundaries, meaning and practices of academia are also blurring and being contested, while some people within business organizations even identify themselves as "internal activists" (Wickert & de Bakker, 2018). What does all this tell us about SMO agency for sustainable organizing and research in these directions?

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a concise theoretical contextualization and understanding of the recent surge in sustainability-related social movements and its potential to create disruptive change for sustainable organizing, that is, organizing to achieve (selected) sustainability goals. Hence, we structure this chapter on social movement sustainability agency around social movement *strategies* of internal and external organizing and seek to distill key factors contributing to movement *success* in terms of advancing change to achieve sustainability goals (what works at different levels). Figure 13.1 summarizes a few key concepts and insights from this review on sustainability SMOs' strategies and outcomes. We present the case of Extinction Rebellion in Austria as an *empirical example* of a recent sustainability-related SMO. We conclude with a reflection on future research on new forms of organizing and tactics of SMOs, their potential to transform sustainability narratives, and the agency of academics in working towards sustainable organizing.

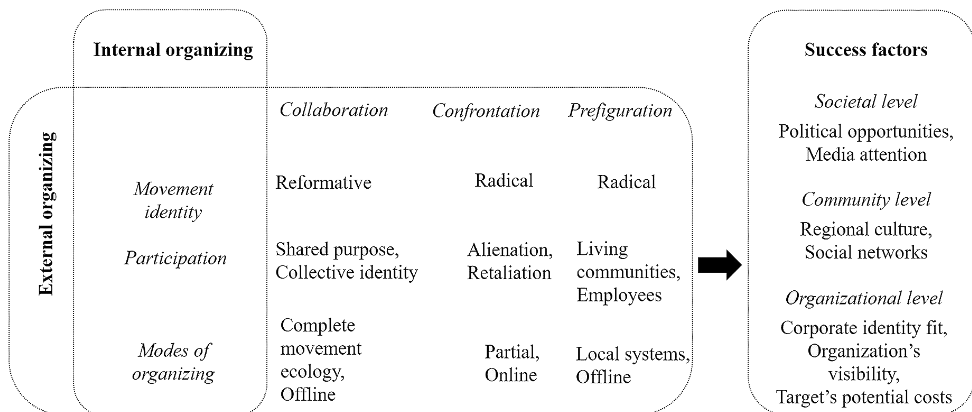

Figure 13.1 Sustainability SMOs' strategies and outcomes

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STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

External Organizing: Collaboration, Confrontation, or Prefiguration

Scholars have accumulated a wealth of evidence on how social movement initiatives may successfully facilitate societal change such as sustainable energy transitions, and influence individuals, organizations and institutions on causes they support. In examining SMOs' efforts to influence other organizations, we may generally distinguish between radical and reformative movement organizations (Della Porta & Diani, 1999). Reformative social movements, often formally organized, try to reform the current situation. They are more likely to collaborate with firms, forming alliances or multi-stakeholder initiatives in order to (gradually) change current practices and institutional frameworks (den Hond & de Bakker, 2007). Radical social movements, aiming for more fundamental changes in practices and institutional frameworks, are either likely to engage in confrontation with business organizations, such as through demonstrations, lawsuits or boycotts (den Hond & de Bakker, 2007; Yaziji & Doh, 2013), or to avoid interaction with existing businesses and work towards an alternative institutional framework – often organizing with minimal organizational features (den Hond et al., 2015). This may include stimulating new economic models that bypass the contested firms or industries (den Hond & de Bakker, 2007). Similarly, the environmental movement has been characterized as having a "dark green" camp of those who are more radical and confront industries, and a "light green" camp of those who tend to collaborate with business (Hoffman, 2009). Beyond such cooperation and confrontation, Auld (2020: 32) proposes "prefiguration" as an alternative orientation, "where activists seek to live out their societal prescriptions or proscriptions in their own practices". Attention for prefiguration seems to be growing (de Bakker et al., 2017; Skoglund & Böhm, 2020) and might be related to radical movements' strategy to develop a completely different society or economic system. In this chapter we won't discuss all potential strategies SMOs could apply – rather we will highlight several strategies that highlight SMO agency through different degrees of organizing to engage in collective action.

