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# Action Organization Analysis: Extending Protest Event Analysis Using Hubs-Retrieved Websites

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Maria Kousis<sup>1</sup>, Marco Giugni<sup>2</sup> , and Christian Lahusen<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

The comprehensive and systematic study of collective action organizations (AOs) requires a new methodological approach that takes into account the rise of online sources as well as the new ways in which people interact and participate in politics. This article aims to present and situate in the related literature such an approach, which was recently created and applied in two European Commission funded research projects, LIVEWHAT and TransSOL, across nine and eight countries respectively. Moving beyond recent studies using online sources, our research used a hubs website based approach to study alternative action organizations (AAOs) in the LIVEWHAT project and transnational solidarity AOs in the TransSOL project. The hubs and subhubs websites that aggregate data on AOs in multiple regions were scraped to identify national samples that offer advanced coverage of the repertoire of AO activities, as defined by the teams. These nodal websites were used as sources, similar to the way in which newspapers are treated in protest event analysis. The article situates and compares the new action organization analysis approach against its foundational protest event, protest case, and political claims analyses, as well as other approaches offering data on online activism. It outlines its main features and the related data construction process, while showcasing its application in the two European Commission cross-national projects. Finally, its merits and limitations are discussed, including a reference to how it can be used as a foundation for a mixed-methods approach.

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<sup>1</sup>University of Crete, Rethymnon, Greece

<sup>2</sup>University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland

<sup>3</sup>Siegen University, Siegen, Germany

## Corresponding Author:

Maria Kousis, University of Crete Research Center for the Humanities, the Social and Education Sciences, Gallos Campus, Rethymnon, 74100, Greece.

Email: kousis.m@uoc.gr

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protest event analysis, action organization analysis, social movement organizations, alternative actions, organizational analysis, online, digital activism, hub-websites, website analysis, political claims analysis, mixed methods

**Introduction**

Mapping organizations and activities online is becoming increasingly important and widespread among students of social movements and protest activities (e.g., Bennet & Segerberg, 2013; Cruz, Martinez, & Blanco, 2017; Earl & Kimport, 2013; Rucht, 2005). The rise of social media, blogs, and other online services has not only changed the ways in which people interact and get involved in politics and public life, but also offers scholars valuable online sources for investigating collective social and political practices in the 21st century. These sources provide researchers an easily accessible and up-to-date entry point to the world of contemporary social movements, which are increasingly relying on the web to attain their goals.

Most important for our study on alternative ways of coping with the economic crisis and on innovative forms of transnational solidarity in the European Union (EU) funded LIVEWHAT and TransSOL projects, respectively,<sup>1</sup> online sources are especially useful for studying action organizations (AOs) operating in the past decade, which made extensive use of online tools of communication to network and promote their actions. We elected to use the term AOs, instead of the term more commonly used in the literature, social movement organizations (SMOs), in order to include civic society organizations with a wider repertoire of noncontentious (direct) in addition to contentious (protest) actions supporting their constituency groups during the crisis period.

Aiming to provide systematic data for these two projects to trace such actions at least from 2007 to 2016, we developed action organization analysis (AOA), an approach that allows us to identify AOs using online sources. Following a series of attempts with online media we chose hub websites, which aggregate and classify organizational websites.<sup>2</sup>

**Foundations of AOA**

The proposed methodology was inspired by protest event analysis (PEA), a well-established technique in social movement studies (see Hutter, 2014; Koopmans & Rucht, 2002, for methodological discussions) that has mainly used newspapers as sources. Originating in the seminal work by Charles Tilly (1978, 1986, 1995), this method has proved extremely helpful in tracing mobilization and action repertoires of social movements across both space and time (see, e.g., Beissinger, 2002; Hutter, 2014; Kriesi, Koopmans, Duyvendak, & Giugni, 1995; Rohlinger & Earl, 2018; Soule & Earl, 2005; Tarrow, 1989). It consists of a systematic search of reports of protest actions, usually on quality newspapers, but sometimes also using other sources, both off-line (e.g., archives, yearbooks) and, more recently, online (e.g., online news portals). In spite of criticism, usually coming from qualitative-oriented scholars (Goodwin

& Jasper, 1999), this method has become quite popular among students of social movements and, more specifically, among proponents of the political process approach, in tracing levels of mobilization as well as trends over time.

Moreover, PEA, a foundational method, produced “offsprings” (Hutter, 2014). One of these, political claims analysis (PCA), expands the method in a number of ways (see Hutter, 2014; Koopmans & Statham, 1999, for methodological discussions). More specifically, PCA goes beyond the more traditional PEA in three ways. First, it takes into account other actors apart from social movement actors, including state actors. Second, it looks both at protest forms and at more conventional forms such as verbal statements (in fact, this method most often stresses the latter), including policy decisions. Third, it goes much further than PEA insofar as it does not simply count the occurrences of a given movement or, at best, code the general topic addressed by the mobilization, but it also examines in more detail the content of what is claimed by the actor, in terms of a subject–action–addressee–action–object sequence: An actor, the subject, undertakes some sort of action in the public sphere to get another actor, the addressee, to do something regarding a third actor, the object. In this respect, PCA can be considered as a combination of “quantitative” PEA and “qualitative” content analysis (Koopmans & Statham, 1999).

