



On September 20th, three thousand miles away from Liberty Plaza-Zuccotti Park's post-occupation name the two founders of 'Occupy Wall Street' wrote a manifesto in the form of a letter to President Obama.

Occupy the World: The Emergence of an International Movement

Dünyayı 'İşgal Et': Uluslararası bir Hareketin Doğuşu

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Özet

Para piyasalarındaki yolsuzluklara karşı Eylül 2011 tarihinde New York'un Zuccotti Park'ında baş gösteren Occupy (İşgal) hareketi ikinci yaşına girerken, tüm dünya da yeni şekillerde zuhur eden kitlesel protestolarla tanışmış oldu. Mayıs 2013'teki #OccupyTürkiye ve hemen sonrasında #OccupyBrazil beraberinde Bosna ve Bulgaristan'daki "occupy" (işgal) hareketleriyle de dünya yeni işgal hareketlerine tanıklık etti, ve bu hareketler ulus devletlerdeki derin temsili demokrasi krizinin henüz son bulmadığını göstermiş oldu. Bu çalışma farklı coğrafyalarda ortaya çıkan emsal koşulları yeniden yorumlayarak ve bu küresel hareketin, yani Occupy Wall Street'in (Wall Street'i İşgal Et), öncülerini irdeleyerek söz konusu uluslararası hareketin nasıl ortaya çıktığını incelemektedir. İkinci bölümde ise; bölgesel ölçekli başlayıp uluslararası boyutta büyük çaplı protestolara dönüşen Occupy hareketinin nasıl yayıldığı örneklerle açıklanmaktadır. Özellikle bu dijital çağda etkili ve net bir ifadeyle oluşturulan bilgilendirici bir etiket (hashtag), dünyada küresel direnişin markası hâline gelen Occupy ile çok daha kolay tespit edilebilmektedir.

While the North African continent went through different series of spring uprisings, Europe was shaken by the so-called Euro crisis, which hit mostly the South European countries. In Spain, youth employment reached its highest number. Due to untrustworthy politicians and their parties as well as the absence of labor unions, various digital networks were organized by worried citizens.

Abstract

Celebrating the 2nd anniversary of the Occupy movement, which started in the fall of 2011 in New York's Zuccotti Park against the corrupt financial system, the world became acquainted with new forms of mass protests. With #Occupy-Turkey in May 2013 and shortly after #Occupy-Brazil, as well as occupy uprisings in Bosnia and Bulgaria in the same year the world counted new movements in the history of Occupy and showed that the deep crisis of representative democracy in nation states not ended yet. The sheer diversity of events, which swept from the periphery (Middle East, Greece, Spain, Great Britain) and reached the center under the umbrella of the so-called "Occupy-movement", circulated again equipped with a powerful language ready to be heard all over the world. The present essay examines the birth of this international movement by re-constructing the mosaic of the different events in different geographies. The second part illustrates the spreading of Occupy, started with regional through international large-scale protests. Especially in the digital age, where the role of image and media composed of a powerful verbal and visual language, Occupy Wall Street seemed as the culmination of a global process and the new brand for global resistance all over the world.

Keywords: *Occupy movements, occupy Wall Street, global resistance*

On September 20th 2011, three thousand miles away from Liberty Plaza—Zuccotti Park's post-

occupation name – the two founders of 'Occupy Wall Street' wrote a manifesto to President Obama in letter form. In the six hundred word manifesto, it seemed as if they gave answers to the global and current questions of all kind of political, economic and social grievances. "Exercise your right to peaceably assemble; occupy public space; create a process to address the problems we face; and generate solutions accessible to everyone." Knowing that the two started something absolutely new, they even guided other generations and gave the movement a label, which can easily be adopted and automatically associated, be it in Tahrir or in Taksim.