First, collaborative SMOs will often work *with* firms to achieve their objectives. Having the objective to reform the current situation, they aim to use their agency to gradually change firms' behavior. They may for instance adopt market-mediation strategies (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013) through which they target focal firms and seek to convince them of new market opportunities due to changing consumer demands. Also, they may engage in collaborative cross-sector partnerships and mobilize leadership by "bringing diverse stakeholders together to encourage collective action toward global issues of sustainability" (McDermott, Kurucz & Colbert, 2019: 236). Finally, they may also create standards organizations that may collaborate or compete with industry-driven standards (Reinecke, Manning & von Hagen, 2012), or publicly support organizations whose practices they would like to see accepted more broadly. All these strategies are based on collaboration and collective action rests on a belief in the ability of firms to make the changes that the SMOs envisage.

Confrontational social movement strategies, in turn, show less confidence in firms' ability or desire to change. Collective action thereby does not include their targets but focuses on mobilizing movement followers. SMOs deploying such strategies think more than persuasion and stimulation is needed and therefore turn to more coercive means, exerting pressure on their targets (den Hond & de Bakker, 2007). They try to push business organizations to change their practices, for instance through demonstrations, lawsuits or boycotts (McDonnell et al.,

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2015), as a collaborative approach is not considered effective. Confrontational SMOs may at times be seen as extremist, so they may alienate potential followers and trigger retaliation and repression from economic and political actors. More often than not, firms affect politicians' and the public's perception of a SMO by employing the practice of 'astroturfing', i.e. using a public relations firm or financing a non-profit front group (i.e. fake grassroots movements) "to serve as its voice while the company remains anonymous" (Scott, 2019: 432; see also Chiroleu-Assouline & Lyon, 2020). For example, sowing doubt about the soundness of climate science through financing think tanks and front groups has been found to be a widespread practice in the USA (Mann, 2013; Oreskes & Conway, 2010). The potential negative perception and even stigmatization of environmental activists may restrain citizens from wanting to join and being associated with a certain movement (Stenhouse & Heinrich, 2019). Others observed that governments themselves may use strongly repressive mechanisms against environmental activism, which they may even label as "eco-terrorism" to protect entrenched political and economic interests (Mireanu, 2014).

Finally, neither collaborative nor confrontational, SMOs may also strategically engage in mobilization of collective action at the community level. Within such "prefigurational movements" activists do not focus their attention on external targets which they seek to transform, but rather aspire to enact systems change at a small scale (Auld, 2020). For example, the prefigurative "ecovillage movement" is based on small local communities who aspire to "live their version of sustainability" (Ergas, 2010: 32). People adopt alternative economic practices and lifestyles, "as a means to put in practice a more socially and ecologically just society" (Pelenc et al., 2019: 374). These include the cooperative movement, "transition towns, degrowth, the commons movement, buen vivir and rights of nature" (Pelenc et al., 2019: 373). Skoglund and Böhm (2020) recently proposed how the everyday green actions of employees within a firm could fuel employee movements and contribute to environmental activism at work. "Living the example" then is where SMOs' agency plays out.

All in all, SMOs may use different strategies over time in order to gain legitimacy and influence and, at the broader movement level, different SMOs are likely to specialize in particular strategies and tactics. Whereas a traditional distinction is often made between collaborative and confrontational strategies, each building on a different type of agency, a third category could involve a deliberate move towards a "do-it-yourself (DIY) approach" – not aiming to influence, nudge or push business organizations in a particular direction but to live the example and offer a "proof of concept" to the wider society.

Internal Organizing: Movement Identity, Participation and Modes of Organizing

To form, and maintain a SMO, both participation and internal organization are required (Klandermans, 1984; Taylor, 2013). Important elements in explaining individuals' participation in SMOs include identity, networks and emotions (Taylor, 2013). First, identification with a group makes participation in that group more likely (Klandermans, 1984). In order to recruit members, movements communicate a shared purpose and goal and develop a collective identity (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Scholars found that creating a common vision of the future is essential for establishing a social movement identity as it aligns its members (Jonason, 2019). Others suggest that envisioning a potential enemy may also sharpen movement identity (Whittier, 1997). Second, research on micro-mobilization has depicted social movement participation as a multi-stage process in which social ties play a major role in motivating people