Extending PEA at an organizational, meso level, protest case analysis (Kousis 1998, 1999) was developed to provide systematic data on community-organized collective initiatives (cases) of environmental activism, simulating to an extent protest campaigns (Rucht & Koopmans, 2002). Relying on quality newspapers and journals, the approach offers a wide-ranging list of claim-related codes and extends the action repertoire to include nonprotest activities (e.g., visible claims), while also coding the responses of the challenged groups (Kousis, 2005, 2017).

Relying on newspapers as their main source, the works listed above allowed for the systematic study of collective action, covering longer time periods, not offered by other methods such as case studies, surveys, or qualitative interviews. However, newspaper sources have their limitations because they usually provide restricted and often filtered information on social movement actions (Fillieule & Jiménez, 2007). This has led researchers to avoid depending on one or two newspapers, use a “blanketing approach” utilizing multiple available sources (Beissinger, 2002; Diani & Kousis, 2014), and, if possible, also use archival material or alternative media sources (Tilly, 1995). Adjusting these methods to the new media environment of the past decade, social movement research has been shifting from using quality newspapers to using online sources. Digital media has also become a primary source, in addition to newspapers.

This new research focus responds to the increasing use of online media by SMOs aiming to promote their cause (Earl, 2013, p. 9). According to Earl (2013, pp. 13–16), online mobilization has been studied mainly through the following four approaches: case studies, hyperlinks of SMOs, popularity websites, and off-line sampling combined with coding online content. The case studies approach offers ample information, usually on notable SMOs via their websites, but case studies are not representative of the related populations. A second group of studies examines sets of websites connected to key SMOs or key websites via hyperlinks by identifying a single or a few starting sites and in a snowball mode constructing a larger network of sites by

following links from the initial one(s) (Lusher & Ackland, 2011). A third approach uses larger sets of high-profile websites based on popularity criteria, thus introducing serious methodological and sampling biases (Earl & Kimport, 2013). In a fourth approach, sampling SMOs is carried out using off-line directories while the analysis is done on the respective organizational websites; for example, Stein (2009) uses comprehensive off-line directories that represent the majority of established and active organizations but are not as inclusive of informal and less resourced groups.

Given the selection biases in the above approaches, Earl (2013) offers a new approach not exclusively relying on SMOs, that of “reachable websites,” to examine the extent to which protest-related websites use technologies that help to either subvert or reinforce organizer/participant distinctions; using random samples of websites drawn from “reachable populations” of websites on specific topics, researchers identify the set of “reachable sites” that users could locate if they were not given a URL in advance (Earl, 2006).

Issues of sample representativeness in the four popular approaches using online sources (Earl 2013) call for website search strategies that need to be more sensitive for websites containing information on representative collective-action organizations—that do not exclude, for example, unpopular or less networked civic organizations. Furthermore, coding their organizational features in such approaches does not focus extensively on their action repertoires (e.g., contentious and noncontentious activities) or on their organizational aims and frames. Thus, there is a need for an approach offering systematic, representative, large-scale (e.g., cross-national), internet-based data on these features of collective-action organizations for a meso level unit of analysis, extending PEA and PCA.

Following the above, the article will present the main attributes of AOA, outline the related data construction process, illustrate two applications of the new method in two cross-national projects, and discuss its strengths as well as the areas that need improvement.

## **The Approach: Action Organization Analysis Through Hubs-Retrieved Websites**

Our proposed methodological approach for the systematic study of collective action organizations, AOA, uses organizational websites and is founded on two considerations and premises. First, it is committed to the protest event orientation of previous research (following Tilly, 1978, 1986) because it is interested in the systematic tracing of action repertoires and organizational features at the meso level. Second, it sees the merits of digital activism, and more specifically of those activist initiatives that offer online sources, including hub websites of formal and informal AOs. This type of digital activism can be seen as “participatory politics” (Cohen, Kahne, Bowyer, Middaugh, & Rogowski, 2012), or “prosumption” (Earl, 2013), offering citizens a way of surpassing conventional media structures and providing more independent forms of political expression or carrying out collective action online, such as AO websites as well as hubs of AO websites.

Recent research in the LIVEWHAT and TransSOL projects—to be presented in the next section—has shown the following advantages of using such sources. First, compared with newspapers or archives, classically used in PEA and PCA, the use of hubs-retrieved websites in AOA offers an optimal coverage of action repertoires (nonprotest and protest), as well as sufficient information on the main features and frames of collective action organizations at the transnational, national, regional, and local levels. Even though less resourced organizations do not take full advantage of all the web functions because of their socioeconomic limitations (Stein, 2009), they nevertheless do use organizational websites to the extent that they can and become more visible through related hubs, in contrast to other sources. Many AO hub websites are created by activist groups to facilitate networking and to promote their activities.