Prelude to 'Occupy'

Indeed, when Kalle Lasn chose the first suggested name for the new website in June 2011, which soon became the movement's online headquarters, he selected Occupy Wall Street.org, instead of Acampada Wall Street or Take Wall Street. Although the physical *occupation* took place almost three months later, 'occupy' was born – leastwise digitally. Today Occupy Wall Street occupies literally the label Occupy, which is employed to a range of outrages and offers an inspiration for thousands of social activists all over the world. Yet Occupy also had its inspiring moments and its origin as a 'network movement' can be traced to the Arab Uprisings and Spanish *Indignadas*.

Before the New Yorkers gathered together in public space around Wall Street in September 2011, the Adbusters magazine wrote that there

was a “spirit of this fresh tactic, a fusion of Tahrir with the acampadas of Spain.”¹ In turn, the Spanish indignadas, camping in the main squares of cities around the country in May 2011, were pointing to Iceland, where the protests against the corrupt financial system had been held since 2009. Likewise the mass demonstrators in Cairo’s Tahrir square looked to Tunisia, where the chain of revolutions was initiated in December 2010 and went down in history as “Arab Spring”. To get to Zuccotti Park, we need to first travel to the Middle East and Southern Europe. Following the chronological line, the Arab uprising is located prior to the wave of Spanish protests in mid-May 2011, followed by mass demonstrations covered as ‘occupy’ movements including Occupy Wall Street (OWS).

From the Arab Spring to the *Indignadas* movement to Occupy Wall Street

The notion of comparison of the divergent mass protests in the beginning of 2011 makes general claims almost impossible. Even the protests in the Arab World, some of them still in progress shows us the specificity of these events. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that global images from young protesters in their fight against all kinds of injustice, irrelevant if it is Tahrir or Barcelona inspired, encouraged and refreshed others.

Thus, on January 25, 2011, the National Police Day in Egypt, tens of thousands gathered in Cairo’s symbolic central square of Tahrir (which means Liberation) to protest in front of the ministry of Interior. Authoritarianism, oppression, injustice, poverty, unemployment, corruption and police brutality were just some of the list. However, the actual spark that ignited the Egyptian insurgents came from Tunisia, showing in a bitter way² that there was still hope for change in an ostensible unbreakable system. Actually, the outrage against the system started during various protests in the 2000s, ending in repression by the police. Emerging from that struggle, the April 6 Youth Movement was born, which created a Facebook group with 70.000 followers afterwards. It was the same group that initiated the mass mobilization through different channels.

Therefore, the four main members of the group played a significant role in the Egyptian Spring.

While the North African continent went through different series of spring uprisings, Europe was shaken by the so-called Euro crisis, which hit mostly the South European countries. In Spain, youth employment reached its highest peak. Various digital networks were organized to solve what untrustworthy politicians and unreliable labour unions could not change. Two of these Internet platforms, that should play an important role in the indignadas³ movement later, were *Democracia Real Ya* (Real Democracy now) and *Juventud Sin Futuro* (Youth without future). These platforms quickly evolved into Facebook groups. Although the critical financial situation in Spain was deepened for the sake of the European membership, which requested hard guidelines, the insurgence from the youth was directed against the mismanagement of the crisis by the unresponsive political system. The example of Icelandic Protest in 2009 and the wind of rebellion from North Africa across the Mediterranean Sea encouraged the indignadas that confrontation with the corrupt bank system and politicians was possible through grassroots mobilizations by calling for action on the streets. The most popular slogan read as follows: “Real Democracy Now! Take the streets. We are not merchandise in the hands of politicians and bankers”.

In this sense some extraordinary characteristics, which became the signature feature of OWS inherited from the previous protests in the Arab world and Spain. Truly, Mubarak’s Egypt was one of the most repressive societies throughout the world and the Egyptian protests were primarily against the authoritarian system and its symptoms, while OWS target was the global financial system symbolized by Wall Street. Nevertheless, there were some inspiring moments. For example, in many places, like the famous Cataluña Square (Barcelona) or Puertadel Sol (Madrid), the protesters decided to occupy the square and discuss democracy. Contrary to the Arab Uprising in Tunisia, where the national election of 2009 confirmed Ben Ali for the fifth time as the President, the time of the Spanish outrage came



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across with the local and regional elections, held on May 22, 2011. With sleeping bags, the young people debated throughout several nights how the political future in Spain should be re-designed and what democracy really meant.

