Contextualizing Contestation. Framework, Design and Data

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Abstract

This paper presents the theoretical underpinnings, design, methods and measures of the Caught in the Act of Protest: Contextualizing Contestation Project (CCC). The project examines street demonstrations varying in atmosphere, organization, and target; in who participates, why and how these people got involved. The idea is that features of countries, movements and issues interact to mobilize participants. The project deals with the entire ‘demonstration moment’; data is collected before, during and after the sampled demonstrations. We developed standardized measures and techniques of sampling and data collection at the individual demonstrator level and at the context level. Evidence is gathered not only from the demonstrators but also the police, the organizers and the mass media. Data-gathering efforts are standardized through identical methods, questionnaires, fact sheets, and content analysis protocols. The CCC project examines demonstrations in Belgium, the Netherlands, UK, Spain, Switzerland, and Sweden between 2009-2012. Teams from Italy, Mexico and the Czech Republic joined the project at a later stage. As we speak, the project has covered 61 demonstrations and in total 12,993 questionnaires have been completed.
The CCC-project is set up to combine interview data of individual participants in the act of demonstrating with multilayered contextual data that allow embedding this individual participation in meaningful contextual differences. To that end, we developed standardized measures and techniques of sampling and data collection both at the individual demonstrator level as at the context level (Klandermans et al., 2010; Walgrave & Verhulst, 2011). This paper presents the CCC project, its theoretical underpinnings, design, methods and measures. To start, we briefly elaborate upon the phenomenon of interest, namely street demonstrations¹.

**Street Demonstrations**

Street demonstrations are examples of contentious performances. Tilly argued that contentious performances obey the rules of strong repertoires. Participants are enacting existing scripts within which they innovate, mostly only in small ways (Tilly, 2008, p. 17). Like an improvising street theatre group, people who participate in contentious politics normally have several pieces they can play, but these are not infinite (Tilly 2008: 14). Similarly, participants in protest and organisers match their performance to local circumstances. As a consequence, street demonstrations are the same and different every time they occur. There is a lot of variation in how street demonstrations look and feel, in their atmosphere, in how they are organized, and whom they are targeting. And, accordingly, in who participates, why these people get involved and how they get to do so. All this depends on the many contexts within which the protest is staged. This is precisely what the CCC project examines: in which ways systematic variations in who, why and how people protest should be accounted for across countries and across issues.
Following Casquete (2006: 47) we define street demonstrations as “collective gatherings in a public space whose aim it is to exert political, social and/or cultural influence on authorities, public opinion and participants through the disciplined and peaceful expression of an opinion or demand”. Note that the peacefulness and the disciplined nature of a street demonstration event may vary but that demonstrations clearly differ from riots or street violence. Distinguishing demonstrations from collective gatherings in general, Fillieule (2011) proposes that demonstrations have four distinctive traits. They are

(1) temporary *occupations* of open physical spaces—public (e.g. streets) and private (e.g. hotel lobby, shopping mall)—which excludes numerous gatherings at meeting places, marches from workshop to workshop within a company on strike;

(2) *collective* action, which excludes individual political action (e.g. buy- and/or boycotts);

(3) *expressive* through visual affirmation of social/political demands for participants and public, which excludes gatherings of heterogeneous crowds lacking a unifying principle (e.g. shoppers on a market);

(4) *political* through making social/political demands, which includes many apparently nonpolitical events as ceremonial rallies (e.g. “political burials”) and politicized festive parades (Gay or love parades).

Demonstrations are vehicles of ideas or beliefs. They are a form of political communication: both externally- aiming at authorities, media and public opinion -as well
as internally- conveying and/or consolidating a message to the participants themselves.

Casquete (2006) mentions three different functions of demonstrations.

1. **Persuasion**—demonstrations are staged to persuade authorities, to acquire and exert influence for social or political change by influencing formal policy making processes;

2. **Ventilation**—refers to the benefit of participation for the participants themselves by publicly voicing their anger, indignation or moral discontent;

3. **Consolidation**—also refers to the benefits of participation since ritual behaviour such as protest demonstrations serves to build, convey and conserve this sense of ‘we’ and fosters sustained commitment among participants in a social movement.