Second, the new approach provides live directories, which are usually up-to-date and more inclusive of informal as well as formal organizations than conventional sources, such as newspapers, official registers, or archives.<sup>3</sup> Third, in comparison with the more selective focus of previous online-based approaches, the hub website approach offers large numbers of links on AOs and an approximate, rough “population” from which samples can be drawn, randomized, and cleaned for website/AO coding, and also for subsequent online surveys and qualitative interviews. In sum, the use of hubs-retrieved websites surpasses the disadvantages of conventional media and the more selective use of online sources proposed by previous research. Compared with the major online approaches described above, the hubs-based approach is designed to limit selection biases while resting on as wide a coverage as possible of activist-constructed organizational websites, on specific collective-action sectors. From this pool, the researcher can draw a random sample of AOs based on the desired selection criteria. The approach therefore offers unmediated information on organizational and action details that allows for a comprehensive and systematic study of AOs.

This approach is suitable for the study of civil society organizations, especially for students of SMOs, with research questions focused on the organizational structure, collective identity, frames, constituency groups, action repertoires, and aims of collective action organizations. Table 1 offers a comparative view of the four methods in terms of their unit of analysis as well as their coverage of the actors involved, action forms, and aims or values. It is important to note that the latter three methods are to some extent all based on PEA (Tilly, 1978). Therefore, they all cover protest actions, but they expand the focus to cover other types of (noncontentious) activities and additional features as underlined in the table.

Our AOA method, relying primarily on hubs-retrieved websites, uses the organization as its unit of analysis precisely because their mission is to list the AOs active in a particular organizational field, and thus to provide online access to these AOs. The method maps, samples, and also codes information at the organizational level following PEA. According to our understanding, an AO is a formal or informal group or organization (e.g., producer–consumer initiatives, cooperatives, self-help groups, non-governmental organizations) engaging in strategic contentious and noncontentious actions in the public sphere with claims on their beneficiaries or participants (e.g., in reference to their economic or social/cultural well-being). These organizations are

**Table 1.** Action Organization Analysis Compared With Related Methods

Features	Method			
	Protest Event Analysis	Protest Case Analysis	Political Claims Analysis	Action Organization Analysis
Unit of analysis	Protest Event	Protest Case	Political Claim	Action Organization
Actors involved	Challenging groups, Challenged groups	Challenging groups, Challenged groups, Supporting groups	Subject, Addressee, Object	Activist Groups, Constituency groups, Collaborators, partners or supporting groups
Action forms	Protest	Protest, formal complaints, Court route	Policy decisions, verbal statements, Protest	Claims, Direct/ Solidarity and Protest actions, Court route, Media actions
Aims and frames	Protest demands	Protest demands, proposals to solve the problem	Frames	Aims, Frames, Values

neither operated nor exclusively supported by mainstream economic and political organizations—that is, corporate, state, or EU-related agencies.

### *The Four Phases*

Operationally, the AOA method can be divided into four main phases. Phases 1 and 2 involve the construction of the extended sample aiming to resemble a “population,” from which, in Phase 3, a random sample is drawn and cleaned for manual coding. More specifically, Phase 1 involves the identification of the “hub-websites” of AOs (and secondarily of individual websites) on the topic under study, by the researcher, through systematic Google searches and the respective literature. These hubs encompass a wide sample approaching a population, which is used as a base to draw the random sample of AOs for coding purposes. Thus, the compilations of regional and thematic hubs are used as sources, similar to the way in which newspapers are treated in PEA, protest case analysis, or PCA. In the case of a large number of hub-websites and limited time and resources, a selection of hubs may be chosen and ranked according to the desired criteria, such as inclusiveness and diversity in terms of geographic spread, coverage of different action types, and the number of websites they contain.

In Phase 2, the hubs are scraped to identify organizational data. The entry point for the analysis is a publicly accessible hub-websites containing links to other sites. Since there is no single common format for these hubs, each one of them requires customized scraping; in some cases, the list of sites in a hub is given in a table; in other cases, there are drop-down lists that reveal information about these sites. The work requires skills in programming with (a) web-accessible resources and HTML parsers (required for the extraction of information), (b) string patterns (required for cleaning the data), and (c) files (required for storing the results). Thus, the following sequential steps are taken (see Marketakis et al., 2015, 2016):

1. Extracting/scraping of (a) the organizational websites from the hub websites and of (b) data from the organizational websites (including brief description, URL, contact details, etc.)
2. Cleaning of the extracted/scraped data, for example, by eliminating repeated entries and adding missing information
3. Aggregating the data from multiple hub and subhub websites as well as from individual websites identified outside the hubs and merging them into comprehensive lists at the level selected by the researcher (e.g., national).

Preview checking on specified criteria (e.g., geographic spread, coverage of different action types) can be carried out by the researcher to check for available attributes or the representativeness of the merged data from the extracted organizational websites.