The *acampadas* proliferated across the Atlantic and the commitment to non-violence during the Arab Spring became an important item of the upcoming Occupy movement. Manuel Castells further points out that the solidarity in Tahrir Square expressed in sanitation, food and water supply, medical care, legal assistance and communication to gestures such as the protection of the square by Christian Copts during the siege of November 21 while Muslims were in the Friday prayers became a role model in the Occupy movement. Both resistances were formed on social media (Facebook, Twitter) and social networks (family, friends, soccer team...) without a party or political organization.

The new pattern of protest and organization also called for a new political jargon. Although the movement frequently underlined its "leaderless", where a uniform voice could not be heard, it was the peacefully and solution-oriented language. The apparatus of general assemblies, the various hand signals, tents, sleeping bags and many other items made the occupy movement as some

In sum, the Occupy movement characterized itself by new forms of communication, expression and amplification strongly inspired by the previous mass demonstrations around the globe. Although the mass gatherings and occupation at Tahrir Square or the indignadas movement in Spain were comparatively much more considerably than in OWS, it was the tiny public-private Zuccotti Park in lower Manhattan, which grabbed the attention of the world and made it as a symbol of a new generation.

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From Occupy Wall Street to Occupy Everywhere

The worldly reference of OWS two years ago is echoed in many places all over the world. The Occupy world articulates the same goals, diagnoses, methods, and lineages of OWS. Therefore, we can depict many elements in the post-Occupy period adopted by the original OWS, inspired by the Arab Spring and Spanish indignadas or a mix of them. Each of these struggles has its own powerful and particular history. While many of the elements remained the same, like the organization and proliferations of news through social media, the encampment during the occupation, the non-violent communication and many more, other significant characteristics disappeared (for example the “We are 99 % banner”) or new forms of articulation were added due to unique peculiarities of different regions.

Unlike other mass demonstrations, ‘occupy’ characterizes itself by overnight presence of the protesters. They spend the night at the occupied place and ‘take possession’ and control of a park, square, in front of a building with sleeping bags. The encampment during the occupation became a well recognized unique. The two original initiators Lasne and White of OWS encouraged New Yorkers in the very early campaign to “Bring tent” while occupying.

While occupy Wall Street was held in the Zuccotti park, known as a privately owned park located a block away from Wall Street, the latest protests of the *Istanbullites* occupying the Gezi Park was

to prevent the demolition of park and construction of a shopping mall - the 94th in the city. Like every occupation movement – and the world saw approximately 951 in 82 different countries⁴, the protests once it spreads, characterizes itself by a ‘more than just’ banner. When the chain of demands culminates, it becomes inevitable to absorb the series of requests from the original demands. The argument of the movement is often not very well defined and can change up to the addressor. As a result, many people start to wonder who these people are and what they want. Although the protests in New York started with a remonstrative attitude towards the ‘corrupt’ financial system, like the Icelandic and Spanish Revolution, the occupy movement revealed bit by bit various facets of a global attempt from bottom up. Even though the majority met under the uniform ‘occupy’ umbrella, the protective gadget made itself responsible for all kind of resistances. Environmental issues, minority rights, lack of democracy are just some of few.

Back to the event on 17 September 2011 on the North American continent, a date which was selected on purpose due to the symbolically anniversary character of the signing of the American Constitution, we can analyze a huge organization of a leaderless movement. In the next few weeks, the encampment became more established, with tents, desks, walkways, wireless Internet, a kitchen, and an extensive lending library. A sort of organization took place, with people forming working groups: Structure, