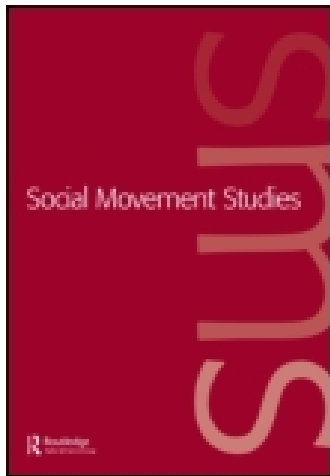


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Movement Building and the United States Social Forum

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ABSTRACT *Despite the growing academic literature on the World Social Forum process, few scholars have attempted to systematically analyze the social, cultural, and political impact of the forums. This has to do in part with the inherent difficulties of assessing movement consequences, which is particularly complicated for an activity geared toward creating ‘open spaces.’ This article presents an analytic framework for evaluating the impact of the social forums through an analysis of the 2010 United States Social Forum (USSF) in Detroit from the perspective of a local Boston-based delegation called the Boston Freedom Rides. We then use that framework to consider the impact of the 2010 USSF, bridging the academic literature on movement outcomes with activist perspectives. We make two related claims. First, the social forums, and the USSF in particular, should be viewed and their impact assessed in light of their generativity as ‘movement-building machines’: infrastructures designed for the production of social capital, networks, solidarities, meanings, frames, identities, knowledges, strategies, skills, and repertoires. Second, with respect to the Freedom Rides, the 2010 USSF contributed to movement building on multiple levels, but more so within rather than across movement sectors. Our goal is less to make a definitive argument about the impact of the 2010 USSF than to provide a helpful way of thinking about movement building as a social movement outcome, which can be applied and refined through further comparative and longitudinal research. We thus favor breadth over depth in outlining a broad framework for future inquiry.*

KEY WORDS: globalization, transnational activism, social movement outcomes, social forum process, United States Social Forum

As roughly 200 youth activists came together for a United States Social Forum (USSF) report-back in a community center in Boston on 17 January 2011, the excitement was palpable. The 2010 USSF in Detroit had occurred the previous summer, but the energy it created among grassroots base-building organizations remained fresh for many in attendance. The youth activists had gathered to share their experiences during the USSF and to strengthen the bonds between the organizations that had gone to the forum as part of the Boston Freedom Rides.¹ Nearly seven months before, many of these young people had

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not known each other, although most of the adult organizers from their groups had worked together for years. On a warm evening in June 2010, many of the same youths, along with members and organizers from other base-building groups from the Boston and Providence areas, gathered for a picnic before boarding one of the five Freedom Ride buses making the trip to Detroit, sharing food, drink, and conversation. Friends, family, and colleagues not making the trip showed their support by bringing snacks, cooking on the grill, or serving meals.

Once on the buses, the young people began to chant, expressing their enthusiasm and emerging solidarity. They also mingled, strengthening their relationships forged during the Freedom Rides organizing process, sharing their thoughts and feelings about the upcoming forum, and introducing themselves to their counterparts from other groups. On other buses, activists from a wide range of groups also exchanged their hopes for the USSF and the social change they hoped it would generate. The excitement gradually turned to exhaustion once the caravan began to make its way to the Midwest. Those who stayed awake retreated into their headphones or turned their attention to the television screens overhead. The next morning, as the buses neared the Michigan state line, the excitement from the previous day's gathering returned as youth began chanting their organizational acronyms: 'RE, EP; RE, EP, REEP!' (Roxbury Environmental Empowerment Project, a youth project of Alternatives for Community and Environment [ACE]) and 'BY, OP; BY, OP, BYOP!' (Boston Youth Organizing Project). Organizers then handed out black USSF T-shirts memorializing a young activist who had been tragically killed in Boston just weeks before. Donned in anticipation of the opening march, the T-shirts blurred the organizational distinctions among the Boston groups. As the buses arrived in Detroit and unloaded everyone along the march route, the Freedom Riders further coalesced, as organization-specific cheers gave way to chants disparaging the police: 'Back up, back up, freedom, freedom; all those dirty ass cops, we don't need 'em, need 'em!'

The Boston Freedom Rides involved a wide array of organizations, including groups working on public transit, environmental justice, jobs, prison reform, labor rights, and opposition to war. Such diversity mirrored the USSF opening march where union members walked next to environmental justice activists holding giant wooden flowers, and groups promoting health-care rights comingled with Native Americans seeking justice for imprisoned activists such as Leonard Peltier.² As they marched with their matching shirts and common chants, the Boston contingent brought together numerous issue-based groups within a single block. The unity and solidarity the young Freedom Riders had forged during the week of the forum was again on display six months later, as the youth sounded their chants at the report-back mentioned above. Speakers described the Boston youth activist scene as a family that had come together in Detroit. For many Freedom Riders, young and old alike, the USSF was a learning experience that introduced them to new ideas, strategies, and perspectives, while generating energy, solidarity, and social ties among individuals, organizations, and regions. In short, they saw the forum – and the Freedom Rides in particular – as contributing to what USSF organizers call 'movement building,' which we can provisionally define as the creation of movement infrastructures required for sustained organizing and mobilization, including social relationships, organizational networks and capacity, affective solidarity, as well as movement-related identities, frames, strategies, and leadership.

How should we understand, and how ought we to study movement building? What are the various dimensions of movement building, and how do these relate to movement

impact? How effective was the 2010 USSF in terms of movement building, and how might movement building lead to political change and/or social and cultural transformation? In what follows, we draw on our observations, interviews with Freedom Ride and other Boston-based USSF participants, the discourses of USSF organizers, and the social movement literature to explore the meaning of movement building as a social movement outcome, and to provisionally assess the extent to which the 2010 USSF achieved its movement-building goals. Ultimately, we seek to offer a useful framework for evaluating the impact of the social forums, including forums in other times and places, as well as similar movement-building events. It is our hope that future researchers and organizers of subsequent forums and related gatherings will incorporate such a framework into their ongoing documentation and evaluation efforts.