In Phase 3, the coders randomize and construct the sample (e.g., 500 AOs) from the merged lists by applying inclusion criteria such as the type of organizers and activities or the time period of the organization (see applications in the following section). AOA as a process of mapping is flexible and allows for various sample types to be used—not only random but also stratified sampling, quota sampling, or others.

In Phase 4, the coders are trained, the codebook is finalized, reliability checks are carried out, and coding begins. This is a key phase because it allows for the systematic tracing of the structural as well as the framing features of AOs following PEA, but with more information (compared to newspapers) from an unmediated source, i.e. the organization's own website. The AOA codebook is constructed following a series of pretests with different subsamples with cleaned organizational websites. Following and extending the PEA and PCA codebooks, it can consist of six main groups of variables related to the coding of AOs: the online media profile; territorial features; organizational profile, activities, and constituency groups (beneficiaries/participants); aims; solidarity orientation and partners; and supplementary actions and frames.

Based on the above, AOA is the first method that can be used to map, sample, and code AOs using hub-websites. It can also be combined with other methods, such as an online survey with AO organizers and in-depth interviews with both organizers and beneficiaries or participants of AOs in a mixed-methods, multiphase research, using similar random or purposive subsamples from the cleaned lists of organizational websites.<sup>4</sup> In the following section, we illustrate the AOA method as it was developed and applied in the two EU-funded research projects.

## **Applying Action Organization Analysis: Studying Alternative Action Organizations and Transnational Solidarity Organizations Across Europe in Times of Crises<sup>5</sup>**

Informal and formal collective action organizations in European countries aimed to cope with the negative effects of crises during the past decade, not only those related to the global financial crisis of 2007 and the subsequent austerity measures, the shrinking welfare sectors, the growth of precarity, decreasing safety nets and surfacing political concerns, but also those caused by the recent refugee crisis, especially in 2015. AOA was developed to address the aims of the LIVEWHAT and TransSOL projects on collective responses to hard times and crises in Europe through alternative action organizations (AAOs) and transnational solidarity organizations (TSOs), respectively.

AOA was initially created in the framework of the LIVEWHAT project to study AAOs in the context of the economic crisis, that is, alternative initiatives and solidarity practices during the years of the crisis (2007–2015) in France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.<sup>6</sup> Identifying adequate sources that would allow for the mapping and systematic study of AAOs at the national and cross-national levels generated challenges for the researchers since sources allowing for systematic empirical research at the national level are difficult to locate. Using case studies, secondary data, as well as online sources through quantitative and qualitative methods, studies have covered either specific issues and initiatives, or local-level case studies (Andretta & Guidi, 2017; Baumgarten, 2017; Cruz et al., 2017; Papadaki and Kalogeraki 2017; Forno & Graziano, 2014, Petropoulou, 2013; Giugni 2010); therefore, such methodological approaches are considered incompatible with the project's aim (Kousis & Paschou, 2017; Kousis et al 2016).

We developed the AOA approach following unsuccessful trials with PCA<sup>7</sup> because it provided a more comprehensive coverage, even of informal initiatives. National newspaper reports or local newspaper reports were explored, but offered very limited inclusion of such solidarity initiatives. By contrast, hub-websites incorporate a considerable number of AAO websites, including rural or less resourced groups and therefore offered an approximate population that was used not only for the coding of AAOs, but also in the subsequent online surveys and qualitative interviews with representatives of AAOs.

AOA has also been used in the TransSOL project,<sup>8</sup> aiming at monitoring, analyzing and assessing innovative practices of transnational solidarity in response to the economic and refugee crises in eight countries, France, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, for the 2007 to 2016 period.<sup>9</sup> The teams faced similar difficulties in tracing adequate sources providing information on transnational solidarity across three fields: unemployment, disability, and migration. First, they located alternative online news portals<sup>10</sup> for each country that could potentially be used to trace such mentions, following a PEA-related approach. However, attempts to do so proved unsuccessful given the very long, extended list of keywords involved in capturing “transnational solidarity” mentions, the different periods covered by the news

portals, as well as the technical problems with search processes related to the different news portals. Subsequently, the teams turned to a mesolevel unit of analysis that would allow for the tracing of TSOs and their activities, based on the hub website AOA approach.

