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Making sense of the Social Forum

On the local framing of a fashionable global symbol

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The worldwide emergence of Social Forums (SF), originating from Porto Alegre (Brazil) in 2001, is a key element in the movement for global justice. A growing body of literature on the forums concerns its function as a transnational venue for civil society and a global symbol for resistance against neoliberalism. However, little empirical research is carried out on the local meanings of the widespread SFs. This article reports on a case study on the organizational process of a local forum in a Swedish town. The analysis focuses on intra-coalitional interaction among activists from the labor movement, Attac and a local cultural institution. The importance of considering *local framing processes* and the often-neglected influence of *fashion*, when studying the emergence of social forums is emphasized. Findings show how the dichotomy the Old vs. the New became crucial in the framing process. Framed as a *novelty* contrasted with “old” socialist values, the SF was rejected by the labor movement activists as just another expression of a contemporary neoliberal trend of depolitization. Implications for the study of the social forum phenomenon are discussed.

Key Words: social movement organizations • social forums • framing • fashion

Introduction

In the last few years, social scientists concerned with social movements, globalization and the emergence of a global civil society have taken an interest in the worldwide appearance of Social Forums (cf. Allahwala and Keil 2005; Byrd 2005; Böhm et al. 2005; Glasius and Timms 2006; Reyes 2005). Inspired by the first World Social Forum, first held in Porto Alegre (Brazil) in 2001 as a counterweight to the political and economic elites’ World Economic Forum in Davos (Switzerland), regional, national and local social forums have grown rapidly (Glasius and Timms 2006). Typically, these Social Forums are open and heterogeneous political and cultural venues that have gathered a diverse crowd of people, organizations and social movements within in the “movement for global justice” (della Porta 2005a), a.k.a. the “movement of movements” (Klein 2001) or the “anti-globalization movement” (a term mostly used by skeptical observers). In international debates among activists and scholars, the social forums have been widely described as an attempt to challenge global neo-liberal hegemony; as a source of alternative knowledge production and critical learning – and as a site for wide-ranging networking and coalition building (e. g. Sen et al. 2004). The social forum process is often referred to as an illustration and a symbol of a new form of counter-hegemonic globalization and a cosmopolitan political mobilization “from below” (de Sousa Santos 2004 & 2006; Evans 2005; Hardt and Negri 2003; Langman 2005). However, little is known by way of empirical research about the actual meanings and the functions of the Social Forum created when it travels across the world. As a phenomenon, which crosses both organizational and geographical borders, the Social Forum interrelates with innumerable social movement actors and many and diverse local contexts. As a contribution to the growing academic literature on social forums, this article examines the meanings that evolve when the Social Forum as a symbol is negotiated and constructed in a specific local context. Analyzing this as a local framing process (Benford 1997; Snow and Benford 2000), it is argued that the influence of fashion (Blumer 1969; Abrahamson 1991; Czarniawska and Sevón 2005) is a central, but often overlooked, aspect of the global spread of social forums, which may have unpredictable implications for its political meaning and content.

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Scholars concerned with the social forum process have mostly focused on the World Social Forum and its political meaning and various functions as a transnational venue for civil society (Teivainen 2002; de Sousa Santos 2004 & 2006; Smith 2004; Allahwala and Keil 2005). However, some research exists on the emergence of affiliated local forums. A thorough overview of the traveling social forum is to be found in Glasius and Timms' (2006) inventory of local social forums. Several survey studies of local forums have been conducted in order to examine both socio-demographics and the political behavior and values among the participants (e.g. Andretta et al. 2003; Bramble 2006; Wennerhag et al. 2006). Examples of studies applying qualitative methods are della Porta's (2005a) interview study of participants in local social forums in Italy. della Porta argues that a model of deliberative and participatory democracy, and a celebration of diversity and ideological pluralism, was evident in the organization of the forums. According to della Porta (2005b), who combines interviews with survey data in her research, the forum – characterized by multiple belongings, tolerant identities and inclusiveness – made it possible for several different groups of activist to participate, without having to compromise their ideological integrity. In an interview study at Social Forums in Southern Africa, Larmer (2007) argues that the participants regard the Forum as a useful arena for promoting social struggle, in spite of their opinion that Africans' influence on the global justice movement remains limited.

Although there are some empirical studies of local social forums, most of the studies are based on interviews or surveys. Accordingly, the local process of interaction in which the social forum as such is interpreted and given meaning has not been thoroughly explored. In addition, the cases that have been examined are those where the Social Forum is already established. Thus, the cases where the phenomenon is disputed or even rejected remain uncharted by research. Consequently, there is a risk of only paying attention to "success stories". Hence, this article sets out to counterbalance this tendency by focusing a negative case, where the Social Forum was rejected as a symbolic label after an intra-organizational dispute where various frames became evident. Drawing on field studies during this process of interaction, the design of the present study offers a rich empirical basis for analyzing the local meanings of the social forum as it emerges in a naturally occurring setting.

Drawing on the empirical findings, the article also addresses the more theoretical and visionary debates on the social forum phenomenon, briefly characterized above. In this more theoretical and visionary discussion of the flourishing social forums, both hopes and fears are displayed. Representing the camp of the hopefuls, Hardt and Negri (2003, xvi) characterize the World Social Forum and the regional forums, as "*the representation of a new democratic cosmopolitanism, a new anti-capitalist transnationalism, a new intellectual nomadism, a great movement of the multitude*". Langman (2005, 66), for his part, argues that the Social Forum is slowly "emerging as a social force to be reckoned with as the symbol of growing resistance to neoliberalism". In sharp contrast to such sentiments, Sen (2004) uses the metaphor of *franchising* when he critically discusses the global spread of Social Forums, highlighting what he claims to be a risk that the Forum is becoming a commodity, a brand name, a "superficial recipe for success", without the political and deliberative culture of the World Social Forum. On a skeptical note too, Glasius and Timms (2006) point to the risk of vanguard leftist elements highjacking the social forums and transforming them into local political campaigns. Hence, the productive and dialectical tension between a tradition of "struggle" and one of "deliberation", which Glasius and Timms argue is characteristic of the World Social Forum process, would collapse leaving the former tradition in sole control.¹ These understandings of the traveling social forum are discussed in relation to the findings in the present empirical case study.

Theoretical framework

In the present article, the theoretical concepts of *fashion* and *framing* are used as analytical tools to interpret the local meanings given to the Social Forum symbol. In order to grasp the local process of meaning construction vis-à-vis the Social Forum, I have been inspired by the "framing

perspective” frequently used in social movement research (Snow et al. 1986; Benford 1997; Snow and Benford 2000; Berbrrier 1998). The concept of framing is defined and used in various ways in the large and still growing literature (cf. Haines 2006; Payerhin & Zirakzadeh 2006; Alimi, Gamson & Ryan 2006). In the following, the framing concept found useful for my analysis is presented. Thereafter, I elaborate the concept of fashion (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996; Czarniawska and Sevón 2005; Blumer 1969) and its importance for coming to grips with the globally traveling phenomenon of the social forum.