Most demonstrations fulfil all three functions, but some functions will likely prevail under specific circumstances. For example, if the government is targeted and its stance seems to be ready to give in, the persuasive function will probably dominate. Reactive demonstrations on valence issues such as random violence are most likely mainly serving the ventilation purpose. Both examples show that the issue, as well as the broader context, are likely to shape the function participants attribute to a demonstration. In other words, motives for participation differ across demonstrations. That is why we need a comparative design scrutinizing issue and context like the design we propose in the next section.

Demonstrations, their composition, participants’ motivations and mobilization trajectories, are social phenomena that develop in multiple interactions between different actors, which are either directly present or involved at a distance in the demonstration.
‘moment’ (Favre, 1990). There are the demonstrators themselves, consisting of various societal subgroups and segments, organizers and non-organizers, leaders and followers, stakeholders and sympathizers. Then there are also the targets of the demonstration, sometimes physically present in the form of a counter demonstration or a company headquarter, but most often in the form of instances from which change or at least attention is required: bosses, politicians, bureaucrats, or also society at large. Next, at a protest event itself, the forces of law and order enter the field. This can be the police, but also other public order forces: the army, private militia etc. Finally, there are various publics varying from casual bystanders, over journalists covering the event to intellectuals and/or scientists who influence public opinion through their interpretation of the facts. Therefore, the design of the CCC project not only covers the protesters themselves but includes these other actors and factors as well. Since who shows up, why and how is determined by the interaction with and between these various factors and how these are structured by the issues that instigate the protest in the first place.

**CCC-design: Comparison across Contexts**

The CCC project has been set up to examine how variations in street demonstrations result from differences in the context in which the protest takes place, and how they interact with these contexts. This requires a comparative design; designs that are rare in studies of contentious politics. Yet, as Klandermans and Smith (2002: 6) hold, “Comparative research of movement participation is important. It tells us that what holds for a participant in one movement, or at one point in time, or at one place is not necessarily true for a participant in another movement, or at a different time or place”.
The most common comparison is across *space* and examines the same movement in different locations. A classic example is Walsh’s (1988) study of citizens and activists in four communities in the neighbourhood of Three-Mile Island. This study demonstrates that contention is shaped by characteristics of the local communities in which the movements are embedded. Had Walsh neglected to make this comparison—either by restricting himself to a single community or by simply analyzing aggregated data—he would erroneously have believed that the contention in each community was the same.

The most ambitious study so far comparing similar movements in different countries and taking diverging social and political contexts as key independent variable is the study coordinated by Walgrave and Rucht (2010) dealing with the worldwide demonstrations against imminent war on Iraq on February 15th, 2003. The most important finding of this study is that the size and composition of the anti-Iraq war demonstrations, the motivation of the participants and their mobilization trajectories, strongly varied between countries. Although the different protests were organized on the same day, were staged within an internationally collaborative framework, employed the same action repertoire, and although they dealt with the same clear-cut issue – opposition against the same war, remarkable differences *between* nations were found. Mobilization, coalitions, protest turnout, demonstration composition, and the features, attitudes and mobilization trajectories of the individual protesters all varied. The key variable to account for these differences between countries was the stance regarding the war of government and opposition in a country. In a follow-up study, Walgrave and Verhulst (2009) found that in countries where government and opposition were opposed to the war (e.g. Germany and Belgium), countries with a ‘favourable’ political context so to say, the diversity of the
people demonstrating against the war was systematically higher than in countries were
government and/or opposition supported the war (e.g. US and UK). All this to say that
mobilizations on the same issue, the same moment in time, and even staged on the same
conflict, attract very different publics in different contexts. Protest is shaped not only by
the demand for protest opportunities, but also by the very context that generates this
demand.

Comparisons across *movement/issues* enable us to answer different questions. The
most common question in a comparison of movements/issues concerns the similarities
and differences between participants. These differences may concern demographic
characteristics, motivations, identity and attitudes, and mobilization trajectories. For
example, research by van Stekelenburg and colleagues in the Netherlands alludes to the
context-dependency of motivational constellations, demonstrating that demonstrators
staged by labour unions are more instrumentally motivated while demonstrators in a
protest staged by an anti-neoliberal alliance were more ideologically motivated. Different
movements appear to foster diverging motivations (Van Stekelenburg, Klandermans, &
demonstrations in Belgium and found substantial differences. People taking the streets to
support asylum-seekers are very different from people taking the streets to protest lay-
offs. Verhulst claims that the issue at stake strongly affects the composition of the event,
and the motivation and mobilization trajectories of the participants.