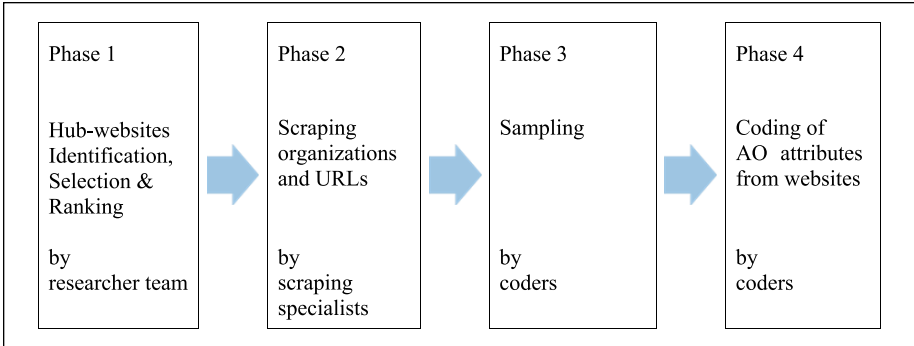
To meet our research aims in both projects, we chose a meso unit of analysis, the *action organization*, to study AAOs and TSOs, i.e., formal or informal (nonstate) groups or organizations carrying out alternative to dominant socioeconomic and cultural practices with visible beneficiaries or participants and claims on their economic and social well-being, including basic needs, health, and lifestyles, as depicted through the AO website/online sources.<sup>11</sup> Visible in the public sphere, they involve solidarity-based exchanges and cooperative structures, such as barter clubs and networks, credit unions, ethical banks, time banks, alternative social currency, cooperatives, citizen self-help groups, solidarity networks covering urgent/basic human needs, and social enterprises (Kousis & Paschou, 2017; Lahusen, Kousis, Zschache, & Loukakis, 2018).

The application of AOA in its four phases, as shown in Figure 1, is presented below for both projects, with illustrations in the online appendix.

### *Phase 1: Hubs Identification, Selection, and Ranking*

During the first phase, the research teams of the LIVEWHAT and TransSOL projects identified hub websites of AAOs and TSOs, respectively, based on literature reviews, collaborative preparation among the teams, and pilot testing, following a common set of guidelines provided by the leading team. For each of the countries, they located hub-websites that were operating at any time during the period of the crisis (2007-2015 and 2007-2016, respectively) on the basis of systematic Google searches, supplementing these with independent websites—especially if the number of hubs for some types of activities/organizations was limited—by crawling the web or through searches based on selected keywords related to the fields of interest. The teams used similar keywords translated from English in their home language. During this process, they also located subhubs specialized in specific types of activities or covering a specific geographic area.

Table 3A in the online appendix presents the coder guidelines for keywords related to types of activities and organizations that were used in the Internet searches for hub websites. At this stage, the selections were more inclusive in order to incorporate all potential AAOs and TSOs. Given the similarity of focus between the alternative actions in LIVEWHAT and the innovative, reflective transnational solidarity actions in TransSOL, both teams searched for hub websites that centered on specific types of activities and organizations. Given TransSOL's focus on three fields, these hub searches were field specific; that is, they centered on “migrants and minority organizations,” “unemployed and precarity organizations,” and “disabled and health organizations.” In both projects, the hubs searches aimed to locate organizations with alternative activities related to urgent needs (e.g., food, health, housing), alternative consumption/lifestyles, the alternative economy, energy and the environment, civic media and communications, self-organized spaces, as well as art and culture. The teams were guided on how to perform optimal search engine queries in order to maximize their



**Figure 1.** Action Organization Analysis (AOA) based on hubs-retrieved websites: The process

identification of appropriate hubs (and avoid excluding potential AOs) for the specific topics, regions, and types of organizations and activities of interest.

The hub and subhub websites<sup>12</sup> identified for each country (Table 4A in the online appendix depicts these for Greece) provided large numbers of URLs of potential AOs (see Tables 5A and 6A in the online appendix) and an extensive coverage of the main categories of alternative and transnational solidarity activities of AAOs and TSOs, respectively, for the two projects.

The teams selected and ranked their identified hub/subhub websites according to three basic criteria: (a) inclusiveness in terms of national coverage and diversity of alternative activities (rather than specialization in specific types), (b) the number of related websites, and (c) coverage of as many types of alternative activities as possible.

The national teams provided a list of final, ranked hub/subhubs, which reflected those best representing alternative/innovative transnational solidarity actions in their own country. The subcategories across fields (e.g., housing, food, social medicine, and education under “urgent needs”) were used to make the Internet search easier. The teams also provided an accompanying description explaining and justifying their final selection and ranking procedure in terms of process, steps and logic.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, in a series of trilateral communications between the University of Crete coordinating team, each national team, and the extracting/scraping specialists,<sup>14</sup> the teams were guided not only to ensure that the hubs selected do show up among the first results of a Google search but also include subhubs that relate to actions not mentioned by other identified hubs/subhubs.

### *Phase 2: Website Extraction From Hubs/Subhubs and Preview of the ‘Population’*

Following the above, the national teams sent their final selections to specialists in scraping websites to retrieve the ‘population’ of AOs listed in the hubs. In the

LIVEWHAT project, where the method was applied for the first time and there were indications that large populations would be expected for each country, given time and resources were limited, the data retrieval specialists suggested adopting a step-by-step procedure, starting with the top-prioritized hubs/subhubs before deciding on how to proceed after the retrieval of the topmost hubs/subhubs in the first step. The second and third steps of the procedure could follow, within the available time frame, to cover as many of the prioritized hubs/subhubs as possible.