Goffman’s (1974) definition of a frame, which Snow et al. (1986) later developed, is a “schemata of interpretation” that enables individuals to “locate, perceive, identify, and label” (Goffman 1974, 21) occurrences within their life space and the world at large. Frames are principles of organization, or assumptions about what we see, which define experiences and make them meaningful. A collective action frame, which is a specific term in relation to the collective sense-making in social movements, is in part a cognitive entity. But Snow and Benford (2000, 56) emphasize that its “essence, sociologically, resides in situated social interaction, that is in the interpretive discussions and debates that social movement actors engage in amongst each other and in the framing contests that occur between movement actors and other parties within the movement field of action”. The framing is not just a result of “pure” logic and strategic concerns, sentiments are also a part of the framing process (cf. Berberier 1998).

Hence, the focus on interaction in the context of movement gatherings and campaigns is important when studying the framing process (Benford and Snow 2000, 623-624). However, interviews with activists and analysis of organizational pamphlets and documents have also been frequently used methods in frame analysis in social movement research (Johnston 2002).

Framing in general is a contested process where several parties take part in a negotiation. Some frames are more generally accepted and less contested than others in a given situation. When there is broad consensus as to the meaning of an object, such meaning might appear obvious or self evident as it is implicit in the interaction. When parties overtly disagree about how to define and give meaning to an issue, a frame dispute occurs (Goffman 1974, 322). On such occasions, the parties aspiring to define meaning often make this more explicit and thus more accessible for an outsider to observe. Benford (1993) has stressed that frame disputes constitute important objects of inquiry in social movement research because the outcome of debates often shapes a movement, thus also revealing that movements are not monolithic entities. Benford (1993) identifies three types of frame disputes: diagnostic (definitions of the problem), prognostic (what is to be done), and frame resonance disputes (how to connect the audience’s life experiences and preferences).

In a multi-organizational setting – such as the one studied in this article – the relations between several frames are crucial. Croteau and Hicks (2003) refer to the inter-organizational process of frame negotiations as coalitional framing. Hence, coalition framing is the process whereby organizational frames are either linked in some complementary fashion or are confronted in frame disputes between organizations and within the coalition (Croteau and Hicks 2003, 254). In successful cases, a master frame (Snow and Benford 1992), which is broad and flexible enough to include several organizational frames, may function as a unifying and mobilizing set of assumptions about the social world, creating possibilities for a common agenda. If the Social Forum, as symbol and a platform, makes it possible for a wide range of groups to unite, then it could be interpreted as a form of master frame.

Czarniawska and Sevón (2005) have emphasized that globally traveling organizational ideas and concepts are translated in the local contexts in the sense that they are transferred, transformed and given a new meaning. Consequently, they argue, “a thing moved from one place to another cannot emerge unchanged: to set something in a new place is to construct it anew” (Czarniawska and Sevón 2005, 8). Ideas and objects that travel from one context to another are interpreted in a local process where meanings are negotiated. This process of translation might produce meanings that differ radically from those generated elsewhere, (Czarniawska and Joerges

1996; Czarniawska and Sevón 2005). That is also why local meanings of the Social Forum cannot be determined in advance or with simple reference to what has occurred before; rather, they must be subjected to rigorous empirical scrutiny.

When organizational ideas travel, it is crucial to consider the influence of *fashion*. As Czarniawska and Sevón (2005, 10) argue: “guided by fashion people imitate desires and beliefs that appear as attractive in a given time and space”. The importance of fashion has been stressed elsewhere. There is an extensive body of literature on the importance of fashion and fads in the flow of organizational and management innovations (e.g. Abrahamson 1991 & 1996; Best 2006). Best (2006) argues that the attraction to novelty is a general characteristic of contemporary society, deeply rooted in the culturally widespread belief in progress and the possibility of improvement. Blumer (1969), often quoted in the literature on management fashion, describes this general pattern of orientation towards novelty in modern society as a “fashion mechanism”. This mechanism appears “in response to a wish to be in fashion, to be abreast of what has good standing, to express new tastes which are emerging in a changing world” (Blumer 1969, 282). This mechanism of fashion is perhaps most evident when it comes to clothing, but is also very much present in other fields. Fashion should, according to Blumer (1969, 290), “be recognized as a central mechanism in forming social order in a modern type of world”. However, all areas are not equally receptive to the mechanism of fashion. According to Blumer (1969, 286), certain conditions must exist if the mechanism is to be influential: “the area in which fashion operates must be one that is involved in a movement of change, with people ready to revise or discard old practices, beliefs, and attachments, and poised to adopt new social forms; there must be this thrust into the future”. For instance, the attachment to certain beliefs built on old practices, coupled with a suspicion of new forms of practices, may counterbalance the attraction to novelty. Best (2006) argues that unwillingness to adopt new fads may also grow out of negative experiences of the enthusiastic introduction of novelties in the past. As organizational fads appear – surrounded by promises and presented as necessary to adopt in order to be on the cutting edge – only to vanish just as quickly, they might generate suspicious attitudes towards talk of renewal. Therefore, many people may decide to defy the charm of novelty, despite the risk of being seen as “old fashioned” or dismissed as recalcitrant stick-in-the-muds (Best 2006).

Thus, the impact of fashion depends on the outcome of local framing processes, through which people make sense of traveling ideas and concepts (as well as fashion, which could be considered as an influential force when it comes to shaping the outcome of framing processes). Drawing on the theoretical insights presented, this article relates to the academic debate regarding the emerging social forums. By means of an ethnographic study of a local dispute among social movement actors when interpreting the Social Forum as a political symbol, this study highlights the process of framing and the influence of fashion. Hence, the importance of local meaning production in relation to the global social forum phenomenon is emphasized.

In the following section, I will provide a brief definition and description of the Social Forums generally, followed by a description of the Forums in a Swedish context and a presentation of the specific setting for the case study. Thereafter, I will elaborate the strategy that guided my fieldwork. This will be followed by a presentation and discussion of key findings of the analysis, which, finally, is summed up in the conclusions presented.