Despite the growing academic literature on the social forums, particularly with respect to their organizational forms, democratic practices, and cultural politics (see, e.g., Byrd & Jasny, 2010; Conway, 2012; Funke, 2008; Juris, 2008a, 2008b; Santos, 2006; Smith et al., 2008; Smith, Reese, Byrd, & Smythe, 2012), few scholars have attempted to systematically analyze their social, cultural, and political impacts. Part of this has to do with the difficulties of assessing social movement consequences, particularly for an activity geared toward creating ‘open spaces’ rather than policy gains. This article presents an analytic framework for evaluating the impact of the forums, seeking to bridge the academic literature on social movement outcomes with movement-based perspectives. We also use that framework to *begin* considering the impact of the 2010 USSF. In so doing, we make two claims: the former analytic and the latter provisional, requiring further empirical research. First, the social forums, and the USSF in particular, should be viewed and their impact assessed in light of their generativity as ‘movement-building machines’: infrastructures designed for the production of social capital, networks, solidarities, meanings, frames, identities, knowledges, strategies, skills, and repertoires. Second, with respect to the Freedom Rides, the 2010 USSF seems to have contributed to movement building on multiple levels, but more so *within* rather than *across* movement sectors. Our goal in presenting this framework is less to make a definitive argument about the impact of the 2010 USSF than to provide a helpful way of *thinking about* movement building as an outcome of gatherings such as the forums, which can be applied and refined through further comparative and longitudinal research. For this reason, we favor breadth over depth in outlining a framework for future inquiry.

‘Movement Building’ as Social Movement Outcome

Although still not as prevalent as research on social movement emergence or the dynamics of mobilization, studies of movement outcomes or consequences have increased steadily over the past two decades (Giugni, 1998, 2008; Giugni, McAdam, & Tilly, 1999). Most of this work has focused on the policy impacts of social movements (see Amenta & Caren, 2004), with an earlier wave inspired by resource mobilization theory emphasizing internal movement dynamics related to strategy, tactics, goals, and organization (Gamson, 1975/1990), and more recent approaches paying greater attention to external factors such as political context and opportunities (Burstein, 1999; Giugni, 2004; Kriesi, Koopmans, Duyvendak, & Giugni, 1995). Given the analytic and methodological challenges associated with the study of movement outcomes, it is not surprising that outcomes research has lagged behind other areas of social movement inquiry (Cress & Snow, 2000;

Giugni, 1998). This is unfortunate, particularly from the viewpoint of organizers, since the study of how, when, and under what conditions movements succeed is of inherent interest to activists (Bevington & Dixon, 2005). Research on movement outcomes thus represents a promising field of study that links academic and activist spheres of knowledge production. However, significant obstacles have hindered such research (Amenta, 2006; Earl, 2000; Einwohner, 2001; Giugni, 1998, 1999, 2008), three of which are particularly relevant for our purposes.

First is the issue of how to define ‘success’ (see Amenta & Caren, 2004; Einwohner, 2001). Perhaps, the most obvious way to conceive success relates to political impact and policy change, but evaluating political consequences is often not as straightforward as it might seem. Researchers have developed various schemes for analyzing the policy impacts of movements, including Gamson’s (1975/1990) ‘acceptance’ (as legitimate political actors within the polity) versus ‘new advantages’ (gains for a constituency) and Kitschelt’s (1986) distinction between ‘procedural,’ ‘substantive,’ and ‘structural’ gains (changes in the political conditions within which social movements operate). However, such categories are often difficult to operationalize (Earl, 2000). We might also conceive success in terms of cultural change and the production of new identities, but defining and evaluating cultural outcomes is even more complicated than assessing policy change (Earl, 2000; Giugni, 1999). Moreover, given that social movements are comprised of multiple networks, sectors, and groups, movement actors may disagree about the relevant criteria for success (Amenta, 2006; Giugni, 1999).

This is related to a second challenge for research on social movement outcomes: how to account for intended *and* unintended consequences. The stated goals of a movement do not necessarily capture all the potential outcomes of movement activity (Bosi & Uba, 2009; Cable & Degutis, 1997; Giugni, 1999; Meyer & Whittier, 1994). Although a movement may fail to achieve its stated goals, for example, it may still win benefits for a constituency (Amenta, 2006, p. 8). Other consequences of activism not always articulated by movements include the creation of networks and relationships (social capital), new meanings and identities, and personal impacts such as emotions, biographical shifts, and new skills and knowledges (Diani & McAdam, 2003; Earl, 2004; Gamson, 1998; Giugni, 2004; McAdam, 1989; Rochon, 1998; Whittier, 2004).

Given the importance of unintended outcomes, Earl (2000) suggests that we develop our own theory-driven categories of possible outcomes rather than relying on informants to articulate their goals. While sympathetic to this argument, we feel that an effective analysis of outcomes – and what constitutes success – is best carried out in *dialogue* with the discourses and categories of movements themselves. This allows for the building of a set of outcome categories that emerge inductively from interaction with movement actors and that are strategically relevant for organizers while still informed by social movement theory. Of course, such a methodology works best in relation to movements researchers support; it would be less relevant in the case of right-wing extremist movements, for example.

A final challenge for outcome researchers has to do with causality: how can we be sure the changes attributed to a social movement resulted from movement activity and not some other factors (see Amenta, 2006; Bosi & Uba, 2009; Earl, 2000; Einwohner, 2001; Giugni, 1998, 1999, 2008)? In the political realm, for example, outside of localized campaigns with a clearly identifiable social movement sponsor, it is often difficult to attribute a specific policy change to a particular instance of social mobilization. As Diani

(1997) points out, political elites may encourage rather than respond to political mobilization around an issue (see also Tarrow, 1989). Meanwhile, cultural innovations such as the rise of environmental or other ‘post-material’ values may derive from movement activity, but they may also be caused by more general modernization processes. Diani (1997) thus argues for a more modest approach to causality, focusing ‘on the *structural preconditions* [sic] which may facilitate or constrain movements’ attempts to influence both politics and culture’ (p. 133). Andrews (2004), one of the few scholars to use the term ‘movement building,’ similarly writes about the importance of ‘movement infrastructures’ for achieving institutional and policy outcomes.