Comparisons across *time* examine the same movement over a certain time span.
Movements expand and contract in phases of mobilization and demobilization. In which
stages of a protest cycle are demonstrators likely to feel and behave more radically or
rather moderately? We do not know much about the extent to which the composition of the crowd and their motives change over the life course of a movement and what causes this variation. A rare example of a study that compares the same movement through time is Walgrave et al’s (2012) study of ICT use among peace protesters 2003-2006 in Belgium. They find the role of ICT in producing diverse organizational memberships to significantly increase through time.

These examples of research comparing demonstrations across space, movement/issue, and time show the advantage of comparative designs and the kind of questions that can be answered using them. We know that demonstrations staged by the same movement on the same issue but in different countries produce diverging protest participation as do demonstrations in the same country but staged by different movements on different issues. However, we are not aware of any comparative study that systematically compares national and movement/issue effects. This is precisely what the CCC-project does. It is the first study that employs such a country x issue design. The key idea is that features of countries and of movement or issues interact to mobilize participants with a specific socio-demographic profile, a specific motivational constellation, and a specific mobilization pattern.

Our theoretical framework draws on four contextual ‘layers’ that are expected to affect directly and indirectly who shows up, why they attend and how they are mobilized. Different context layers as visualized in Figure 1 ‘generate’ – or rather appeal to – a specific type of protest participant. ‘Higher’ context layers affect ‘lower’ context layers and altogether they determine the ‘who’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ of participation. Demonstrators are nested in demonstrations, demonstrations in issue-specific
mobilization contexts, issue-specific mobilization contexts in general mobilization contexts, and general mobilization contexts in nations. Analytically, these four contextual layers can be distinguished, but in practice some of these layers are confounded (e.g. the general mobilization context and nation often coincide to a large degree). Before elaborating on each of those layers, we briefly discuss the primary dependent variables: the characteristics of the protesters.

*Figure 1 about here*

Protesters

Who are the protestors? In other words, what are their socio-demographic characteristics, what types of political participation have they engaged in in the past, to what extent are they interested in politics and what are their political views, etc? Next, how were they mobilized, through what channels, by which techniques, within what kinds of networks and milieus? And, why do they protest? What are the specific attitudes, motives, motivations and emotions that pushed them onto the streets? The basic claim of the CCC project is that these characteristics of protestors are highly context dependent. The type of demonstration, the mobilization context and the features of a country determine who shows up, why and how.

A multilevel comparative design allows examining the dynamic process by which the micro-level participation by individuals is coupled with the macro context, generating a demand and opportunities for participation, by means of a meso level that canalizes the willingness to participate in a specific event. The links between these levels of analysis—context layers as we call them in the CCC project—is one of the more important but
thorny problems in the literature on social movements and protest participation (Diani & McAdam, 2003; Klandermans, 2004).

For example, regarding the composition of a protest crowd, the fact that different issues will attract different kinds of protesters is evident. But furthermore, as these issues are also dealt with differently by different political actors, media and public opinion in a given society, the barriers and thresholds to participate will very likely vary according to these differences.

The question of why people take part in protest largely deals with their motivation. We conceive of motivation in terms of grievances and emotions and assign a central role to identification processes (Van Stekelenburg et al., 2009, 2011). First of all, for people to take action, they need to feel aggrieved in one way or another. But for collective action, a sense of collective belonging and shared understandings of an unjust, wrong or improvable situation is indispensible. In order to develop shared grievances and emotions, a shared identity is needed. Motives can be more instrumental (people participate because they believe it will make a difference), they can be ideological (they participate because they feel the moral obligation to express their view) or they can be identity-driven (they participate because they feel the social obligation to stand by their people)(Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2007). The question is to what extent the typical motivations of protesters vary across demonstrations, issues, mobilization contexts and nations. And, accordingly, to what extent these differences are shaped by these contexts and issues.
In terms of mobilization, the question is to what extent mobilization patterns differ across countries and/or issues. From a previous anti-war study we know that mobilization channels vary strikingly between countries (Walgrave & Rucht, 2010). Some demonstrations are the result of ‘open’ mobilization processes – potentially targeting the public as a whole –, while others are the result of ‘closed’ mobilization processes – targeting only specific sub-sections of the population. But still we know very little about how processes of mobilization vary across issues and demonstrations. In one of the rare studies on this subject, Boekkooi (2012) shows that organizers who rely on different mobilizing structures—coalitions of formal organizations, networks of informal networks, or both—reach different subsets of a movement’s mobilization potential (Boekkooi, 2012).