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to join a movement (Ward, 2016). This is in line with earlier work on how network ties in different contexts may enhance the chances of participation (Diani, 2015). Finally, emotions are powerful drivers of human behavior, including engagement in protest movements. Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta (2004) suggest that different categories of emotions are important in understanding movement processes: reflex emotions, affective bonds, moods, and moral emotions. Delmestri and Goodrick (2016), drawing from Cohen (2001) and Norgaard (2011) and focusing on the meat industry, also address the role of the denial of negative emotions in maintaining social orders: both on the side of incumbents and of opponents. SMOs can actively use such emotions to mobilize support and to influence identities (Barberá-Tomás et al., 2019): "Activists strategize about what kinds of emotions to display, as well as what kinds of emotions to try to stimulate in movement participants, targets, and opponents" (Goodwin et al., 2004: 423).

From another angle, Klandermans (2004) suggests looking at the dynamics of movement participation as an interplay between interests, identity and ideology on both the demand side and the supply side of participation. Demand then refers to individuals' internal psychological state driving them to participate (or not), whereas supply involves movement organizations' efforts to pull people into action (Klandermans, 2004). Interests have traditionally been seen as an important driver for participation, as noted in resource mobilization and political process theories of social movements (Della Porta & Diani, 1999). Identity is more linked to sociological and social psychological theories on both collective identity and social identity. Ideology, "a search for meaning and an expression of one's views" (Klandermans, 2004: 361), relates to approaches in social movement studies that highlight themes such as culture, meaning, narratives or emotions. These elements together are "possible motives that contribute to the individual's motivation to participate" (Klandermans, 2004: 374) and they can compensate one another, forming a mixture of motives that SMOs can try to evoke in their activities to increase participation.

All in all, there is a fairly good insight into what motivates people to join a movement and to be activated. Yet, the modes of organizing social movements have changed over time, especially with the rise of social media and related technologies (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). A recent study on the anti-plastic movement, for instance, analyzed how movement organizers used both visuals and words to elicit negative emotions through moral shock, and then transforming those emotions into energy for enactment by movement supporters (Barberá-Tomás et al., 2019). Not only did this process connect the supporters to the cause at hand, it also strengthened a collective identity and reinforced the role of the movement organizers as legitimate actors in the wider plastic pollution debate. The different elements of organizing thus go together. Nevertheless, in social movement studies concerns are also voiced about the role of SMOs in Internet activism. Earl (2015: 35), for instance, argued that "several critical functions for social movement organizations in offline social movements are not as applicable online, rendering SMOs less necessary for online participation and/or organizing". Yet, she contends, even though these organizations might be less needed for online protest, this does not imply their extinction. Other, non-instrumental motives may drive the formation and maintenance of SMOs; they can help in offering the offline component of activism and contribute to "healthy movement ecologies" (Earl, 2015: 35).

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Illustration of External and Internal Organizing at Extinction Rebellion

The case of Extinction Rebellion (XR)[1] is exemplary of the dynamics summarized above and also offers some additional cues on social movement organizing. XR is a SMO founded in 2018 in the UK by a group of academics, scientists and activists to confront mass species extinction due to the climate breakdown and other attacks on our natural and social environment: "Life, society and democracy are under threat" (Shiva, 2019: 16). XR is a global radical non-violent movement for which "the climate crisis – and the associated crises of capitalism and colonialism that caused it – will not be solved by gradual reform and rotten compromise. This is a crisis that requires radical system change on a scale never seen before" (Knights, 2019: 24). Its external organizing tactics are confrontational and as such in Europe XR is positioned in terms of ideology and numbers between the vast youth climate movement Fridays for Future (F4F), formed around Greta Thunberg, and the much smaller Deep Adaptation movement (Bendell, 2018[2]) – although the boundaries among the three are porous. F4F, supported by the academic movement Scientists for Future (S4F) (Hagedorn et al., 2019), advocates immediate science-based action to meet the targets agreed upon at COP 21 (the United Nations Climate Change Conference) in Paris in 2015 on the basis of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports (e.g. reaching net zero CO_2-equivalent emissions by 2050 in order to stay below a temperature increase of plus 1.5°). XR criticizes the IPCC's position as insufficient, due to its closeness to governments, which has historically led to optimistic predictions that were (later) disconfirmed by reality. Instead, in line with certain scientific positions such as Lamontagne and colleagues (2019), XR demands a much faster convergence to carbon neutrality for rich countries by the year 2025 and the strengthening of the democratic process through citizens' assemblies. According to XR, the higher reductions speed should account for rich countries' historical (and often colonial) responsibility. The Deep Adaptation movement, whose leader, Jem Bendell, is also active within XR, is skeptical of the possibility of our entrenched economic and political system radically reforming itself at a sufficient pace and therefore advocates for preparing ourselves socially, materially and spiritually to soften the inevitable societal collapse expected in about ten years (Bendell, 2018, 2020). In short, while F4F supported by S4F uses more collaborative tactics by educating and working with governments and organizations and Deep Adaptation is more prefigurative by transforming local communities to align with climate adaptation, XR uses mostly confrontational tactics relying on media attention through civil disobedience techniques but also espouses some prefigurative elements.