By following USSF organizers’ emphasis on movement building and illustrating the importance of social capital, networks, and movement infrastructure, we heed Diani’s call for a shift from causal factors to an analysis of the structural preconditions for movement success. As we conceive it, the term movement building refers, in part, to the production of social capital via the development of movement infrastructures. Beyond organizations, resources, and leaders, however, social capital creation also entails the ‘production and circulation within the movement of ideas, cultural practices, and alternative lifestyles’ (Diani, 1997, p. 136). Movement building thus also implies cultural, identity-based, and personal consequences related to skills acquisition, leadership, and the emotion and solidarity required for sustained organizing (Collins, 2001; Juris, 2008a; Melucci, 1989; Polletta & Jasper, 2001).

Finally, movement building can refer to the effect that one movement has upon another. It is through ‘spillover effects’ that movements influence the frames, identities, ideologies, and strategies employed by other movements (Meyer & Whittier, 1994). These can diffuse from one movement to another across space and time or be transmitted during ‘umbrella’ protests and gatherings (Whittier, 2004) such as world and regional social forums. Spillover effects, which can enhance movement capacity, as well as coherence across sectors (see, e.g., Krinsky, 2007), are rarely articulated as movement goals – they are generally *unintended* consequences in the terms of social movement theory. What is novel and important about the USSF is that organizers view movement building as an intentionally desired movement-to-movement outcome.

Context, Methodology, and Reflexive Engagement

The World Social Forum (WSF) began in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in January 2001 as an ‘open space’ for activists and organizations to share experiences, develop strategies, and coordinate around initiatives related to global struggles against neoliberalism. Global forums, which have since been held annually and now biannually in cities such as Porto Alegre, Mumbai, Nairobi, Belém, and Dakar, bring together tens of thousands of participants from feminist, environmental, indigenous rights, labor, economic justice, and other movements. Part conference, part political rally, and part cultural festival, the forums involve hundreds of self-organized workshops, large-scale plenaries, mass marches, musical and artistic events, and myriad opportunities for informal networking. Over the past decade, the WSF has blossomed into a global process comprised of hundreds of convenings at local, regional, and world levels.

The first national social forum in the USA was held in Atlanta in 2007, drawing 12,000 grassroots activists and organizers for one of the largest nonprotest-oriented social movement gathering in US history. Three years later, the second USSF brought 18,000

participants to Detroit. Since its inception, the USSF process has been uniquely characterized by a focus on ‘movement building’ and insistence that the process be led by the grassroots, low-income communities of color most affected by the social, economic, racial, and environmental injustices confronted by the forum. Observers have noted that at the global level, WSF participants have been disproportionately lighter-skinned, highly educated, and middle class, many from professional NGOs and academic institutions as opposed to grassroots movements (Álvarez, Gutierrez, Kim, Petit, & Reese, 2008; Chase-Dunn et al., 2009; Worth & Buckley, 2009). To reverse this trend, USSF organizers implemented an ‘intentional’ strategy to reach out to and engage historically marginalized communities in the USA (Juris, 2008b).

In Boston, grassroots, largely people of color-led, organizations have played a key role in local forum organizing. Based on their experience bringing young people to the 2007 forum in Atlanta, caravan organizers decided to expand their efforts for the forum in Detroit and to reach out cross-generationally to other Boston area base-building groups. A larger caravan dubbed the ‘Boston Freedom Rides’ ultimately brought five busloads of grassroots organizers and members to Detroit, including three buses of young people and two buses of adults – roughly 250 activists, largely low-income people of color. The process was led by youth and base-building groups in Boston, although non-base-building groups and a handful of organizations located in Worcester, Massachusetts, Springfield, Massachusetts, and Providence, Rhode Island also participated. The organizing for the Freedom Rides began in January 2010, culminating with report-backs in July and August 2010 and January 2011.

The research for this article was based on the model of ethnographic ‘tracing,’ following local groups from Boston to Detroit and back again, through the planning, mobilization, and report-back phases of their work.³ Larmer, Dwyer, and Zeilig (2009) similarly followed activists from several South African countries to the Nairobi WSF in 2007, but they did not conduct interviews after the event and did not explicitly attempt to analyze the impact of the forum on grassroots groups. We also conducted roughly 30 interviews with activists from Boston who had either attended the USSF and/or were associated with the Freedom Rides before and after the forum to assess the outcome of the USSF with respect to their goals and expectations. This research was carried out in an effort to produce movement-relevant analyses based on interviews and fieldwork that engage proactively with the movements in question. Indeed, our focus on USSF outcomes arose from our participation in the Documentation and Evaluation Committee of the USSF National Planning Committee,⁴ and responded to a specific post-forum request on the part of Freedom Ride organizers to write a report for the funders of the delegation (Juris et al., 2010). This article represents a more scholarly oriented and theoretically driven elaboration of that initial report.⁵

In this spirit, we were active participants in the Boston Freedom Ride planning process, attending meetings and volunteering for logistical, fundraising, and outreach tasks, although at various times we stepped back in response to requests from lead organizers of the grassroots base-building groups that spearheaded the process. The USSF process has brought to the fore the importance of leadership and participation by working-class communities of color (Juris, 2008b), which the Freedom Rides achieved by relying on organizations that primarily mobilize those groups, and asking allies from other communities to assume a support role. As a white, middle-class collective of scholar activists, we were thus careful not to overshadow the effort to engage and empower

working-class people of color. Our experience mirrors that of other largely white, middle-class groups involved in the USSF and the Boston Freedom Rides in particular.

Our data included field notes taken during meetings, rallies, sessions, and planning events before, during, and after the USSF. Two of the authors joined the Boston Freedom Ride buses, taking notes and conducting short interviews on the way to and from Detroit. We also collected field notes from report-back events that various community groups hosted following the forum, which were crucial to our understanding of how movement building developed after the forum. In addition to field notes, the authors conducted interviews with organizers who were involved in Boston Freedom Ride planning and who we made contact with through our participation in the organizational process. We conducted interviews before the USSF, asking participants about their history as activists, their knowledge of the forum, and their goals for attending, and then met with many of these activists again in Detroit to informally discuss their experiences. Upon returning to Boston, we conducted a second round of formal interviews, asking participants about their experiences in Detroit, their thoughts about the USSF, and their post-forum goals for their organizations. Interview transcriptions were coded for key themes, and quotes were selected based on their relevance to the idea of movement building.