Nation

The level of the national context is the most ‘distant’ explanatory layer. We expect it to affect mostly the intermediate layers and to have relatively small direct effects on the who, why and how of individual participation. Nations vary in terms of the circumstances they create for political protest. These are the typical stable and structural political system features implied by the political opportunity structure in a country. These features affect all types of movements and protest on all kinds of issues. It relates, for example, to the openness of the political system for challengers and the access points available for actors willing to defend their interests and express their opinions (e.g. Tarrow, 1998; Tilly, 2008). In open political systems, such as for instance the Netherlands, there is space for challengers to enter negotiations with decision makers.
whereas in closed political systems, for instance France, this is much less the case. This may imply that the French are in general, being excluded from easy access to politics, more motivated to participate in protest than the Dutch. Indeed, in the Netherlands protest demonstrations are rare, while in France they became the most frequently employed form of contention (Mayer, 2013).

Another example of a nation level factor is the difference between countries in their prevailing conflict and conflict resolution style. Take for instance Great Britain and Sweden where open and pragmatic elites avoid extreme forms of repression. In Italy and Spain instead, they recourse to violence in order to exclude groups from political representation (Della Porta, 2003). One may therefore expect that in Italy and Spain, protest is much more likely to become a matter of principle than one of interests, where for protesters in Sweden or Great Britain, interests are more likely to prevail as a protest instigator. This distinction is important since conflicts on material interests are usually solved by compromise whereas conflicts on principles often lead to deadlocked situations and, consequently, to fierce confrontations (Harinck & De Dreu, 2004).

Mobilization context

Each protest in a given country takes place in both a general and an issue-specific mobilization context. The general mobilization context refers to the general ‘demand’ and ‘supply’ of protest and to the general protest culture in a country, regardless of the issue. The issue-specific mobilization context is more particular and regards demand and supply and protest culture regarding a specific issue.
The general mobilization context

Protest does not originate randomly but in the context of unequal power relations rooted in manifest or latent political cleavages or societal divides (Kriesi, Koopmans, Duyvendak, & Giugni, 1995). Traditionally, protest dealt with divisions between classes, religions, regions or sectors. Yet during the past decades, Western societies underwent far-reaching social and cultural transformations. Traditional cleavages withered, are complemented or cut-across by new cleavages resulting, among others, from schisms between ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ of modernization (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005), globalization and de-nationalization (Kriesi et al., 2008), and recent conflicts such as those on environmental issues, citizenship, animal rights and ethnocentric nationalism (Jansen, 2011; Roggeband & Duyvendak, 2013). Along these traditional and new cleavages, opposing identities emerged and organizational fields crystallized or are being formed (cf. Lipset & Rokkan, 1967).

As mentioned, the general mobilization context in a country can be described in terms of demand and supply (Klandermans, 2004). The demand for protest refers to the protest potential in a society; the supply of protest refers to the characteristics of the social movement sector in a society.

A demand for protest always starts with grievances in a society (Klandermans, 1997). For grievances to become the engine of collective action, the people involved must develop a politicized collective identity. Politicization implies that people become aware of the fact that their grievances are shared by others, that opponents are defined, and that attempts to generate public support are undertaken (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). In general, in most Western societies, the demand for protest is on the rise. Not
only did the economic financial crisis deepen and widen the ‘pool of grievances’, but it also made that grievances easier politicize. As a consequence, more population groups employ protest as a means to communicate their grievances (Klandermans, 2001; Meyer and Tarrow 1998). Also, increased immigration engenders grievances and heightens the demand for protest in many Western societies (Koopmans, Statham, Giugni, and Passy 2005). Grievances also become more global as populations in different countries realize that their concerns are not specific or idiosyncratic but cross borders. In terms of the CCC project, then, the question is to what extent the general level of grievances in a country (e.g. due to austerity measures), the increasing diversity of the population in a country (e.g. due to immigration) and the increased internationalization of discontent in that country (e.g. due to membership of supranational organizations) translate in a demand for protest.