As an engaged scholar (Van de Ven, 2007), one of us was able to participate in the Rebellion Week staged in Vienna (as well as in many other capital cities) in October 2019, where the combination of confrontation and prefiguration was evident. The week consisted of authorized and unauthorized actions. Coherent with Vienna as a music town, music was central in all actions. The occupation of a central traffic intersection in the center next to the Art Museums and the Human Rights Square through a large disk representing a blooding Earth realized by local artists and artisans to which activists glued themselves attracted a lot of media attention because also non-prototypical activists were present, such as a university professor, an older man in a wheelchair and kids. Here positive emotions prevailed thanks to the music and the atmosphere of a street festival: even some policemen and policewomen were observed moving to the rhythm of the music. The five-hour occupation, until the police peacefully arrested the "arrestables" among the activists, was also aimed at prefiguring a city without cars open for

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families and children. Another action was a "die-in" in the hall of extinct species in the Natural History Museum that was authorized by its director, a scientist concerned with biodiversity loss. Similar to a "sit-in", participants at a "die-in" simulate their death and occupy a space by lying down on the floor. The action represented human beings in a future after their extinction. In the funeral march for biodiversity loss, where a coffin was carried through the city center accompanied by funereal percussion, emotions of grief prevailed. Many participants reported this as the most intense moment of the week. Importantly, before and after all actions debriefings were organized. In a parallel camp meditation and other workshops were offered. The practice of individuals checking in and out at preparatory meetings, as well as the whole "regeneration" period devoted to building close connections among the activists represent prefigurative elements typical of this radical movement.

The case of internal organizing at XR is also interesting for at least two reasons. First, XR was able to spread to several countries and organize disruptive actions on all continents within a few months, a fact that requires explanation for a movement demanding radical social, economic and political changes and that calls itself a "rebellion". Second, the movement's organizing is peculiar as it paradoxically combines elements such as visual "branding" and a global organization with radically anarchic structures.

To the first, XR seems to be able to overcome the identity-dilemma of being either a radical/adversarial SMO with few adherents at the margins of society or a mainstream collaborative one with large societal support (Comi, Lurati & Zamparini, 2014). XR in fact is a radical adversarial movement that draws members from the middle of society, professional and cultural elites included. XR has succeeded in detaching itself from the common category of leftist radical movements, assuming a purportedly apolitical stance – despite its attention to the rights and survival of indigenous people and the poor in countries already affected by climate breakdown, a typical leftist position. This neither/nor strategy of political positioning has deflected part of the stigma impinging on radical movements and attracted persons "on the barricades", having their first experience as activists. This detachment is supported by the use of visual art and high-brow music during actions, also a feature not usually present in adversarial protests. Moreover, by clearly positioning themselves as science-based, and having scientists and academics in their founding group, XR emulates a high-status realm of society, profiting from this association. Finally, combining a no-blame approach to individuals like politicians or managers (XR only blames "the toxic system") with an artful combination of negative and positive emotions at actions (e.g. grief for the dying planet and mutual connection within the movement thanks to the strong role assumed by community "regeneration" practices, as well as through the artistic expressions themselves), the movement is able to maintain a relatively stable activist basis.