CONTEXT, SETTING AND METHODOLOGY

Description and definition of Forums generally

Since the beginning of the 1980s, and continuing in the 1990s, progressive movements have suffered from the international neo-liberal backlash against the radicalization of the 1960s and 1970s. The right wing politics of Reagan and Thatcher became, more or less, a role model even for labor governments (Hall 2005; Žižek 1997) all over the world – including the Nordic countries (Ryner 2002). A process of neo-liberal globalization has formed a hegemonic world order (Ryner 2002). During the 1990s, a new radical wave of social movements emerged,

challenging this globalization dominated by multinational corporations and neo-liberal politics.² Massive popular protests by a wide coalition of labor unions, greens, feminists and solidarity groups followed in Seattle, Prague, Gothenburg and Genoa. In the last few years, Social Forums – rather than militant demonstrations – have been regarded as being at the “heart” of the struggle against neo-liberalism. The World Social Forum (WSF) has grown rapidly. 20,000 participated at the first WSF in 2001. At the 4th WSF in 2005 in Porto Alegre, there were 155,000 registered participants, representing 6,872 organizations from 135 countries (Glasius and Timms 2006, 200). The Forum is organized with the ambition of being an open space where organizations and individuals concerned about the negative effects of neo-liberal globalization meet and participate in seminars, different cultural events, debates, workshops, carnivals, etc. A central aim of the WSF is to formulate an agenda with a focus on issues of social justice instead of economic profit. The label itself accentuates this, initially formulated as a response to the World Economic Forum (Teivainen 2002; della Porta 2005).

The form and the intentions of the World Social Forum are regulated by a Charter of Principles. The following quote from the charter demonstrates the general orientation and the basic idea of the forum.

The World Social Forum is an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among Humankind and between it and the Earth.³

In January, 2002, the International Council, formed by the Brazilian organizers of the first WSF, declared an ambition to encourage the organization of regional and thematic forums. The subsequent European Social Forums (in Florence in 2002, Paris in 2003, London in 2004 and Athens in 2006), the Asian Social Forum and different thematic forums on drugs, war and education are some examples of such meetings that have taken place. The first United States Social Forum was held in Atlanta in 2007 (Wellington 2007). This process also has a local dimension. State and city-based Social Forums has been organized all over Brazil and Latin America, as well in several parts of Europe, Africa and North America (and other places), (Glasius and Timms 2006; Sen 2004).

Forums in Sweden – an outline of the local context

In Sweden, local Social Forums have been held since 2002, so far in seven cities. Different local interpretations of the World Social Forum Charter (quoted above) do, however, exist but all these Forums describe themselves as related in one way or another to the WSF. Parallel with the social forum process, similar forums have been established in Sweden since 1999, first held in the town of Umeå, but with the label *Socialist* Forum [Socialistiskt Forum]. Like the Social Forums, the Socialist Forums are open meeting places for a wide range of movements (not necessarily explicitly socialist ones) that aspire to formulate alternative and radical visions and agendas. In the program for the Socialist Forum in the city of Malmö in 2002, the organizers presented the event with this formulation:

The right wing longs to create right wing winds. They do this in secret, far above peoples' heads. That is because the right wing detests democracy as an idea. The Socialist Forum longs to create left wing winds, which puts equality, solidarity and democracy on the social agenda. We do this overtly, with wide popular participation, just because we consider democracy to be an existential key issue, without it no future is worth speaking about. That is why we are launching this offensive, in the name of democracy, against inequality, elite power and hunger for profit. (ABF and LO-idébatt 2002)

The “enemy” referred to is most likely, among others, the Employers’ Federation of Sweden (Svenskt Näringsliv) which successfully launched an ideological offensive in the 1980s and 1990s with think tanks, PR campaigns, lobbyists and its own publishing houses. This campaign and its success were, of course, in line with the contemporary international neo-liberal offensive and the “turn to the right” in Western politics (Boréus 1997).

There is no charter of the Socialist Forum(s) and although a political connotation is obvious in the label, the ambition formulated in programs and elsewhere has been to create an open space for debate, without dogmas. The Stockholm Socialist Forum (2003) presented itself as follows:

This is a free and open debate between equals without lecturing. Thus, the Socialist Forum rejects an old and authoritarian tradition within the left and the labor movement. For too long the Swedish left has been dominated by patriarchal manners. Everybody is welcome at the Socialist Forum. No one is excluded. This is how the political discussion will gain its power and credibility. (ABF Stockholm, LO-idédebatt and LO-Stockholm 2003, 2).

Different leftist elements, such as anarcho-syndicalists, social democrats and communists, as well as critical globalization activists, environmental and feminist groups, have been invited to participate. The local Social Forums and the Socialist Forums are new and unique arenas in the Swedish political context where different movements and organizations meet and cooperate in a way that has historically been regarded as almost unthinkable. Through a remarkable electoral mobilization, an ability to control the political agenda and successful working-class mobilization through powerful unions, the Social Democratic Party has been a leading force in post-war Swedish politics in a way that Pontusson (1988) characterizes as “social democratic hegemony”.⁴ The history of the Swedish labor movement in the 20th century is full of examples of sharp antagonism between, for example, the numerically and politically more influential Social Democrats and the (minority of) Communists and anarcho-syndicalists. This has been the case especially in the trade unions, which “became a battlefield for working class support” (Korpi 1978ff). During the 1960s and 1970s, the New Left emerged mostly outside and in opposition to the social democratic labor movement (Sund 1989; Östberg 2004).

Although there are differences between the Social Forums and the Socialist Forums, such as their history and connotations, the similarities have been quite clear when they have appeared on a local level in Sweden. The organizations participating in the two Forums often overlap (in some cases, this also goes for the people organizing them). The anti-neoliberal globalization organization Attac⁵ – to exemplify the local differences with an international organization central to the social forum process – has chosen dissimilar roles at different local socialist forums. At the Socialist Forums in Malmö and Umeå, Attac participated as co-organizers. It did not, however, participate in the Stockholm Socialist Forums. The political issues, as well as the characteristics of the program, have great similarities. Globalization, radical strategies and visions, feminism, racism and privatization are examples of common topics (often presented by well-known authors, representatives of movements, academic researchers and local activists).

The issue concerning the participation of political parties has been crucial for the World Social Forum, where they are not allowed by the Charter to be (officially) represented. In the Swedish context, however, there have been different policies at different local Social Forums. Political parties were allowed to participate at the Skåne Social Forum in Lund in 2002 and the Uppsala Social Forum in 2003; but they were not allowed to participate in the Stockholm Social Forum 2004. Similar local differences can be seen between Socialist Forums in Sweden; but generally speaking, the main organizers have been (non-party) civil society organizations. Consequently, there are crucial similarities between the two forums. Not even the name is always a fixed distinction that marks an unambiguous difference between the Social Forum and the Socialist Forum. In the town of Umeå, for example, the local organizers in 2004 did in fact change the label of the event from Socialist Forum to Social Forum. In 2005, they changed the name back to

Socialist Forum. This fluid border between the forums was also striking in the case focused on in this paper.

Selection of case and methodological considerations

The present article is part of a larger research project on Social Forums in Sweden (cf. Nordvall 2002; Nordvall 2007). It draws on two types of data: on the one hand, a wide range of empirical data concerning the general development of social forums and similar phenomena in Sweden, and on the other, data produced through concentrated fieldwork conducted in the specific local setting for an emerging forum. It is the latter type of data that is the focus of attention in the present article.