Given the above, LIVEWHAT's nine teams allocated the selected, ranked hubs/subhubs into a three-step selection process that would guide the work of the engineers. Step 1 listed in rank order the top national-level hubs, aiming to offer national coverage, that is, to provide the most inclusive top-ranked, multiple-action oriented national hubs, and if they were not available (as in the case of Poland, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom), to offer top-ranked subhubs covering different action types, as well as lists of specific websites. In Step 2, each national team ranked the first or second action-type subhubs; this step included both hubs and subhubs, with priority given to subhubs covering multiple-action types (the most inclusive here were on Spain and France), if available, at the national level. In Step 3, the teams ranked subhubs by region/locality and/or action type; this set included all the remaining ranked hub and subhub websites as well as independent websites, covering either the regional/local level or action types. The scraping process started with the first set (Step 1) for each country and incorporated all of the hubs/subhubs of the three steps within the set time period (Marketakis et al., 2015).

Given this experience, the three-step procedure was not followed in the TransSOL project because the number of estimated websites was smaller than that in LIVEWHAT. All the hub/subhub websites identified for each of the three specialized fields were used to retrieve TSO websites (Marketakis et al., 2016).

Based on the analysis of the above hubs/subhubs and where needed, on individual websites, the process was carried out by specialists (Marketakis et al., 2015, 2016), who (a) extracted the selected information on organizations and groups from the hubs and stored them for further analysis (see Table 5A in the online appendix); (b) merged the produced lists into one, removing double entries; and (c) downloaded the available online content of the organizations. This process led to the production of one data table for each country that offered the merged listing of the population of potential AOs (as described in Marketakis et al., 2015, 2016). Our rough, unclean 'populations' consisted of approximately 50,000 and 30,000 organizational websites, in LIVEWHAT and TransSOL respectively. This data set was used to construct the selected, clean, random sample of approximately 500 AAOs and 300 TSOs, respectively, for each country. Organizations without either individual websites or hub connections were excluded. Data were scraped when possible (see Table 5A).

To preview our populations, we checked the national distributions of these organizations using the available extracted zipcodes (see related map at <http://arcg.is/1GqgEKK> for a preview of organizational URLs on Greece,  $N=2,867$ ). In general, these distributions tend to spread according to the distribution of the population. That is, they are more concentrated in areas with larger populations, such as urban areas; however, as

seen in the map of the link above, they do offer coverage of both urban and rural areas, which is not often found with off-line conventional sources. Overall, our preview results allow us to consider that we have approximate, national “populations” with fairly adequate national distributions of all our organizational websites and to proceed with the construction of our random samples, following cleaning with a common set of guidelines, and criteria of selection tailored to the needs of each project.

### ***Phase 3: Randomizing and Selecting Action Organizations***

Sample construction followed using the final lists. It involved randomization, selection, and cleaning. Random, cleaned, national samples of 500 AAOs and 300 TSOs in LIVEWHAT and TransSOL, respectively, were selected from the population of national, hubs-retrieved websites (as presented in Tables 5A and 6A, respectively). Following the randomization of the lists, common criteria of selection were applied across all the teams in each project. Both random and cleaned samples included only organizational websites that were active at any time within the period of the recent global economic crisis (i.e., 2007-2015 and 2007-2016 in the two projects, respectively). This meant leaving out state (central)-related organizations, EU-related organizations, and corporate-related organizations as sole organizers of AO actions.

Our LIVEWHAT aggregate random sample totaled 4,297 AAOs across the nine countries, while in TransSOL, the random sample reached 2,408 TSOs across the eight countries.<sup>15</sup> In TransSOL, the 300 randomly chosen innovative TSOs per country were selected across the three fields of migration, disability, and unemployment (100 per field) following our selection criteria.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Phase 4. Coding AOs***

A series of systematic pretests, coders’ training workshops and e-sessions, as well as reliability testing were organized and coordinated by the leading team at the University of Crete. Different selected subsamples of English-language websites were used for the pretests and coders’ training, with the participation of all coders from all the national teams, in both projects. This led to the development and refinement of the codebook’s categories to enable coding of the widely diverse AO types, their repertoire of activities and their features, based on the information available on their organizational websites. Online spreadsheets were used for a live communication on coding issues between the leading team and all the coders. Coding was carried out on an online platform centrally administered by a member of the leading team.<sup>17</sup>

The codebooks in both LIVEWHAT<sup>18</sup> and TransSOL<sup>19</sup> focus on the following sets of variables, with minor differentiations based on the aims of the research. The first group offers information on the AO’s media profile, including its online media outlets (facebook, blog, twitter, hub) and their updates, its territorial features (address, contact details, and country), the language(s) used, a brief description of the organization (who does what, for whom, and where), the starting year of the media outlet and structural features of the website (e.g., action calendars, the finance section, legal and other