It is important to point out that by movement building we are *not* referring to the social forum as a movement, either in the sense, common in Latin America, of a unified political actor with a formal organizational structure and membership base such as the Brazilian *Movimento dos Trabalhadores sem Terra* (Landless Workers' Movement) or in the more diffuse sense of the labor or civil rights movement more frequently used in Europe and North America. As many observers have noted (e.g. Conway, 2012; Juris, 2008a, 2008b; Patomäki & Teivainen, 2004; Worth & Buckley, 2009), since its inception, and increasingly so in recent years, a debate has raged between those who would like the forum to become a unified actor (a movement in the former sense; see Bello, 2007) and defenders of the open space concept (see Sen, 2003; Whitaker, 2007). The movement-building idea espoused by USSF organizers was a compromise, signaling their intention to provide a space for more than sharing and talking, while recognizing that the forum is not a political actor. Movement building in this sense refers to the creation of infrastructures that can enhance the capacity of the diverse movements that use the forum and potentially lead to the formation of new movements.

In relation to the USSF, movement building relies on the forum's open space as a conduit for networking, exchange, and translation among diverse groups (Juris, 2008a, 2008b; Santos, 2006; Smith et al., 2008), but it also stresses building social capital and movement infrastructures. The discourse of movement building was specifically drawn from the progressive US foundation and nonprofit world, where the term refers to a strategic shift from short-term organizational priorities to longer-term relationship building that can ultimately lead to social change (see Delgado, 2009; Masters & Osborn, 2010), a goal that resonates with the forum's own objectives. USSF organizers thus envision the forum as a space that generates multiple spillover effects that can help movements develop over time. This is precisely what we mean by the social forum as a movement-building machine.

At the same time, the notion of movement building articulated by activists can be further specified. By combining activist discourses, relevant concepts in the social movement literature, and the stated goals of USSF organizers and Freedom Riders, we develop a more robust view of movement building as the generation of social capital that

links individuals, organizations, and movements across issue, sector, and scale, as well as the forging of cultural meanings, identities, strategies, and emotions that make movements sustainable. Based on themes extracted from our interviews as well as our experiences and observations, complemented by our reading of social movement theory, we further organize movement building into five distinct, yet overlapping categories: *individual/personal*, *organizational/group*, *cross-organizational*, *interscalar*, and *cross-sectoral*. In addition to outlining these categories, we make an initial attempt to assess the degree of movement building in each domain at the 2010 USSF by employing material from our field notes and conversations with Boston-based USSF participants, including those within and outside of the Freedom Rides.

Individual/Personal Movement Building: Affective Solidarity and Developmental Benefits

This dimension of movement building encompasses the generation of emotions and feelings of solidarity that inspire individuals to engage in sustained organizing and mobilization, the related experience of life-changing moments that transform personal trajectories, and the acquisition of new knowledges, skills, and leadership capacities. Our interviews and observations suggest that such emotional and pedagogical effects were among the USSF's most significant consequences.

Social movements rely upon emotion to generate the commitment necessary to maintain ongoing participation. Activists thus dedicate significant time and energy to the management of emotions (Hochschild, 1979; see Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2000), working to build affective ties, convey particular emotional states, or evoke certain feelings with the goal of sparking sustained action (Gould, 2001; Robnett, 1997). A particularly important outcome in this respect is the generation of what Juris (2008a) calls affective solidarity: the sense of inspiration elicited by mass events such as the USSF where activists feel what it is like to be part of a community struggling for shared goals. Our interviews after the 2010 USSF with Freedom Ride and other Boston-based organizers and participants revealed that affective solidarity was among the most deeply felt outcomes of the forum. Mike, a white male organizer and REEP staff member in his mid-twenties, had this to say⁶:

There's something about energy that shifts when you're with that many people and when you're so overwhelmed with these beautiful inputs. In youth organizing we talk about PEP (Participation, Energy, and Power) and we say you can win anything if you build enough PEP. Really we're talking about building power, and there's something crazy with the way you can walk away from that space [the forum] feeling energized for your work. (Interview, July 2010)

Before the Freedom Riders arrived in Detroit, they had started to build feelings of solidarity on the buses. These emotions expanded and intensified at the opening march. As Jermaine, a high school-aged African-American REEP member and youth organizer, explained, 'After getting to Detroit we went right to the rally. As soon as we walked in the mood changed, the rush, you couldn't hear yourself talk; people were playing music and chanting. It's hard to explain. It was just exciting' (Interview, October 2010). The energy and inspiration is about more than personal transformation; it can also translate into

longer-term learning, organizing, and movement building. This was particularly evident for the young people who went to the forum. As Grace, an African-American organizer in her late 20s from Project Hip Hop, said:

I think it [the forum] really impacted our young people. A lot of them with us now hadn't really heard of social justice before. That doesn't mean they didn't have something inside them. I mean we did interviews and they talked about injustice so it wasn't that they were unaware, but they didn't have a frame. And I think the social forum gave them the idea of what we mean by movement and what we are trying to build towards and the possibility that there are thousands of people trying to do that, so there is less a feeling of aloneness. (Interview, September 2010)

In addition to affective solidarity, the USSF also seemed to facilitate a great deal of learning and personal development through the sharing of ideas, strategies, and experiences (see della Porta & Doerr, *in press*; Polletta, 2002), as well as the provision of opportunities for exercising leadership (see Ganz, 2000; Morris, 1984, 2000; Morris & Staggenborg, 2004; Nepstad & Bob, 2006). Polletta (2002) refers to this dimension of social movement activity in terms of 'developmental benefits' among individual activists: enhancing their social and organizational skills, offering political training, and instilling in them a sense of confidence. For example, Dan – a 30-something Asian-American organizer and staff member of ACE – specifically highlighted the role of workshops in promoting learning and development (Interview, September 2010). The impact of people's experiences in Detroit and what they learned about the socioeconomic conditions there were also crucial in helping participants to understand how inequalities and injustices are experienced elsewhere. As Denise, a middle-aged African-American woman and ACE member, pointed out during a sharing circle at an ACE report-back after the forum, 'They have no public transportation in Detroit, there's no way to get around, I guess what we have isn't so bad' (Interview, August 2010). Participants expressed similar sentiments regarding the lack of supermarkets in the city. Learning about Detroit helped people better grasp how environmental justice, transportation, housing, and food justice play out locally.