The actors observed during the fieldwork consisted of a group of organizers planning a large event involving political debate and cultural arrangements in a Swedish town with approximately 100,000 inhabitants. It is a traditional working-class town where the labor movement holds a strong position both on the local council and in civil society. The group studied has a radical political profile and includes local representatives from the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO)⁶, the Workers' Educational Association (ABF)⁷, Attac, the Left Party (the former communist party)⁸, a local cultural institution ("the Theatre"), the Centre for Marxist Social Studies (CMS)⁹ and a folk high school¹⁰ with links to the labor movement. The group thus consists of a mixture of actors representing different organizations and social movements, which together make up a loose coalition in favor of organizing a cross-organizational venue.

The case presented in this article comprises an internal debate concerning the name or label of the event: *Social* Forum or *Socialist* Forum. This specific "case within the case", i.e. the debate concerning the label of the forum, has been chosen because it became a key phase in relation to the organizational outcome of the coalitional process. During the debate, different ways of framing the Social Forum were evident, and the different meanings attached to Social Forum produced outcomes in terms of a dominant interpretation and an organizational structure. The selection of the practice of naming as a specific case, rests on extended field studies of the organizational process (from early planning to realization and evaluation of the forum event), carried out over a period of one and a half years.

The selection of the specific setting for conducting research was made for both theory-driven and pragmatic reasons. Research on the interaction process in social movements has been restricted due to problems of access and to the labor intensity involved in fieldwork over time (Benford and Snow 2000). Hence, my initial ambition, when entering the field, was to grasp the inner dynamics of and the meanings produced in the coalitional process related to the contemporary emergence of heterogeneous venues for social movements, such as the local Social Forums. However, conscious of the difficulties in gaining access as a researcher to such internal settings, I drew up a wide inventory of potential targets all over Sweden. I visited several meetings and events to locate embryonic initiatives for organizing local social forums and similar venues. Thus, I first became involved as a researcher in the group focused on in my study at a national meeting organized by LO in Stockholm. At the meeting in Stockholm, I met a leading organizer in the group. I informed her about my research interest and she invited me to a meeting in her hometown where they had just started to plan for a local forum. After that, I attended a meeting where I presented my intention of carrying out a study and was immediately accepted in the group and was able to conduct my field study during their planning of the forum event.

The data for the study were collected through participant observation at meetings with the organizing committee/group of the Forum. To my knowledge, I was fully accepted as a person concerned with the importance of radical public debate and as a researcher gathering data on their activities. Although I openly declared my personal interest and personal experience of working with radical debates within different social movements, I chose a field role where I tried not to actively interfere in the process and I avoided taking sides in the internal debates and

negotiations. Nor did I intentionally provoke reactions among the participants by introducing specific issues. My field strategy was to use the meetings as a setting for collecting, as far as possible, "unsolicited accounts" (Hammersley and Atkinson 2003, 126 ff), a course of action which, needless to say, has been critically and reflectively considered in relation to my presence as a researcher. This is not a self-evident choice in social movement research, where fieldwork strategies inspired by participant action research (Gaventa 1988) and intervention methods (Brincker and Gundelach 2005) are quite common. During meetings, I kept a low profile and focused on taking detailed field notes on the discussions as well as recording interpretations of emotional experiences. To some extent, the spatial allotment was also recorded; how people were sitting, the meeting atmosphere, people's moods, etc. During breaks, before and after meetings, I participated in small talk. Such occasions were also used to ask participants questions, both individually and in groups/subgroups. Relevant informal talk and courses of events, that took place outside the meetings, were written down as soon as possible.

The participant observations from the specific debate focused on here took place at three meetings over a period of three months. Shortly after the debate, semi-structured interviews (Kvale 1996) lasting 60-90 minutes were conducted with three key actors involved (the organizers from LO, Attac and the Theatre). They were chosen due to their central roles and varying positions in the negotiations. The interviews focused on the specific debate and the participants were invited to comment on parts of my field notes concerning their main arguments (quotes, etc.) in the negotiations. They were also asked about their political backgrounds and general approach to the organizational process. The interviews produced accounts of the informants' perspectives. Hence, these solicited accounts were used to check the validity of observation data (and vice versa) and as a resource for my interpretations of the interaction. Data were also collected from meetings after the debate, where retroactive talk, so to speak, on the negotiation of the label had occurred. I was allowed to tape-record these meetings and take notes. The tape recordings were used as a complement to the field notes and sequences assumed to be of specific importance (on the basis of observations and field notes) have been fully transcribed to make quotes as correct as possible.

The activists focused on in this study were fully informed about, and approved, my intention to produce and publish research based on my observations and recordings. For ethical reasons, I have chosen to reveal neither the actual names of the actors involved, nor the name of the town in which the event took place.

When analyzing and conceptualizing observed interactions in a specific negotiation like this, it is not possible to predict, for instance, the outcomes and meanings of local Social Forums in general. However, by making explicit my process of interpreting when analyzing the aspect of naming, the reader is given the possibility of judging whether the perspective and concepts applied and developed in this study are transferable to other cases (Larsson 2005).

FINDINGS

Fashion and suspicion in the framing process

The presence of fashion as a force to reckon with became clear in the local process of framing the Social Forum through the emphasis in the interaction concerning the novelty associated with the Social Forum. The dichotomy "Old" and "New" was frequently used in the negotiations. In several respects, this was in accordance with the frequent use of the terms "old" and "new" in the discourse of contemporary social movements. For example, both in academia and in practice a distinction is often made between *old* social movements and *new* social movement. The labor movement/trade unions and political parties are often perceived as old movements, while environmental groups, the feminist movement, animal rights groups, etc. are regarded as new social movements. This way of grouping different organizations in "new" and "old" is not necessarily appropriate as a coherent sociological categorization (Scott 1990).¹¹ However,

interpreted in relation to a fashion mechanism, the distinction could be used to grasp some of dynamics involved in the process of framing the Social Forum explored in this case study.

There is especially one organizational representative in the negotiation who accentuates the importance of novelty when framing the label. In the following excerpt, Linda, representing the Theatre, arguing in favor of using the label "Social Forum", emphasizes the importance of distinguishing the "new" from the "old".

Linda (the Theatre): Social Forum is the new, the large and the global. One can't stick to the old.
Socialist Forum is so traditional.
Björn (the folk high school): But Socialist Forum is not traditional here in [the town]...
Linda: No, but *socialism*...