reports). The second group of variables provides information on the organization's profile. Detailed codes are offered on the AO's network and spatial features, the starting year and month of the AO itself (and its website), its structural features (ranging from more formal to more informal), and the types of AOs. The third group of variables offers information on the repertoire of (noncontentious, direct) activities the AO engages in (e.g., related to covering food, health and housing needs), as well as on its constituency groups (beneficiaries or participants). The fourth group focuses on the overall aim and strategic orientation of the AO. This includes the aims, goals, or ethos of the organization; the proposed route to achieve its aims; the type of strategic orientation; its calls and invitees; and its partners (including transnational partners). The fifth group of variables provides information on the supplementary (noncontentious) actions of the AO. Supplementary action forms or public events include verbal or written statements, dissemination and promotional actions such as public reports, parliamentary debates or interventions, as well as political pressure other than lobbying, court route actions (litigations) and legal procedures, as well as protest actions. Again, the spatial level of action is also coded. The sixth and final set of variables deals with the AO's framing of the actions undertaken, that is, the values on which these actions draw to get their fundamental meaning, based on the related website text. The value codes are organized in groups (e.g., humanitarian or philanthropic, rights-based ethics, empowerment and participation, diversity and sustainability, economic virtues, community and order).

## Conclusion

In his seminal work on action repertoires, Tilly (1986) showed how the means people have at their disposal are historically determined and that they have changed over time. In the past few decades, new organizations and forms of contention, as well as the new media they create to promote themselves, have appeared within and beyond the EU and global regions. Alternative and innovative solidarity organizations extend the action repertoire of social movements. Citizens can draw from a wider "toolkit" to make their voices heard in their efforts to endure day-to-day difficulties and challenges during hard times. These new forms of doing politics reflect a more direct involvement in practices where people act themselves rather than asking someone else to act; they also reflect an (infra)political dimension (Giugni & Grasso, this issue; Zamponi & Bosi, this issue). It is, in part, precisely such a combination of political and nonpolitical aims that makes the proposed methodology particularly suited to studying AOs, compared with PEA and PCA, which focus on the political dimension of collective actors. Furthermore, other than protest case analysis, these other methods are event or claim based and therefore inadequate to capture the organizational dimension of collective actors, although they allow us to do so to some extent.

AOA, therefore, is particularly well placed for the study of collective-action initiatives and practices. Furthermore, this approach may be useful for organizational analysis more generally, in addition to (or replacing) surveys or interviews, as it takes advantage of the rich, updated<sup>20</sup> information provided on organizational websites, on activities,

constituency groups, sponsors, or frames, especially when covering wider spaces and time periods—for example, national or regional levels and periods longer than 5 years. The articles presented in this special issue analyze the organizational website data produced with AOA in the LIVEWHAT project and thereby portray its potential contribution to the study of collective action. The method offers rich online data coded to cover a wide range of issues (Cristancho & Loukakis, this issue; Kalogeraki et al., this issue; Loukakis et al., this issue; Uba & Kousis, this issue) of AOs operating in the past decade, but may have been founded in earlier periods (see Figures 2A and 3A in the online appendix).

Our work in the two projects also reveals the challenges we faced using hub websites and the steps we took to resolve them, which can help future AOA researchers. Hubs are third parties, mediating between organizations and their AO users, and therefore their AO selections may be biased (e.g., systematically leaving out smaller organizations or certain types of activities). That is why we checked and supplemented them with additional (independent of hubs) organizational websites, aiming for representativeness (see Table 4A on hubs and independent websites, and related map). The strength of the AOA approach became even more evident when we carried out a supplementary online survey with the random, national samples of 500 AAOs but had a general response of approximately 13% (with relatively large national divergence, as seen in the related reports).

Considering all of the above, using online hub, websites, and supplementing them when needed with independent AO websites, avoids the limitations of mediated offline sources (e.g., public registers and official reports, news coverage by conventional mass media) in at least three respects. First, it provides “unfiltered” information from organizational websites established by activists. The blanketing approach allows for better sample representativeness of online sources through an initial construction of a rough ‘population.’ Second, online sources include not only formal but also informal organizations and offer more updated information than other public sources. Although resource-rich organizations may have more developed websites, AOA allows us to have the best available information on an extensive number of informal and grassroots organizations at the national level, which is not usually available from other comprehensive sources used by scholars in the area. Third, online sources facilitate the inclusion of the latest-established groups, such as migration-related organizations appearing during the refugee crisis of 2015, as well as more informal groups such as the Indignados, who are not easily located in public directories or formal lists.