The experiences of many of the young Freedom Riders also seemed to facilitate critical leadership development skills. Building youth leadership is a particularly important component of the 'youth-led paradigm' that predominates within youth-oriented community organizing (Delgado & Staples, 2008). In the Boston-based organizing leading up to the USSF and during the event itself, many spaces not only focused on but were also led by youth. Young people and youth organizers commented on the opportunities for leadership development provided by the USSF. As Mike explained, 'One point where [my youth] were really together was at our first Freedom Rides info session, young people's leadership was at the forefront of our planning' (Interview, July 2010). It was not only in youth spaces where opportunities for youth leadership arose. As Jermaine said, the opening march 'made me want to be like "Give me a microphone, let me say something," and start a chant. That was a good feeling of leadership; a good lesson in how to lead' (Interview, October 2010).

Our interviews with Boston-based Freedom Riders suggest that their USSF experience contributed to the development of affective solidarity, leadership, and learning. Such personal development is a key building block that underlies movement building on wider

organizational and interorganizational levels, as individuals return to organizations and movements with enhanced awareness, energy, and capabilities.

Organizational/Group Movement Building: Cohesion and Community

Organizational movement building encompasses the strengthening of group cohesion as well as the development of organizational capacity and resources. As Jenkins (1983, p. 538) suggests, ‘The major task in mobilization [. . .] is to generate solidarity and moral commitments to the broad collectivities in whose name movements act.’ In turn, social movement organizations are critical vehicles for generating the resources required for successful mobilization (Gamson, 1975/1990; McCarthy & Zald, 1977). The building of community and cohesion was an important impact of the USSF. As revealed in the opening vignette, the bus ride contributed to this outcome for the groups involved in the Freedom Rides, as did other moments at the forum such as a barbecue at the home of relatives of an ACE member. Malika, a young African-American participant in REEP, reflected on another key moment that reinforced the bonds among members of her group:

We just started talking about how REEP began and what we wanted to do. We tried to make a stand, it just got so deep, people were telling life stories, and we were shedding tears, there were alumni shedding tears, and it was just so deep. We connected more when we got there and it felt so good to know that other people know you’re pain, and other people want to make change just like you, I loved that moment. (Interview, October 2010)

Mike felt such cohesion would generate organizational strength and capacity within REEP:

To organize you have to have trust – genuine relationships, real friendships, and deep appreciation for the people you are organizing with. I feel we’re on the cusp of building a huge membership, doing tremendous youth organizing work in the coming years and it’s launched by our experience at the forum. (Interview, July 2010)

In this sense, internal group cohesion can also translate into ongoing organization building. Joe, a member of ACE and the T Riders Union, reported that he saw the forum as a place to generate excitement and commitment with respect to ongoing organizing activities within his group, ‘I’m hoping to have new ideas and fresh approaches and tons of energy to get this thing off the ground. We’re in this planning stage and it’s great to come back having spent hours on the bus talking about it more’ (Interview, September 2010). Grace described the forum’s organizational movement building impact this way, ‘It allowed us to take collective action. It’s not like we went to the social forum and now we have a movement. There’s a lot more work, but we feel closer to each other’ (Interview, September 2010). Beyond the individual/personal level, organizational movement building is the next step in the development of a strong and sustainable movement infrastructure. Solid organizational capacity as well as internal cohesion and unity are necessary for larger movement formations to be effective and the USSF seemed to contribute to the organizational strength of the groups that took part in the Boston Freedom Rides.

Cross-organizational Movement Building: Local Networks, Coalitions, and Alliances

The cross-organizational aspect of movement building entails the creation of interorganizational networks and coalitions; the forwarding of campaigns; the exchange of skills, information, and strategies; and the forging of cross-organizational solidarity. Social movements are grounded in networks, coalitions, and alliances, infrastructures that facilitate wider movement building (see Diani & Bison, 2004; Fox, 2009; Van Dyke & McCammon, 2010). The Freedom Rides were led by a local alliance of base-building groups that convened a coalition with the goal of taking part in the USSF as an opportunity to strengthen existing organizations and networks and build broader movements. Local and regional relationships that arise in anticipation of an event such as the forum can result in longer-term processes of communication, coordination, strategizing, and mutual support with the potential to strengthen campaigns and help win concrete victories. However, processes of trans-local networking and movement building can also sap energy and resources away from local-level organizing, which was a frequent concern for many of the local organizations on the Detroit organizing committee.

Nonetheless, beyond the strengthening of particular organizations, the forum experience and the Freedom Rides in particular also contributed to a forging of mutual awareness and social ties among grassroots base-building groups in the Boston area across issues and generations. The USSF thus seems to have facilitated the kinds of interorganizational networks and alliances that are necessary to forge sustainable coalitions and movements. This building of local relationships and movements across organizations was particularly notable among the youth organizations that came together in the Boston Freedom Rides. Mike explained the working relationships that came out of the forum this way:

There's a half dozen groups that are seriously talking now about how to do some long-term stuff together. How do we use what all of us are really good at to think about what movement building really looks like? All of us knew each other before the forum, but after the forum, riding on the energy of the young people involved and the relationships they built and of doing those things together, we're in a place where we're ready to make this central to what we're doing, and to make the commitment to make it work. (Interview, July 2010)

The planning process also played a critical role in strengthening intergroup solidarity. The experience of successfully organizing such a large venture allowed groups to develop a deeper sense of trust. As Grace explained with respect to the youth contingent:

There is a level of synergy and relationships that had never been [before]. Organizing the social forum trip helped us see the beginning of what's possible together. No single one of us could have pulled off the logistics, raised the money, none of it. I see this as the first act of a coalition and a collaboration I believe has more potential than I've seen before. It has more of the ingredients necessary to actually work together than before. (Interview, September 2010)

Malika pointed out that since the USSF the connections built in Detroit have become ongoing relationships of mutual solidarity and support. As she explained:

Every time we've had a big event, they [the folks from Boston and Providence they met at the forum] were there, they came to the youth summit, they came to some of the rallies, every time we've had an event we would outreach to them and they were there, 'like REEP, we're there [for them].' (Interview, October 2010)

Perhaps the most tangible outcome of the 2010 USSF for the participants in the Freedom Rides was the significant interorganizational movement building it stimulated. In this sense, the experience of many grassroots base members and organizers planning for and in Detroit not only strengthened their organizations but also helped to build a strong sense of solidarity and purpose, as well as shared goals among the organizations that took part in the Freedom Rides. After the USSF ended, a network of four or five youth groups continued to meet every few months, plan together, and support one another at mobilizations, rallies, and other events. This is a concrete example of the kind of movement infrastructures required to build broad-based movements that can achieve local political victories.