In the excerpt from field notes above, Linda connects the "old", the "so traditional", to a Socialist Forum, in contrast to "the new" and "the global" Social Forum, when framing the label. An underlying assumption is that it is important to be "new" and not "old-fashioned", which is a crucial dimension of the fashion mechanism. Hence, socialism and "old" conflicts, such as the political left-right distinction, are framed as outdated. This local framing corresponds to a public and well-known debate regarding the contemporary order of things. In a "new" world often described as constantly changing, no longer having the characteristics of the Fordist industrial society, the "old" movements easily become obsolete per definition (Holst 2002). Therefore, the labor movement is easily deemed "old fashioned" and politically *passé*. In the empirical case study of the labeling of the local forum, such a tendency of stigmatizing "the old" became visible in the negotiation. In other words, "organizational ageism" comes to the fore, placing the trade unionists and socialists in a position where they have to defend themselves from being defined as *passé*. The symbolic importance of representing "the new" becomes intertwined with the struggle of naming the forum. It became clear that being "the new" was a contested position, as when Björn from the Folk High School in the excerpt above claimed that the Socialist Forum is a novelty as well. Thus, the dual acknowledgment of the importance of novelty, and the dislike of appearing old-fashioned indicate the presence of a fashion mechanism.

In the following example, the attraction to novelty is once again referred to as an argument in favor of the label Social Forum. The content of the Social Forum, described by Linda below, is referred to by the LO and Left Party representatives as legitimate and desirable. However, they oppose the symbolic appearance of the forum label and assert, as does Sonja in the excerpt below, the importance of a "socialist foundation of values".

Linda (the Theatre): Have you read the Social Forum's charter of principles? Lisa [Attac] e-mailed it. It's an open space. One draws up a program based on what movements want to do. Not just leftist and radical movements but from the whole left-right spectrum. In the Third World, the system and the structures affect people, irrespective of whether they are left or right, from the peasants' movement or whatever. Social Forum is a part of a new and cool thing. [...]
Jenny (LO): I can't see any problems with being cross-political in a Socialist Forum as well. Not as organizers, but we could invite, for example, the Conservative Party or movements, which are not clearly socialist. [...]
Sonja (the Left party): I agree that we could raise all those issues you mentioned, Linda, even in a Socialist Forum. But what's important is the foundation of values, to present a foundation of socialist values.

Hence, a crucial dispute concerns the strategic function of the label. Among the supporters of the Socialist Forum label, an assumption is made about the importance of articulating a clear ideological stance and presenting a "foundation of values". This belief, in combination with the fact that they represent the socialist labor movement, which is the prime example of what is often referred to as old social movements, produces a frame dispute. They were not willing to authorize a novelty which required their ideological heritage to be located in a remote corner. A

great deal of suspicion towards such political "renewal" was evident among the critics of the Social Forum label. Jenny from LO, the most critical of the members in the group, strongly dislikes the connotations of the word "Social" (or actually the Swedish word "Socialt") which she thinks is apolitical or liberal/philanthropic. "The word sounds so bloody liberal", Jenny tells me after a meeting. Social Forum to her sounds like a place where people are "nice and sweet to each other", and no issues involving social conflicts are articulated. Celebrating the "new" social forum, by abandoning an "old-fashioned" socialist platform, was said to have too much in common with other experiences of ideological "renewal", as something synonymous with adopting a (neo-)liberal political perspective.

This experience among the skeptics should be seen in relation to the rhetoric of "renewal", found, for instance, in the language of Tony Blair's New Labour and the "Third Way"; a rhetoric that Fairclough (2000) claims to be a particular variation of the political discourse of neo-liberalism, which can also be discerned in the Swedish political context (Ryner 2002). Thus, the Social Forum was framed as something related to this political trend.

Local resonance and ideological connotations

Consequently, a struggle and (socialist) value-oriented way of framing was evident. The Social Forum was regarded as an ideological concession to a contemporary trend of depolitization, giving no radical political signal whatsoever to bystanders. In contrast, the ones in favor of the label Social Forum articulated the risk of being regarded as a venue restricted to old social movements if the forum was labeled Socialist Forum, and that it could create distance and exclude groups who do not regard themselves as socialists. Consequently, a clear element of ideology and strategy was intertwined in the dispute.

However, the focus was first and foremost on the matter of labeling rather than on conflicting claims about the content or the form of the event. The dispute does not concern whether the World Social Forum is a good or a bad thing. In this respect, the dispute does not primarily concern what ought to be, i.e. what Benford (1993) refers to as a prognostic frame dispute. Rather, the dispute concerns whether the Social Forum as a symbolic label is regarded as resonant or not to the local cultural milieu. The disagreement about the label resembles what Benford (1993) refers to as a frame resonance dispute. The question raised is whether the "Social Forum" in a desirable way corresponds or not with the target audience's cultural understanding and everyday experiences. In other words, do the bystanders get the right idea about the event if we label it "Social Forum"? Hence, Jonas, from CMS, argued (according to field notes) that:

Social Forum is a sort of trademark that you can find all over the world. But how well recognized is it among members of the trade union and so on? Do they know what it is? Socialist Forum gives a clearer picture of what it is.

Does it mobilize and appeal to potential participants in a critical and radical political venue? The skeptics of the label Social Forum emphasized the importance of defining and labeling the forum in such way that it maximizes clarity and local resonance by ensuring the label's radical connotations for bystanders. A major factor in this framing of the Social Forum was the existence of the locally developed, parallel phenomenon Socialist Forum in Sweden. As Sonja argued:

To us it is obvious that it should be a Socialist Forum. But we see it as crucial to include both local and global issues in a Socialist Forum. I think we should look at those places where it has been organized before, look at the good examples, for instance in Umeå.

Referring to Sen's (2004) metaphor, one could say that the global franchise Social Forum met a local competitor, with a fairly similar design and vision, but in this case, with enhanced resonance to the local discursive and historical environment.

The antagonism created in the process of negotiating the name of the forum continued over several meetings and resulted in neither consensus nor compromise. Instead, voting solved the issue. Before the voting, each representative returned to his or her organizational committee (or working group) to make sure what the organizational positions on the matter of naming were. The positions that crystallized at the meeting where a vote was to be taken, and which caused the final split, were the following. LO and the Left Party were clearly in favor of the label "Socialist Forum". ABF held a less explicit standpoint, although it supported the LO standpoint. Attac, which dismissed the Socialist Forum label in favor of Social Forum, declared its standpoint before the meeting and did not participate in the final negotiation. The representatives of the Theatre emphasized that they could not participate in a Socialist Forum, and argued in favor of the name Social Forum – although they remained open to any third alternative that did not have the ideological connotations of the Socialist Forum. The CMS representatives were critical of the name Social Forum – "it already exists as a concept which one could have different opinions about" – and declared that they preferred the label Socialist Forum or "or something else" (field notes). A similar position was taken by Sonja from the Left Party, who emphasized a desire for the Socialist Forum label: "We are open to other forms of meetings, but here and now it's a Socialist Forum we would like to work with."

Although no one explicitly turned down the compromises that appeared, even at the final meeting, there was a clear focus on two alternatives. "Social Forum" and "Socialist Forum" were the only serious alternatives proposed in the group and were consequently the main contenders. Any attempt to formulate alternative names ["Radical Forum" etc.] lacked the ability to mobilize emotional and intellectual support within the group. As Berberier (1998, 441) emphasizes, sentiments are crucial in framing processes.