To the second, the movement organizing also assumes a similar paradoxical combination of opposing elements. XR, citing Jo Freeman's 1971 essay *The Tyranny of Structurelessness*, recognizes that "There's no such thing as a structureless group."[3] Consistently, XR defines itself as a self-organizing system, supported by a decentralized network of "rebels" (called SOS) that formalizes structures, roles and mandates to keep XR in line with its founding ten principles and values, and especially maintain its identity as a "non-violent network" (principle no. 9: because violence is counterproductive), welcoming "everyone" (principle no. 6: no formal membership), "based on autonomy and decentralisation" (principle no. 10: decentralized "cells" can form without central permission provided they accept the ten values) that "actively mitigates for power" (principle no. 7: through affirmative action and rotating

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roles): “SOS is the core of how XR remains a decentralised network that trusts rebels at the most immediate levels to make decisions about issues, and trusts the wisdom of the group in the creation and operation of the general organisational structure” (message in internal online tool, 15 April 2020). This involves an emergent, liquid and constantly changing assortment of roles and responsibilities (de Bakker et al., 2017). Interestingly, not only local “cells” emerge and perform actions, but also the general organizational structure emerges in the same way: creating and naming a channel in an online chat or discussion tool, attracting contributors and keeping it live can indicate the formation of an organizational unit. And all this happens in parallel on various online platforms (WhatsApp, Mattermost, Signal, …), building on what Bennett and Segerberg (2013) called the logic of connective action. This way of organizing is highly inefficient, but still allows the involvement of a high number of activists who all are free to take the lead in starting their own creative actions. Observing such an inconsistency between internal efficiency and potential external success takes us to the next theme.

SOCIAL MOVEMENT SUCCESS?

In discussing social movement agency for sustainable organizing, we should not only look at the strategies deployed to structure SMOs and involve people, but also consider the question of social movement success (Giugni, 1998; Van Dyke & Taylor, 2019). This question is challenging as it is often hard to attribute outcomes to particular movement activities. In social movement studies, research on outcomes has focused on various domains, including political, economic, cultural and individual or biographic outcomes, with a lot of attention given to policy outcomes (Van Dyke & Taylor, 2019). After all, many social movements’ efforts have been targeted at (governmental) policy makers. Yet, as we focus here on social movements’ efforts to further sustainability and to facilitate agency, we present some examples of what could entail social movement success at different levels of organization: the organizational level, the community level and the society level. We also reflect on what success could mean for XR.

Organizational Level: Corporate Identity Fit, Organizations’ Visibility and Potential Costs

The organizational level entails individual social movements and their particular organizations, as well as the level of individual target organizations such as firms. Factors that influence SMOs’ success at the organizational level include the fit between the movement’s identity and corporate identity, the organization’s visibility, and the potential costs associated with not responding to movement organizations’ demands. Georgallis and Lee (2020), for instance, recently find that social movements are more successful at promoting a firm’s moral market entry when there is a fit between the type and the orientation of the social movement and a firm’s organizational identity. King (2008) suggests that corporations are more inclined to cede to social movement boycotts when they attract widespread media attention and when firms’ reputation has previously suffered. Similarly, Lee and Lounsbury (2011: 156) find that firms which are “more dependent on reputation for critical resources such as larger firms as well as firms in industries that are closer to end-user consumers are more likely to concede to the demands”. Moreover, they note that social movements are more successful if the firms face a potentially high disruption cost. McCreery’s (2010) study corroborates the importance of

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visibility of corporations for social movements to be effective, suggesting that environmental movements should target high polluting firms that are on the political agenda in order to be most effective. In short, working towards more sustainable organizing may thus be fueled among others by the identity fit between the movement and the business organization, that organization's visibility and the potential high costs that the business organization may otherwise incur.

Community Level: Regional Culture and Social Networks

According to Freeman and Audia (2006: 145), "community can be conceptualized as sets of relations between organizational forms or as places where organizations are located in resource space or in geography". Social movement success at this level thus involves influencing more than one target organization, considering an aggregate level of organizations sharing a common link, such as industry or geography. Several studies focus on social movement success at this level.

Recent work, for instance, has found that regional culture and the dominance of a market or community logic may affect the success of environmental SMOs in furthering the voluntary adoption of sustainability standards (York, Vedula & Lenox, 2018). Local sustainability initiatives seem particularly successful at overcoming apparent differences in actors' motivation and worldviews (Pesch, Spekkink & Quist, 2019) and may successfully mobilize leadership to develop a "biosphere consciousness" (McDermott et al., 2019). The importance of local social networks has also been highlighted in starting and running local environmental groups (Diani, 2015), while Carberry and colleagues (2019) reveal how social movements were more effective at fueling the adoption of green information systems when they sought to transform the organizational field, rather than targeting corporate managers directly. So to be successful at the community level, SMOs could build on strong social networks and seek to align themselves with the regional or field-level culture.