Interscalar Movement Building: Local, Regional, National, and Global Connections

In addition to strengthening local relationships, another key aspect of movement building is the development and expansion of networks and coalitions at wider geographic scales. This aspect of movement building involves the creation of social capital that transcends local contexts, building ties among local, regional, national, and global activists and organizations. Tarrow (2005) has referred to the generation of such interscalar connections as scale shifting. Others have written about the critical relationship between place-based and transnational activism (Escobar, 2001; Juris, 2008a). Such national and transnational networking and movement building creates broader movement infrastructures that allow activists to build power, leverage strength, develop strategies, and achieve victories beyond the local level. Consequently, one of the most important goals of USSF organizers was to build multiscalar links connecting local movements to their counterparts at regional, national, and global levels. This entailed facilitating social ties and building critical awareness of movement contexts at multiple scales of organizing.

The Detroit USSF helped Boston-based participants connect with their counterparts around the country working on similar issues, such as housing, transportation, and environmental justice. Relationships and strategies were developed via specific workshops and in the context of new or emerging national networks and coalitions such as Right to the City or Transit Riders for Public Transit. With respect to interscalar movement building at the USSF, Dan had this to say:

I'm thinking in terms of networks we're not connected to as much as we should be. Right to the City is a good example, or the Push Back Network or the Movement Generation folks. I think about these groupings of organizations across the country, and that it [the forum] reminds us that these are folks who we have a lot to learn and gain from. (Interview, September 2010)

For their part, the young people at REEP have been working on youth-related transit justice issues, and they organized a workshop at the forum that brought together youth activists from around the country, including Los Angeles, New York City, Chicago,

New Orleans, and Milwaukee. These conversations led to the idea of building a national-level youth platform to develop strategy and fight for federal legislation in support of transit justice. As Mike explained, the young people from REEP and BYOP were able to hold a workshop based on their experiences in local public transit organizing in which they ‘invited any young people who had been working on public transit from across the country to come together and talk, build, and share’ (Interview, July 2010). Several organizers also mentioned connections made with counterparts working on immigration issues in Arizona. For example, Chris spoke of the role of white anti-racist and Universalist Unitarian gatherings at the USSF in mobilizing for protest in Arizona:

Folks from all over the country were talking about what we were going to do as white anti-racist folks in response to Arizona. I know there were a dozen people who went to that meeting who were not planning to go to Arizona who all ended up going. Of the 86 people who got arrested on the 29th [of June] in Arizona, 25 of them were [Unitarian Universalists]. They were all mobilized by people who got connected to stuff at the social forum, did national organizing over the next few weeks and turned people out. (Interview, October 2010)

Beyond specific platforms and coalitions, the USSF has also contributed to a general sense of national-level movement building, pointing to the important role of the social forums in forging wider collective identities (della Porta, Andretta, Mosca, & Reiter, 2006; see Melucci, 1989; Polletta & Jasper, 2001). For his part, Chris described feeling reassured of the existence of a Left in the USA, arguing that if 18,000 people came to the USSF then there are many more that could not make it (Interview, October 2010). Related to national movement building is the forum’s impact in broadening people’s horizons, helping them to develop perspectives that connect their local-level experiences with those at the national and global scales. Regarding the forum’s role in linking issues and frameworks at the local, national, and global scales, Dan explained:

On the first night I remember bringing a bunch of our members to the opening plenary and there was someone from another country talking about how this struggle connects to the World Social Forum and other movements across the country and the world. For our members that was an important perspective to hear. Their awareness began to expand and questions arose about how we are connected to networks beyond Boston and the region. (Interview, September 2010)

To maximize their political effectiveness, movements have to operate at scales beyond the local level. In the USA, for example, important legislation that affects grassroots communities often moves through state and federal governments. Moreover, local and state campaigns and protests may require national and global support, as was the case with the mobilization against Arizona’s anti-immigrant laws. One of the most important outcomes of the USSF was the strengthening of national mobilizations, processes, and networks such as Transit Riders for Transit Justice. As we saw with the REEP campaign for a youth transit pass, national coalitions can also inform and inspire local-level strategies and campaigns. In addition, the awareness of national and global issues coming from participation in the forum not only expands horizons, but it also helps people to better understand the issues and challenges they face at home. In all of these ways, the USSF

appeared to contribute to trans-local movement infrastructures that can help movements achieve victories at local, regional, national, and global scales.

Cross-Sectoral Movement Building

The final dimension of movement building entails the forging of relationships and the sharing of information and skills across movement sectors, linking together not only diverse issue areas but also different movement types and forms. By sector we refer to neither an issue-based movement (e.g. environmental, peace, labor movement) nor an economic sector (e.g. manufacturing, service, or even social movement sector), although there may be some overlap. Instead, we take sector to mean a broad grouping in a larger ‘social movement field’ (Ray, 1999) defined by structure, organizational logic, and primary constituents. Movement sector is an *emic* category widely used by USSF organizers to distinguish between different kinds of movement actors within and around the USSF process. Following their lead we refer to five movement sectors in the US context: (1) well-resourced nongovernmental organizations (e.g. Greenpeace), (2) diffuse national movement networks (such as MoveOn.org or United for Peace and Justice [UFPJ]), (3) informal anarchist and direct action collectives, (4) national member organizations (including labor unions, community organizing networks, and socialist groupings), and (5) smaller grassroots base-building organizations (such as those involved in the National Planning Committee or Boston Freedom Rides). Significantly, organizers associate particular sectors with specific racial and class dynamics. In this sense, the first three are often seen as white and middle class, while the latter two, and particularly the base-building sector, are generally viewed as mobilizing relatively more working-class and people of color constituencies.

In addition to individual and organizational ties, cross-sectoral movement building also includes symbolic displays of solidarity, including marches or protests that generate feelings of belonging and commitment to a wider movement. The forum provides unparalleled opportunities for movement traditions with diverse strategies, visions, tactics, and organizational forms to learn from one another, develop relationships, plan larger and more diverse mobilizations, and build broader movement fronts. However, our research suggests that while the USSF may have generated a sense of belonging to a wider movement, the USSF seems to have been less effective in promoting specific cross-sectoral links, relationships, and information sharing, a finding that concurs with Funke’s (2008) assessment of the global forum events.

In some sense, the fact that activists from so many diverse sectors came together within a common physical space during the USSF in Detroit helped to generate a sense of collective identity as well as symbolic displays of cross-sectoral solidarity. This was perhaps most palpable at the opening march where grassroots base-building groups from around the USA organizing around environmental justice, jobs, and housing marched with national organizations and more informal networks and direct action-oriented collectives working on issues related to peace, immigrant rights, climate justice, feminism, as well as Latin American and Palestinian solidarity. In terms of the workshops, participants also had the opportunity to attend a diversity of sessions on multiple issues organized by actors exhibiting distinct perspectives, strategies, and organizational forms. Most Boston-based participants who we spoke to, however, told us they had concentrated on a single track or set of issues related to their primary struggle. Many activists focused on specific themes

and networks directly related to their strategic goals. For example, Peter, a middle-aged white Boston-based peace activist with UFPJ, stated:

I had three agenda items for this year's forum and they became more consuming than expected, so I spent less time being open and learning about other things. Two of the three were national projects I had taken on through UFPJ and a third was a local peace project started by UJP [United for Justice and Peace] in Boston called the 25% solution, a campaign to cut the military budget by 25% and redirect funds to human needs. (Interview, August 2010)

Similarly, Sarita, a South Asian organizer from Deported Diaspora, a refugee rights organization, went to the USSF with two of her colleagues to follow up on a strategic planning session about the national immigration reform debate they had attended in Phoenix while there for a national protest against Arizona's anti-immigrant laws. They spent most of their time at the forum attending immigration-related workshops and assemblies (Interview, August 2010).

The USSF offers a strategic opportunity to bridge gaps between sectors, but the extent to which this happens in a sustained, meaningful way appears limited. Part of this has to do with the focus on mobilizing and developing links among grassroots base-building groups on the part of USSF organizers (Juris, 2008b). For his part, Jay, a middle-aged Boston-based activist of South Asian descent with a history of involvement in the forum process, thinks the USSF has made unrivalled achievements in terms of leadership development among young working-class people of color, but he would like to see 'greater and more deliberate dialogue with the more traditional peace movement, traditional Left-wing entities, and various anarchist groups' (Interview, June 2010).

These dynamics related to cross-sectoral movement building also played out locally in the context of the Freedom Rides. We found that organizers consider the consolidation of interorganizational ties and relationships among a core group of base-building organizations, particularly those centered on youth organizing, as a key achievement of the Freedom Rides. However, the USSF attendees we interviewed were more skeptical in terms of the cross-sectoral linkages facilitated by the Freedom Ride process. Asked whether the Freedom Rides facilitated movement building in Boston, for example, Jamie responded, 'I tend to wonder if groups who already know each other are doing it together, which is fine, because it will make them stronger and more bonded, but it doesn't seem other groups are participating in a coordinated way' (Interview, August 2010). Jay had this to say: 'A certain amount of trust is being built between certain kinds of organizations, but greater awareness about the broader network of the Left would be helpful and fruitful' (Interview, June 2010).

Indeed, some participants in the Freedom Rides we spoke to noted a lack of concern with integrating and building ties with activists beyond core base-building groups. Regarding the bus ride to Detroit, Sarita explained:

I wish there was more of an opportunity for all the Boston/New England organizations to get to know one another, to have a quick introduction or some type of activity before we got on the buses. I didn't feel like I got to know new people or work that was happening locally. (Interview, August 2010)

Ultimately, the focus on mobilizing base-building groups meant that activists from other sectors felt left out. Communication did not always flow smoothly, and mobilizing and fundraising events put on by activists from non-base-building groups were often not well supported or attended by the lead Freedom Ride organizers. Partly as a result, members of many non-base-building groups that had initially been part of the process, including an anti-racist and anarchist collective, a statewide global justice network, and a progressive fundraising and networking organization, backed away from the organizing process. Those of us who remained assumed more of a support role, which on the one hand muted the cross-sectoral movement-building impact of the process, but, on the other hand, strengthened the interorganizational ties and relationships among base-building groups. In this sense, not only are there various levels of movement building but these different levels may, in fact, exist in tension with one other.

Conclusion

Assessing the impact of social movements, including policy outcomes and longer-term cultural consequences, poses a significant challenge, complicated by the difficulties of defining success, establishing causality, and accounting for intended *and* unintended consequences. It is more feasible, as we do, to define and evaluate outcomes in relation to specific movement-related gatherings, but even in this delimited sense obstacles remain. These are particularly acute in the case of the social forums with their diverse constituencies and their lack of clear, unified political goals. Our solution to the challenge of defining and evaluating success in relation to events such as the social forums has been to start with the objectives of USSF organizers themselves, who view the forum as a tool for ‘movement building,’ which, for us, means developing movement infrastructures as the structural precondition necessary for ongoing mobilization. As we suggest, movement building makes explicit what are generally considered the unintended outcomes of movement activity, including spillover effects such as the creation of social capital that links individuals, organizations, and movements across issue, sector, and scale, and the generation of cultural meanings, identities, and emotions that make movement building sustainable.

Our principal argument has been that the USSF should be understood as a ‘movement building machine’ and its impact evaluated as such. By movement-building machine, we do not mean that the social forum is itself a movement. Instead, we view the forum, in its capacity as an open space, as an infrastructure explicitly designed to strengthen the diverse movements that use it, and to potentially generate new movements, through the creation of social capital, networks, identities, meanings, frames, solidarities, knowledges, skills, strategies, and repertoires. Our observations and interviews also *provisionally* suggest that the Boston Freedom Rides were able to contribute to movement building among an emerging network of Boston-based youth activists and youth-oriented base-building organizations.