The connotation of the word "socialist" in a Swedish context, specifically among labor unionists, should be interpreted here in relation to the dominant social democratic version of "democratic socialism" rather than to the real-socialism of Eastern Europe or to the socialist rhetoric of smaller vanguard groups of Trotskyists or Maoists whose influence in the social forum process have been debated (Glasius and Timms 2006). Although a decreasing use of the term "socialist" is obvious in the Swedish public debate, in line with the general neo-liberal international trend, the word can still be used in a relatively uncontroversial and popular way. This, of course, is related to historical circumstances such as the dominance of social democratic governments since the 1930s¹², combined with the presence of a former communist party (The Left Party) in the Swedish parliament.

However, the conflicting relationship between the Social Forum and a Socialist Forum should not be seen as a common phenomenon in Sweden, or as a natural consequence of already fixed organizational positions and structures. In fact, the general picture from the Social Forum process in Sweden, according to my field observations and readings of documents and Web pages, shows a non-competitive and rather cooperative or co-existing relationship between Social and Socialist Forums. LO has both participated in, and funded, many of the Social Forums that have sprung up in Sweden. Moreover, Attac has participated in Socialist Forums in some cities. It should also be mentioned that local circumstances vary over time as does the process of framing, which is not static but is constantly undergoing change and re-negotiation (Benford and Snow 2000). In Umeå, as mentioned earlier, there was a temporary change of name from Socialist to Social Forum. The change to Social Forum in 2004 was publicly announced to mark the link with the World Social Forum. According to e-mail correspondence with one of the Umeå organizers, the change back to Socialist Forum in 2005 was motivated by the weak political connotations of the word "Social". The connotations of the Swedish word for "Social" (i.e. "Socialt") have apparently been discussed in many local social forum contexts. For instance, for the first Social Forums organized in Norrköping in 2002, Lund in 2002 and Uppsala in 2003, the organizers decided to use English and not Swedish when labeling (as in "Östergötland Social Forum", "Skåne Social Forum" and "Uppsala Social Forum"). Despite the resistance to cultural

imperialism among many forum organizers, this decision was made, and the reason given by an organizer of the Uppsala Social Forum in an interview¹³ was the dubious and weak connotations of the Swedish word "Socialt".

In the case focused on in present article, the majority of the group (ABF, LO, the CMS and the Left Party) decided to name the event Socialist Forum. As a direct consequence of this decision, Attac and the Theatre chose to leave the group. The negotiation on a symbolic issue thus resulted in material and real change in the practical matters involved in creating a coalition. Further, the local forum process continued without the physical presence of Attac and the Theatre. Hence, the coalition failed because of a harsh dispute, which prevented the coalitional framing of the symbol of Social Forum as a master frame.

Instead, the label itself was framed with an overriding symbolic importance by the majority in the coalitional group, which made all other aspects secondary. The everyday meaning of the word "Social" in the Swedish language generated an image of a non-political event – a social gathering. Dismissing the word "Socialist" in favor of the more vague "Social" was interpreted as just one more step in the (neo-)liberalization and depoliticization of the vocabulary in contemporary society.

At first sight, the process of naming might appear to be a trivial aspect, lacking the importance of the "real stuff" such as the forces of institutional and economical resources. However, the myths and the symbols surrounding people's everyday life are, according to Gramsci (2000), important to take into account in a struggle for social change. One of the most powerful aspects of the symbolic struggle is the practice of naming; a practice with an almost magical power in the process of defining and making sense of the world (Kertzer 1996; Bourdieu 1991). Hence, the symbolic value of the label, constructed in the interaction studied in this case, illustrates these insights quite well.

Pluralist deliberation or socialist struggle?

After the split, interviews were conducted with key actors in order to grasp more fully the local meanings attached to the Social Forum. It appeared that the meanings and the symbolic values attached to the label were of different kinds, even among those who shared the same position in the debate. In an interview held after the split, the representative of the Theatre expressed a strong commitment to a pluralistic ideal without defining any explicit ideological stance. The representative, Linda, gave an interpretation of the central idea behind a social forum that partially goes beyond the intentions formulated in Porto Alegre.

A real Social Forum, well, if you disregard the definition from Brazil and so on, should be a Forum where even the neo-liberals could present their view. That would actually be best.

Linda expresses a reading of the forum as a strictly pluralist and deliberative ideal. This "ideal Social Forum", as Linda admits in the quote, does not necessarily tally with the anti neo-liberal basis of the World Social Forum. However, it does correspond to a fundamental idea of open deliberation also present in the foundations of the World Social Forum, which – as Glasius and Timms (2006) argue – co-exist with an idea of struggle. This duality, I would argue, creates a great deal of space for local interpretations. As noted elsewhere (Glasius and Timms 2006; Sen 2004), some local interpretations of the Social Forum have appeared as political campaigns, rather than open venues, which implies that the "struggle" – "deliberation" duality has been transformed into a clearer struggle-oriented framing. The interpretation of the Social Forum, expressed by Linda in the quote above, shows the possibility of oppositional framing, where the dimension of "struggle" is dismissed in favor of a strictly pluralist framing.

To Linda, the political connotations associated with the name Socialist Forum are problematic. The Theatre, which she represents, is concerned with its reputation as an open, independent cultural institution with public funding. Linda describes this position of the Theatre – that is, the avoidance of making the symbolic appearance of being leftist or socialist – as being in line with

her own personal view concerning the name of the forum. On the matter of her own political beliefs and identity she mentions her background as a young environmental activist; an identity position she feels more comfortable with than describing herself as a socialist.

The positive framing of the Social Forum as a cosmopolitan novelty and pluralist ideal, illustrated by the position of the Theatre, differs quite radically from the framing of the Social Forum made by Attac's representative, Lisa, when I interviewed her. Although Attac, as an organization, is not socialist, I have chosen to describe the framing by the local representative as a framing of the Social Forum that involved a politically and globally expanded socialist strategy. I have regarded this framing as an illustrative example of the variation and complexity of meanings constructed in relation to the forum, which may underscore the fact that organizational affinity per se does not predict the process of framing.

In an interview, Lisa (who is also an experienced unionist in a LO affiliate) comments on the Left Party representative Sonja's pro-Socialist Forum argumentation concerning the importance of a "foundation of socialist values":

Lisa: ... the Left Party mentioned the importance of presenting a foundation of values, a socialist foundation of values. Yeah, but that's what they are talking about at the Social Forums as well! At the same time as they are talking about [anti-] neo-liberalism... I thought that *was* a socialist foundation of values. Or isn't it? Don't they think so?

Interviewer: Even in a Social Forum, that's the foundation of values?

Lisa: Definitely! Yes, of course it is. Well, it's just... one wants to expand it, become larger, so that... Look at the World Social Forum. There, they are starting to work together more. Because that's the only chance, one must start working together with other countries, with others, to make a change. That must be the case on different levels. Here, at a local level, it's important to work with other social movements. We must reach many more of them to become stronger.

Consequently, those persons in the group who saw the Social Forum as an attractive political symbol interpret the label and the phenomenon Social Forum in different ways. Linda from the Theatre gives an interpretation that is clearly deliberative; celebrating open debate as goal in itself, while Lisa from Attac frames the forum primarily as a place for strategic struggle. Hence, they are joined primarily in their preference for the same label (Social Forum), although they attach different meanings to it.

This attraction to the symbolic value of the Social Forum as a label was not shared by the (victorious) supporters of the Socialist Forum label. After the split, when the Theatre and Attac left the group, they continued to discuss the matter of the label at meetings. An oft-repeated argument in these discussions was that choosing the name Social Forum, instead of Socialist Forum, would be an ideologically defensive concession. However, although they succeeded in pushing through their agenda regarding the name of the forum, the price in terms of a diminished coalition was regarded as both high and regrettable. As Benford (1993) has noted, disputes and contested frames force activists and groups to clarify and critically reflect on their framings. In the discussions observed, different stances regarding the label were elaborated, and different strategic views, often self-critical ones, were examined. In particular, such self-critical consideration emphasized what they regarded as a failure to establish a coalition. One example of this continuing consideration is illustrated in the following excerpt with quotes from a tape-recorded meeting. The discussion is initiated by Björn who tells the others that he had met Lisa from Attac by accident recently and that she brought up the name issue because she had heard that the forum in another town (Umeå) had changed name from Socialist forum to Social forum.

Björn (the Folk High School): I met her at the library [she told me:] "Now they are calling it Social Forum in Umeå, why don't you? Then we could join you."

Jenny (LO): Hmm
[...]

Björn: Then I feel somehow, this is nuts actually, instead of getting together around an idea we are sitting here measuring words, right?

Anna (ABF): Can't we find a third alternative, then, find another...

[...]

Björn: You don't want to label it Social forum, do you?

Jenny: No, but I'm getting so tired [of the discussion] that I almost don't give a damn; I'm thinking what am I doing?

Björn: That's what I feel too, just like you are saying. What are we doing when people sort of gets so fixated on words, right?

Anna: Yeah

Björn: Well, I think so, because it's the idea....

Jenny: Yeah, so do I... or I feel it's about values. I think I reason like this, speaking about social or socialist forum, today there are no discussions about [socialist] values.

Björn: No, that's right.

The were a lot of arguments back and forth; it was claimed that it was "sad that Attac isn't with us" (Björn) and that it could be a mark of strength if they accepted the label Social Forum, reunited with Attac and the Theatre, and declared in public that "we once were separated but now we are together and strong" (Anna). However, the discussion above returned to emphasizing the importance of not having just another "diffuse liberal or social liberal" event on the "importance of caring about each other", as Jenny put it. In the following excerpt (also from tape-recorded conversations), from another meeting, the group has once again been reconsidering the possibility of accepting the label Social Forum, just to put an end to the split and make it possible for Attac and the Theatre to rejoin the group. However, they reject this idea:

Peter (LO): We must at least take some pride

Jenny (LO): Absolutely!

Peter: Let's go for this. [The label Socialist Forum]

Jenny: Let's go for this!

Annika (Left Party): One must make a stand for what one thinks.

Peter: Yes, because otherwise...

Annika: ...otherwise we become *social* conservatives

Peter: Yeah, it would be like trimming one's sails to every wind

Jenny: We have social forums all the time. This [the small meeting where we are drinking coffee and talking] is a social forum, isn't it?

The label Social Forum is regarded as communicating conservative or non-political connotations that might even affect the political status of the group ("otherwise we become social conservatives"). The Social Forum label was framed as a threat to their ideological aspirations, due to its local connotations. However, there was no criticism of or antagonism towards the general idea of open radical debate. In interviews, as well as during meetings, there were no openly differing views between the factions regarding the content of the forum or the pedagogical forms of the forum. Parallel with the negotiations about the label (before the split), a quite detailed proposal for themes, as well as the target audience for the event, was defined in discussions where cross-organizational consensus, which included both LO and Attac, was evident. They all shared to some extent a belief in the importance of radical, pluralist, deliberative and open debate on both global and local issues. A shared frame thus united them in the objective of creating a venue for radical debate. However, this shared frame was not enough to function as a coalitional master frame; instead organizational "sub frames", which framed the Social Forum with different meanings, became of dominant importance in the negotiations.

The crucial debate in this case concerned neither issues about the World Social Forum process in general nor what socialism actually means. The Charter of the World Social Forum was not at the centre of debate. Linda, from the Theatre, and Lisa, from Attac, tried to bring it up for debate, but it never became an issue the Social Forum critics bothered to comment on. The focus remained on the more intuitive symbolic appearance of the Forum, i.e. its name.

Using Sen's (2004) metaphor, one could say that the franchising of the Social Forum did not succeed in the case presented here. The brand name "Social Forum" was rejected. It is important to state that what the majority of local activists actually rejected, however, was an interpretation and a translation of the social forum that had their roots in both a national and a local context. As mentioned, the everyday meaning of the word "Social" ("Socialt") in the Swedish connotation generated an image of a non-political event. Dismissing the word "Socialist" in favor of the more vague "Social" was interpreted as just one more step in the (neo-)liberalization of the vocabulary in contemporary society. The Social Forum as a symbol, and a master frame, was not culturally resonant (cf. Benford 1993; Benford and Snow 2000, 619) to this specific historical and discursive milieu. It did not align with the labor movement activists' frames, which instead produced a meaning related to the Social Forum as something opposing their ambitions of challenging a neo-liberal agenda.

They rejected a symbol that had been given meaning through local negotiation and framing processes. It is not evident that they were rejecting a "global culture" (Sen 2004) related to the World Social Forum. Instead, the label itself was framed with an overriding symbolic importance by the majority of the labor movement representatives in the coalitional group, which made all other aspects secondary. However, the Social Forum as a symbol did align with what I refer to as a cosmopolitan-novelty frame, which Linda from the Theatre illustrates, but was then framed as a strictly pluralist and deliberative event, without any explicit ideological stance.