The supply side of protest concerns the characteristics of the broad social movement sector in a country, its strength, its diversity, its contentiousness. Traditionally, the social movement sector is conceived of as a conglomerate of movement organizations (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996) which provides the infrastructure on which protest is built (Diani & McAdam, 2003). Increasingly, however, people seem to avoid long-term engagements and instead opt for loose engagements in informal, often ephemeral networks embedded in ‘liquid’ communities (Roggeband & Duyvendak, 2013; Van Stekelenburg & Boekkooi, 2013). And at the same time, we witness the emergence of a ‘global social movement sector’ (Smith & Fetner, 2007). In sum, social movement sectors are different in different countries and they change probably at a different pace in
different countries and this affects the general supply of protest opportunities they generate.

*Issue-specific mobilization context*

The demand for protest in a society not only has a general aspect irrespective of issues and movements but also an issue-specific aspect. Specific population segments are affected by specific government measures, specific situations or specific events, leading to issue-specific grievances and thus a specific willingness to participate in protest focusing on that particular issue. As government policies differ across countries and issues, we expect the issue-specific demand to differ strongly across countries. For example, soon after the global financial crisis broke out in 2008, Belgium ended up in a deep institutional crisis leaving the country without a government for almost two years. While elsewhere in Europe large protest waves against often drastic austerity measures took off, in the absence of a government hardly any anti-austerity measures were taken in Belgium and no demand for anti-austerity protest was recorded. Another example is the varying position of Western governments regarding the war on Iraq. In countries with governments participating in the war and sending troops to Iraq the protest demand was much larger than in countries who officially opposed the war (Verhulst and Walgrave 2007; 2009). Issue-specific demand differed dramatically.

The same applies to the supply-side. Between countries, and within countries, the supply of protest opportunities regarding specific issues differs strongly. In some countries a specific social movement industry, for example the environmental movement, is particularly strong, contentious and diverse, while this may be totally different in another
country. This most likely affects who shows up for environmental protest, why they do so and how these people are mobilized.

Demonstration

First and foremost, demonstrations vary in terms of the issue they address. Issues are situated at different levels in Figure 1. As issues are features of the issue-specific mobilization context, as we discussed in the previous section, they essentially define this context. But an issue is also a feature of a specific demonstration. Verhulst (2011) proposes a two-dimensional distinction between old, new, and consensual issues on the one hand, and particularistic and universalistic issues on the other. Old and new issues differ on the ‘new’ survival vs. self-expression value cleavage (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Many old issues are typically socio-economic issues, such as inequality, social security, and industrial relations and new issues often deal with moral, cultural, life-style issues such as gender, GLTB, abortion, animal rights and peace and war issues. But often, the direction of an issue (pro or against abortion, or pro or against environmental measures) is what really matters, and what makes them to be placed in the ‘old’ or the ‘new’ category. Consensual issues are in essence ‘cleavageless’. It are valence issues such as (opposition) against drunk driving or against random violence: nobody is in favor of drunken driving or random violence, there are no opposing political positions and no organized opposition on these issues. Furthermore, an issue also differs in the way and degree to which it appeals to and potentially activates relevant publics. Universalistic issues are issues that in theory concern an entire population, like, for instance, global warming. Taking action on such an issue takes highly different motivations and
mobilization techniques than taking action on a particularistic issue, like, in an extreme case, a village corporate closedown. It does not require a whole lot of argumentation to see that the issue of a demonstration is a key determinant of who turns out, why and how they come to do so. Different people are affected by different issues leading to different motivations and often also to different ways in which they end up demonstrating.

Apart from the issue, demonstrations can be ritualized, peaceful, or violent, with or without permit, and with or without a mutual understanding with the police. Demonstrations are usually staged by a coalition of organizers, but the composition of the coalition varies and depending on the coalition, the composition of the crowd in streets varies (Boekkooi, 2012). For example, the coalition that organized the demonstrations against the war in Iraq in Spain consisted of major political and social organizations, while the coalition staging similar events in the Netherlands consisted of small leftist organizations. As a consequence the composition of the crowds demonstrating in the two countries differed significantly (Boekkooi, Klandermans, & van Stekelenburg, 2011). Also protest venues and even weather conditions vary across demonstrations and so does media coverage on the issue at stake.