Societal Level: Political Opportunities and Media Attention

The societal level considers an even larger level of aggregation, considering an entire society. Social movement success here may seek to bring about changes in policies or in social norms. For example, McCreery (2010: 255) finds that "the environmental social movement is only effective given specific political opportunities, namely, Democratic Party control of the federal government, media attention to environmental issues, and effective policy". Media attention is regularly found to be a key success factor for social movements to effectuate policy change (Priest, 2016). Thus sustainability SMOs may try to leverage political opportunities and aim at generating wide media attention to further their agenda at a societal level.

Success of Extinction Rebellion?

The difficulty of defining success is clear when looking at radical movements such as XR. The radicality of their demands makes it difficult to identify any success towards achieving these demands. If the demands of the movement are that politicians should tell the truth about the imminent climate breakdown, deliberate policies that imply the total transformation of the economy by 2025 and establish citizens' assemblies, what could be intermediate

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success? Success is nevertheless celebrated in the movement with respect to organizational and biographic outcomes: by means–ends inversion such as highlighting the number and days bridges were occupied, or by celebrating the increase in activists and the good mood during their non-violent actions. At a societal level, XR arguably has succeeded in gaining significant media attention – the contribution thereof for sustainability yet remains to be seen.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS FOR SUSTAINABILITY: MOVING AHEAD

Now that we have reviewed some social movement strategies of internal and external organizing and movement success and provided examples of XR in Austria as a sustainability-related SMO, we can look forward. In the context of social movement agency for sustainable organizing, we argue that more research is particularly needed to better understand the specific organizing principles of movements for sustainability and the transformation potential of advancing new narratives.

New SMO Strategies: Digital and Prefigurative Movements

Scholars have suggested that social movements need to internationalize to confront multinational corporations and transnational governmental organizations (Fleurbaey et al., 2018). Indeed, beyond more traditional forms of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Greenpeace, we witness an increase in transnational environmental movements, such as 350.org, that use digital technology to organize and mobilize their members to trigger large-scale collective action. Organization scholars have only recently started to explore the specificities of digital and transnational movements (Barberá-Tomás et al., 2019; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Further research on the organization of digital and transnational movements is important, however, as, in a digital era, sustainability SMOs strive to be online as much as, for example, some non-sustainability movements are.

Moreover, there is increasing interest in prefiguration and "walking the talk" to fuel behavioral and systems change (Auld, 2020; de Bakker et al., 2017). Theories of motivation and behavioral change generally point to two main routes of behavioral change. One is to set new aspirations by describing a future vision, hence the need for new narratives that depict a desirable future to work towards. Another route is to actually start doing things differently right now, which leads to setting new aspirations for further behavioral change. The latter form of prefiguration has generated increasing calls upon SMOs to "walk their talk" and both lead and live organizational change. To understand how (increasingly digital) movement organizations can guide and influence these processes across different levels, more research is needed about their new tactics repertoire and how they may connect to local prefigurative movements to diffuse organizational and systems change towards sustainability.

Sustainability SMO Success at the Societal Level: Transformation of Dominant Narratives

While we have noted that it is difficult to attribute success to SMO activities, another promising research area is how sustainability SMOs may counter the dominant neoliberal paradigm to push sustainability to the center of political agendas (Wolf, 2019). We have discussed the

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emerging ecology of transnational sustainability SMOs. Economists are increasingly calling for an alternative narrative and new theories upon which we can build the economies of the twenty-first century around the objective of inclusive human prosperity within a thriving planet (Raworth, 2017). Further research is needed to better understand the transformative potential of sustainability SMOs to contribute to the emergence of a new "meta-narrative" that challenges an entrenched neoliberal worldview at the societal level. Moving beyond climate change or climate justice frames (Della Porta & Parks, 2013), sustainability SMOs can be great contributors to the emergence of transforming and challenging narratives about the current role of the economy and business in society (Pesch, 2015; Waddock, 2016). Prefigurational movements, which enact systems change at local levels, provide fertile grounds for these challenging narratives (Ergas, 2010; Pelenc et al., 2019), offering some "proof of concept". However, most research that focuses on the transformation of worldviews remains at the community level (McDermott et al., 2019; Pesch et al., 2019). We currently lack meta-analyses of discourses, narratives and dynamics that translate to the transnational level of worldviews (see Beling et al., 2018 for a recent exception). Recent advances in computational text analysis (Hannigan et al., 2019) might help push this research field forward as they allow further discourse and narrative analyses and empirically capture meaning and ideologies at a societal scale.