Conclusions

The Social Forum as name and symbol, often associated with the explicit content of the WSF charter of principles and its motto "Another World is Possible", should not automatically be regarded as an unifying anti-neo-liberal master frame when it travels globally. The global flourishing of Social Forums is often assumed to be the result of an emerging global resistance to neo-liberalism. Another force to consider, according to the findings in the present article, when studying this phenomenon is the mechanism of fashion – at least as long as the Social Forum maintains the symbolic appearance of a novelty. This might, on the one hand, make it especially attractive and trendy in certain areas and circles, and in relation to certain frames, which are the ones most receptive to the forces of the fashion mechanism. When the Social Forum is framed as one of the "pleasures of novelty" (Gronow 1997, 78), adopters might produce local meanings related to it where being a broad fashionable gathering becomes a value superior to other aspects of the Social Forum, such as its anti-neo-liberal stance. In Glasius and Timms' (2006) terms, the dialectics between the traditions of struggle and deliberation thus collapse into the latter. On the other hand, what is fashionably in politics in recent decades has made "renewal" appear to be synonymous with "neo-liberal reorientation" and a process of dismantling the welfare state in many Western countries (cf. Fairclough 2000). Hence, "old ideas" have been synonymous with "socialist ideas" in several political contexts. Consequently, suspicion of "the new", including symbols such as the Social Forum, may grow among activists with experience of such political development, if it is constructed as a contrast to "old socialist" values. This dichotomization between the "New" and "Old" may also get in the way of creating collations among groups with rather similar political agendas, such as between Attac and the labor movements in the present study (cf. Mayo 2005).

The celebration of pluralist radical debate and the struggle against neo-liberalism are not sufficient for actors to align themselves with the social forum symbol. As shown in the analysis, local historical, ideological and linguistic factors may produce specific connotations of the Social Forum as a symbol and a label, which are important when people are making sense of it. Local negotiations and local framing might produce meaning, or lack of meaning, related to the Social Forum that is difficult to foresee. As shown in this case, "local competitors", with a function similar to the Social Forum, might interfere in the spread and the interpretation of the social forum. In political contexts, outside of those where Porto Alegre is a familiar reference and a

prominent symbol, the sense-making of the Social Forum may very well be restricted to associations with everyday life experiences, which draw attention to aspects other than those often assumed. The label of the forum thus seems to be an important aspect of the forum process, as a symbolic dimension with implications for the practical outcomes of the process. In the case discussed in this article, the outcome was related to the (non-)creation of a wider coalition.

The everyday meanings of the word "Social" became crucial for the framing process. It was contrasted with the word "Socialist", which has specific local connotations in a Swedish political context where socialism, or "democratic socialism", carries specific associations due to a history of "social democratic hegemony" (Pontusson, 1988). Consequently, social negotiations do not take place in a cultural, historical and ideological vacuum. Therefore, the empirical study of the process of interpretation in social interaction located in a specific context is crucial to our understanding of the Social Forum phenomenon, its meanings and its role as a potential venue for creating coalitions. Organizing a local forum entails making socially negotiated interpretations; interpretations that should be studied in order to achieve a wider understanding of the global social forum phenomenon. Although the spread of Social Forums could be regarded as an expression of global social forces and anti-neoliberal resistance (see Langman 2005; Hardt & Negri 2003; de Sousa Santos 2004 & 2006), it is also vital to bear in mind that this global perspective must be combined with an attention to the still important national and local contexts where people make sense of it. To grasp these local sense-making processes, the analytical use and utility of the concepts of *framing* and *fashion* is therefore suggested as a complement to the current focus on identity and strategic struggle in the contemporary literature on the Social Forum phenomenon.¹⁴ Such research on the Social Forum phenomenon and its potential for wide-ranging political mobilization and frame bridging should not be restricted to "success stories", but should also consider cases where it fails to mobilize support.

Notes

¹ This tension exists, according to Glasius and Timms (2006), within the World Social Forum process, both in the Charter of Principles and among leading activists. Hence, “(.) the two traditions are necessarily at odds with each other. While deliberation values plurality and diversity and debate for its own sake, effective action against the domination of capital requires a certain level of unity. On the other hand, a debate that is a priori against something can never be an entirely open debate” Glasius and Timms (2006, 225).

² However, this global movement against neoliberalism emerged in the South much earlier, during the 1980s and 1990s, before it was recognized as a phenomenon in Western media and politics (Tevainen 2002).

³ Quote from the World Social Forum Charter of Principles at www.forumsocialmundial.org.br.

⁴ Pontusson's (1988) use the term ‘social democratic hegemony’ to describe this political situation, although it should be seen as something that resembles rather than is synonymous with what Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci meant by hegemony. Overall, Sweden has retained the basic structures of a capitalist society. Therefore, social democracy could, according to Linderborg (2001) be seen as an incorporated force that has not only slightly transformed the bourgeoisie's hegemony in Sweden but has also reproduced and strengthened it, through the social democratic defense of private owned industries and its critique of more radical socialist elements.

⁵ Attac (Association pour la Taxation des Transactions pour l'Aide aux Citoyens) is a worldwide organization with its origins in France, which devotes itself to a wide range of issues related to globalization and criticism of neo-liberal ideological dominance. Attac was one of the organizations to initiate the first World Social Forum and in Sweden the organization has also been an initiating force when it comes to organizing local social forums.

⁶ LO is the central organization for 15 affiliates, which together have 1.8 million (working class) members. This figure should be related to the total labor force in Sweden, which is around 5.5 million and the union density rates, which are over 80 per cent of the employed population (Fahlbeck 1999). The representatives are from the local organization.

⁷ The Workers' Educational Association (ABF) is the largest (voluntary) study association in Sweden. It has 60 member organizations including LO, The Social Democratic Party, The Left Party, immigrant organizations, disabled peoples' organizations, etc. The local office in the town, where the study was conducted, employs 10-15 people.

⁸ The Left Party received 8.3 per cent of the votes in the 2002 Swedish general election. The Left Party also achieved a similar result in the 2002 local election in the town where my study was conducted.

⁹ The Marxist Studies Organization is a small organization, which publishes a periodical and arranges public seminars. The organization has a local group in the town.

¹⁰ A folk high school is a residential college for adults. The folk high schools in Sweden, which have a tradition going back to the 19th century, have often had close links with popular movements, although they are state funded. Today, there are 148 folk high schools in Sweden.

¹¹ Many of the ‘unique’ characteristics ascribed to the new social movements, such as an emphasis on lifestyle and loose organizational structure, are often found in social movements in general (Scott 1990); and quite often, people are engaged both in NSM and OSM (Holst 2002). We can also see that the history of feminist movements and animal rights movements goes back to 18th and 19th centuries (Holst 2002).

¹² The Social Democratic Party has governed Sweden since 1932, except for eleven years of non-socialist governments (1976-1982, 1991-1994 and 2006-).

¹³ The interview was conducted during the initial inventory of social forums in Sweden.

¹⁴ Although the framing concept has been used in some research concerning the social forums and the movement for global justice, it has been restricted to document analysis and survey studies (Andretta et al. 2004; della Porta et al. 2006:61-91). Such an approach fails to grasp the *process* of framing in social interaction, where people negotiate and make sense of events and conditions. Instead, it reveals, in a rather static way, certain frames that might be found in documents, pamphlets, etc., cf. Benford's (1997:415) critique of a tendency in the framing literature to focus on “frames as ‘things’ rather than on dynamic processes”.

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