For individual Freedom Riders, the 2010 USSF seemed to create a great deal of affective solidarity, while providing a critical space for learning, personal transformation, and leadership development in ways that have led to ongoing organizing and increased organizational capacity. The USSF thus linked cognitive, pedagogical, and affective dimensions of movement interaction and communication in strategic ways. At an organizational level, the Freedom Ride experience helped to generate in-group cohesion as

well as information, knowledge, and contacts that can facilitate new and ongoing organizing projects and campaigns. In terms of interorganizational ties, the Freedom Rides thus contributed to an emerging network of grassroots base-building groups in Boston. As for interscalar movement building, the forum provided spaces for learning about and networking with similar groups, organizations, and struggles working on diverse issues around the country, and for coordinating around specific networks and campaigns such as the Right to the City Alliance or Transit Riders for Transit Justice. Moreover, the USSF exposed many grassroots activists based in Boston to regional, national, and global struggles, which appeared to generate a sense of connectedness to a larger movement and provide a wider context for projects and campaigns. The affective solidarity, social capital, and exposure to new ideas, knowledges, and strategies enabled by the USSF can be seen as immediate *outcomes* that serve to reinforce movement infrastructures that have the *potential* to facilitate sustained organizing and movement building, perhaps leading to policy change and/or longer-term social and cultural transformation, but such far-reaching *impacts* need to be assessed through longitudinal research.

With respect to cross-sectoral movement building, however, the Boston Freedom Rides and their 2010 USSF experience appear to have been less effective at building relationships and ties among activists and organizations from distinct movement sectors: between grassroots base-building groups, for example, and their counterparts from more informal direct action-oriented collectives or traditional peace and environmental movement networks. The USSF did elicit a general sense of belonging to a wider movement, particularly through symbolic displays of solidarity during the opening march and some of the larger plenaries. Participants also had the opportunity to participate in an array of workshops and assemblies representing diverse sectors. However, in practice, many of the attendees we spoke to focused on workshops and events most related to their particular issues and sectors. Moreover, locally, the emphasis and complexities of the Boston Freedom Ride process meant that most of the resulting ties centered around the base-building groups and, in particular, the youth-oriented organizations. Few non-base-building groups participated and those that did remained marginal.

In this sense, and this is our second provisional argument, although the USSF appeared to contribute to individual, organizational, interorganizational, as well as interscalar movement building among the Boston-based participants we worked with, it did not appear to facilitate cross-sectoral movement building. Part of this has to do with the specific emphasis on grassroots base-building groups within the organizing for both the wider USSF and the Boston Freedom Rides. As we have suggested, the participation of grassroots base-building groups in the USSF process, particularly those with a base among working-class youth of color, seems to have contributed to movement building *within* the base-building sector and within other sectors that have taken part in the forums.

However, in order to build a broad and effective progressive movement in the USA with the capacity for mobilization, sustainable movement infrastructures are needed that facilitate a wide array of *intra-* and *intersectoral* connections, relationships, and collaborative forms of interaction. With respect to the USSF, intentional strategies will be needed to overcome the tension between *intra-* and *intersectoral* movement building. In terms of research methods, we will also need to develop more adequate tools for assessing the extent to which cross-sectoral linkages may be occurring in more subtle ways.

In this article, we have tried to outline a more fully developed and theoretically informed concept of movement building by bringing together the academic literature on social

movement outcomes with movement-based perspectives. We also used the resulting framework to offer a provisional analysis of the impact of the 2010 USSF for a group of Boston-based participants, most of whom were involved in the Freedom Rides. Our aim has thus been to provide a helpful way of *thinking about* movement building as an outcome of activist gatherings such as the social forums by outlining five dimensions of movement building: individual, organizational, interorganizational, interscalar, and cross-sectoral, and suggesting the possibility that tensions may arise between levels. We have also attempted to provide a model for studying the impact of local, national, regional, and global social forums more generally – as well as similar trans-local, multimovement gatherings that are designed to facilitate movement building – by tracing the planning, mobilization, and experience of a local delegation before, during, and after the event. We hope our framework and methodology will prove useful to other researchers and organizers working to document and assess the impact of future forums and related movement-building events.

Our micro-level approach makes it difficult to arrive at definitive generalizations about the impact of the 2010 USSF or the social forums more broadly. On the other hand, it does provide us with a firm grounding upon which to base our initial findings regarding the outcomes of the USSF for a particular group of activists and organizations. Moving forward, larger trans-local, comparative, and collaborative studies involving multiple teams of researchers will be needed at future forums to trace the experiences of local delegations in many more cities. There is also a need for ongoing research with the Boston delegation to assess the continuing impact of the 2010 USSF over time. Finally, we hope that subsequent researchers will identify further methodological innovations that can help us refine our understanding of movement building and develop more effective ways of evaluating movement building across space and through time. Only in this way can we anticipate how and when powerful movements are likely to emerge.

Notes

1. For the base-building organizations that participated in the Freedom Rides, 'youth' generally refers to young people of high school or immediate post-high school age, although in the USA, the category of youth often extends through age 25.
2. Leonard Peltier is a Native American organizer who was active in the American Indian Movement in the 1970s. He was convicted in 1977 of murdering two Federal Bureau of Investigation officers during a conflict at the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation two years before, and many activists and organizations, including Amnesty International, have challenged the fairness of the trial.
3. The authors of this article are part of the Boston Scholar-Activist Research Collaborative (BSARC), a group of politically engaged researchers from the Sociology and Anthropology Department at Northeastern University. We would like to recognize Lauren Nicoll who was a member of BSARC and contributed to our research but did not participate as an author.
4. As such, we worked with teams of engaged researchers throughout the USA to help document and assess the impact of the 2010 USSF. For the results of previous collaborative research and writing at social forums in Europe and the United States, see Smith, Juris, and The Social Forum Research Collective (2008) and Smith et al. (2004).
5. Participatory action research, which involves collaborative research design and implementation by scholars and organizations in an ongoing process of action and reflection, is one example of a more general engaged, interactive, and dialogical approach to social movement research (see Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Stoecker, 2009). In our case, although we developed our research questions and conceptual categories in conversation with local and national forum organizers, our research was not *fully* collaborative in terms of its ethnographic design and practice given the limitations on the time and resources of our local partners. Nonetheless, local Freedom Ride and national USSF organizers, as well as foundation officers, read our initial report and

indicated that they found it useful for thinking about the role and impact of the USSF on their organizing and/or grant-making. We hope this article will contribute further to such strategic reflection.

6. All of the names that appear in this article are pseudonyms in order to protect the anonymity of our informants and collaborators.

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