CCC Measures. The Importance of Standardization

Researchers tend to study reported protest participation in the past, often via large representative population surveys, or intentions to participate in the future. Both methods are flawed. The former because past-behavior questions only reveal information on participation in protest in general rather than in specific protest events and the latter because intentions to participate are weak predictors of actual participation (Klandermans & Oegema, 1987). In the CCC project, in contrast, demonstrators are ‘caught in the act’
of protesting as they are sampled during demonstrations. Interviewees are actually performing protest behaviour and not just intending to, and we record their behavior in a specific event staged by a specific movement on a specific issues so that their activism can be fully contextualized.

The CCC project deals with the entire ‘demonstration moment’; data is collected before, during and after the sampled demonstrations. Evidence is gathered from a number of different actors, not only the demonstrators but also the police, the organizers and the mass media. Each of these data-gathering efforts is standardized through identical questionnaires, fact sheets, and content analysis protocols. Standardization is important as we want to be able to attribute similarities and differences between demonstrators in different demonstrations in different countries to real contextual differences rather than to sampling biases or questionnaire differences.

The CCC project examines demonstrations in Belgium, the Netherlands, UK, Spain, Switzerland, and Sweden between 2009-2012. Teams from Italy, Mexico and the Czech Republic joined the project at a later stage. As we speak, the project has covered 61 demonstrations and in total 12,993 questionnaires have been completed. Papers for this special issue of Mobilization only use two types of demonstration data gathered between 2009 and 2011: May Day events and Climate Change demonstrations resulting in a dataset of 17 demonstrations and 3157 individual participants. The remainder of this section provides an overview of the employed methods and measures to collect data before, during and after the demonstration from different actors: demonstrators, organizers and the police (Table 1 provides an overview).
Data on demonstrators is collected following a standardized sampling procedure and utilizing standardized questionnaires following the protest survey method (Walgrave & Verhulst, 2011). For each demonstration, a team of approximately twenty interviewers distributes 1,000 postal surveys, making sure that each participant has the same likelihood of being selected; 200 of the selected participants are briefly interviewed face-to-face before they get a postal questionnaire to take home, fill in and send back. Two principles are crucial to guarantee a representative sample: a strict division of labour between selectors and interviewers and a systematic sampling procedure.

Interviewers do not select the interviewees themselves. This is done by so called ‘pointers’ who steer a team of interviewers and order an interviewer to approach a specific individual. Pointers avoid selection biases. Experiments where interviewers could select their own respondents indicate that interviewers are inclined to approach the more ‘approachable’ respondents (Walgrave and Verhulst 2011). The pointers guide and monitor their interviewers through the entire process and take decisions when the atmosphere deteriorates.

The sampling is systematic, meaning that pointers do not have much leeway in selecting potential respondents either. Demonstrations are not unstructured masses and interviewers must employ a fixed procedure in order to cover the entire mass and disperse evenly over the crowd. The procedure depends on the ‘lay-out’ of the area—a broad avenue in Brussels is different than a square in Amsterdam. Most importantly procedures are different for moving and static demonstrations.
This moving demonstration procedure draws on mobile and counting pointers each directing a group of interviewers. Pointers count rows to ensure a fair dispersion of questionnaires over the marching column and send interviewers into a row to interview a specific individual they pointed out. The pointers alternately selects someone walking at the left side, the middle and the centre of a row (see Figure 2). The procedure is meant to guarantee that all demonstrators, no matter where they walk have an equal likelihood to be sampled.

<Figure 2 about here>

To fit the environmental circumstances of static demonstrations that mostly take place on a square, we employ a slightly different method (see Figure 3). Interviewers are equally distributed at the edges of the standing crowd. Pointers instruct their interviewers to start at the outer circle followed by handing out a survey two steps from the outer circle in the direction of the centre of the square. Then another questionnaire is handed out another four steps further in the direction of the centre of the square and so on (5, 6, 7 etc. steps). Hence, the number of steps in between two interviews increases as to control for the fact that due to the circular shape of the crowd the number of people as one moves to the center reduces.

<figure 3 about here>

In addition to the 1,000 postal surveys, short face-to-face interviews are conducted with every fifth respondent. The selected oral respondent is asked a few key
questions of which the answers are written down. After the interview the respondent is requested to take the postal questionnaire home and to fill it in. The face-to-face and postal questionnaire are labeled with an identification number allowing assessment of non-response bias. This is possible because response rates for face-to-face interviews are very high (around 90%). Response rates for the postal questionnaire hover around 30%.