Yet, more attention for both digital and prefigurative movements and their role in the transformation of dominant narratives also implies changes in the domain of researchers. Scholars can have agency here as well, both by looking beyond their narrow domain-specific fields to address the more systemic properties of sustainability issues, and by rethinking their own role as individuals. We therefore conclude this chapter with some thoughts on academic movements, highlighting the potential for management and organization scholars.

Academic Agency for Sustainability

With the United Nations Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) we have entered a goal-driven political agenda which calls upon science to contribute to these objectives. This approach needs a critical reflection around the normativity of the SDGs and the scientific community (Schmieg et al., 2018; Schneider et al., 2019). There may be variation between different disciplines which are more, or less, inclined to engage outside the academic community. For a long time, management and organization sciences have arguably been conservative disciplines, but lately calls for meaning and impact have significantly increased, specifically related to climate change (Chowdhury & Willmott, 2019; Contu, 2020). A recent academic movement of organization scientists, Organization Scientists for Future (OS4F) points to the particular role of business academics and calls for action of organization scientists to help tackle the climate crisis (OS4F, 2020).

For other disciplines the action part may come even more natural. For example, ecological economists (EE) have made a case for academic activism (Pelenc et al., 2019: 373–374):

> If we refer to the very basic definition of EE formulated by Costanza (1991) i.e. "the science and management of sustainability", we understand that EE does not only have a cognitive goal (the production of knowledge about socio-ecological systems), but also an action goal i.e. to help the transformations of socio-ecological systems toward more sustainable paths (Baumgärtner et al., 2008). From this perspective, EE scholars could possibly embrace an "activist-research" position.

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Sustainability science, as an applied science could also more readily incorporate academic activism (Berthoud et al., 2019; Holdren, 2008). Indeed, we currently witness a repoliticization of science around various societal challenges, including a democracy crisis and a post-truth era, the climate crisis and mass species extinction (Hagedorn et al., 2019; Oreskes, 2019). Recent initiatives such as XR, presented in this chapter, but also Scientists for Future or Labos1.5 are a convincing case in point (Etchanchu, 2019).

The recent field of science communication studies notes how scholars are increasingly willing to leave their ivory tower and engage in different kinds of science communication (Priest, 2016). Interestingly, this change from a "deficit" to a "dialogue" model of science communication has been described by Priest (2016) as something of a social movement. She states how scientists moved away from the assumption that people have a knowledge deficit and if confronted with scientific facts they would change their opinions. Instead, recent insights of science communication studies favor a dialogic or public engagement approach which allows for the opportunity of a two-way communication which improves opportunities and motivations of scientists and the public (and policy formation processes) to engage with each other. Moreover, this engagement also opens opportunities for new ways of doing research. Thus, beyond participating in movements, or engaging in new ways of communicating scientific knowledge, to further research in this area scholars may also use original ways of conducting research, such as engaged scholarship (Van de Ven, 2007), field experiments (Paluck, 2010), action research ranging from inductive, experimental to participatory designs (Cassell & Johnson, 2006), or activist ethnography (Reedy & King, 2019), to name but a few.

CONCLUSION

This chapter presented strategies, success factors and challenges for sustainability SMOs, emphasizing their agency in mobilizing collective action to achieve sustainability goals. It argued that SMOs are relevant actors in the sustainability transition and pointed to important areas in need of further research including digital and transnational movements, their potential to transform dominant neoliberal narratives and the role of academic agency. We discussed not only how citizens may participate in movements to further the sustainability agenda but also highlighted how this option is available to scholars. After all, change for sustainability is a collective obligation.

NOTES

1. This example draws also from the participant observations that one of us is conducting within XR Austria.
2. See also the blog https://jembendell.com/ (accessed 15 May 2020).
3. See https://sos.rebellion.support/node/260 (accessed 15 May 2020).

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