Future research could build on and extend AOA to the new opportunities provided by online sources and the focus on organizations. Toward this end, nine national teams will apply and extend AOA to also cover the networking dimensions of youth-related organizations, in the context of the ongoing EU-funded EURYKA project.<sup>21</sup>

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## Notes

1. Specifically, Work Package 6 (“Alternative Forms of Resilience in Times of Crises”) of the LIVEWHAT project (<http://www.livewhat.unige.ch/>) and Work Package 2 (“Innovative Practices of Transnational Solidarity”) of the TransSOL project (<http://transsol.eu/>); Maria Kousis was Work Package Leader in both work packages; Marco Giugni was Coordinator of LIVEWHAT (European Commission [EC] FP7, <http://www.livewhat.unige.ch/>), and Christian Lahusen was Coordinator of TransSOL (EC Horizon 2020, <http://transsol.eu/>). We wish to thank the two reviewers of this paper for their constructive comments.
2. See the related reports of the two EC research projects at [http://www.unige.ch/livewhat/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/LIVEWHAT\\_D6.4.pdf](http://www.unige.ch/livewhat/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/LIVEWHAT_D6.4.pdf) and <http://transsol.eu/files/2016/12/Integrated-Report-on-Reflective-Forms-of-Transnational-Solidarity.pdf> as well as Marketakis et al., 2015, 2016.
3. See the related project reports above.
4. See [http://www.unige.ch/livewhat/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/LIVEWHAT\\_D6.4.pdf](http://www.unige.ch/livewhat/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/LIVEWHAT_D6.4.pdf).
5. This section draws from the integrated reports of the two EC projects; for more details, see the respective method chapters. The diligence, enthusiasm, collaborative spirit and work of all the national teams and the coders (for LIVEWHAT: Niklas Biada, Lorenzo Bosi, Sofia Breitenstein, Ana Covaciu, Valentina Holecz, Eva Hoxha, Konstantinos Kogakis, Simon Magnusson, Sabina Monza, Ewan Munro, Foued Nasri, Janina Petelczyc, Vinicius Ribeiro, Cecilia Santilly, Thalia Siourda, Andrian Stoetzel, Elena Tabacchi, Luke Temple, Kevin Wolf, Lorenzo Zamponi, and Ewa Zielinska; for TransSOL: Nicolas Bovio, Giulia Colombini, Carlo De Nuzzo, Eva Fernández Guzmán, Kostas Kanellopoulos, Effie Katsouli, Konstantinos Kogakis, Franchitto Luana, Nicola Maggini, Tom Montgomery, Deniz Neriman Duru, Janina Petelczyc, Thomas Spejlberg Sejersen, Andrian Stoetzel, Klaudyna Szczupak, Kevin Wolf and Ulrike Zschache), especially Angelos Loukakis and Nikos Kapelonis of the leading team, are gratefully acknowledged. The productive collaboration with Professor Tzitzikas and Yannis Marketakis as well as the quality of the work by their teams are highly appreciated and gratefully acknowledged.
6. For more information, see <http://www.livewhat.unige.ch/>
7. Incorporating variables to code alternative activities in the project’s PCA codebook proved unsuccessful, even though three to five national newspapers were used in each country; for example, about 10 out of 1,000 claims made reference to AAO activities in Greece. Camilo Crisancho’s views and helpful guidance, especially on the first decisive steps of the new hubs’ approach, were important and are deeply appreciated.
8. Funded by the EC under Horizon 2020 (Grant Agreement No. 649435) (<http://transsol.eu/>).
9. See <http://transsol.eu/files/2016/12/Integrated-Report-on-Reflective-Forms-of-Transnational-Solidarity.pdf> as well as Marketakis et al., 2016.

10. These included, <https://linksunten.indymedia.org/en>, <http://www.mediascitoyens.eu/>, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/>, <http://tvxs.gr/>, <http://www.ilcambiamento.it/>, <http://lewica.pl/>, <http://sn.dk>, and <http://www.infosperber.ch/>.
11. See related codebooks for more details.
12. See the methods chapters in the related reports.
13. This was useful because one of the teams had located a much higher number of hubs than the others, which could not be processed given our limited time and funding sources.
14. Marketakis et al. (2015, 2016).
15. About 500 in each country, with only one minor deviation of 333.
16. See the related report.
17. Nikos Kapelonis.
18. <http://www.unige.ch/livewhat/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Deliverable-6.1.pdf> (LIVEWHAT D6.1, 2016).
19. See the Work Package 2 Codebook in the appendix of <http://transsol.eu/files/2016/12/Integrated-Report-on-Reflective-Forms-of-Transnational-Solidarity.pdf>.
20. Or traceable inactivity of an AO.
21. See Work Package 3 of the EC H2020 project “Reinventing Democracy in Europe: Youth Doing Politics in Times of Increasing Inequalities” (<https://www.unige.ch/sciences-societe/curyka/home/>).

## Supplemental Material

The online supplementary material is available at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/suppl/10.1177/0002764218768846>

## ORCID iD

Marco Giugni <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7210-339X>

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## Author Biographies

**Maria Kousis** is Director of the University of Crete Research Centre for the Humanities, the Social and Education Sciences and professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Crete. Her research centers on social change and contentious politics, environmental politics, bioethics and society, as well as on the socioeconomic and political impacts of crises.

**Marco Giugni** is a professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations and director of the Institute of Citizenship Studies (InCite) at the University of Geneva, Switzerland. His research interests include social movements and collective action, immigration and ethnic relations, unemployment, and social exclusion.

**Christian Lahusen** holds a Chair of Sociology at the Faculty of Arts at Siegen University. His research is devoted to the analysis of political participation, civil society, European integration, and social theory.