Apart from the demonstrators, the organizers of the protest are interviewed and so is the police. A few days before the demonstration takes place the five most important staging organizations are interviewed following a standardized interview scheme. Among other issues, they are questioned about their motives to stage the event, their collective action frames (what’s going on, who is to blame and how the issue/problem should be tackled), the expected turnout, relations with and influence on politics and police etc. Organizers are briefly re-interviewed after the event asking them about the effect of the demonstration, the actual turnout, the atmosphere during the demonstration, etc. The police are contacted before and after the event as well. They are asked about the expected turnout, their planned presence at the demonstration etc. and afterwards they answer questions about actual turnout, applied policing style and used gear; the atmosphere during the demonstration etc.

We collect additional data on the demonstrations by interviewing the pointers and the interviewers after the demonstration. Their questionnaires contain questions on the atmosphere of the demonstration, the approachability of the demonstrators, the behavior of the demonstrators and of the police, etc.

Apart from information gathered directly from the different actors—demonstrators, organizers, police—we obtain additional evidence through a number of
secondary sources such as newspaper content analyses, comparative datasets of political system characteristics etc.

In Conclusion

Street demonstrations are becoming more common throughout the world. At the same time, as the protest instrument is adopted by groups who did not use it before, the variation and differences between demonstrations seem to further increase. In this context, not only social scientists but also citizens, organizers, politicians, and police are struggling to understand this new reality. The challenge for students of contention is to document and understand these evolving variations in contention.

This is easier said than done. Studies of demonstrations are mostly dealing with single cases. Therefore it is impossible to tell whether the findings are typical, or not, for this specific country, this specific issue, or this specific demonstration. Only comparison enables us to disentangle the general from the unique. Systematic, contextualized knowledge on protest demonstrations is hardly available. The composition of demonstrations, the motivation of the participants, the mobilization techniques that brought them to participation are most likely contingent on contextual variation, but so far we lack systematic evidence and we can only guess what the influence of context variation on these variables might be. The evidence yielded by the CCC project probably is the first which has the potential to provide evidence-based answers on fundamental puzzles regarding the context-dependence of protest participation.

The results presented in this special issue show that there is a large variation across demonstrations—who shows up, why they do so and how, varies strongly—even if
we limit ourselves to two classic and recurring kinds of demonstrations. May Day and Climate Change events can be better understood when interpreted in their local context, and those contexts differ. All the papers in this volume attest that only by taking the context into account, we can make sense of patterns of similarity and dissimilarity of demonstrations across countries and issues.
Notes

1 For a more elaborated discussion on street demonstration we refer to the contribution by Fillieule in this issue.
2 Actually, Casquete distinguishes a fourth function, communication, but as this function is almost synonymous with the three other functions we only present three of Casquete’s functions her.
References


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Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.


Tables and figures

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| Organizers | Before | Telephone Interview | Issue  
Collective action frame  
Expected turn-out  
Relation & influence politics |
| | After | Telephone interview | Expected effect  
Turn-out  
Atmosphere  
Policing |
| Police | Before | Telephone Interview | Expected turn-out  
Expected presence |
| | After | Telephone interview | Turn-out  
Police attendance  
Policing style & gear |
| Demonstrators | During | Protest survey (f2f) | Short demographic questions |
| | After | Protest survey (core questionnaire) | The ‘who’ of participants  
The ‘why’ of participants  
The ‘how’ of participants |
| Researchers | During | Observations/Pictures etc. | Turn-out  
Slogans/banners/speakers  
Atmosphere  
Weather conditions  
Physical lay-out area |
| | After | Survey (interviewers & pointers) | Assessment method  
interaction resp. /interviewers  
Atmosphere |
| **Contextual layers** | | | |
| nation | Start project | Secondary data | Political opportunity structure  
GNP  
# population  
General demand & supply  
Protest culture |
| General mob.context | Start project | Secondary data |  
Issue-specific demand & supply  
Mobilization techniques |
| Issue-specific mob | After | Secondary data & interview organisers | Issue  
Turn-out  
Policing  
Site  
Timing in protest cycle |
| Demonstration | Before During After | Secondary data interviews & police | Issue  
Turn-out  
Policing  
Site  
Timing in protest cycle |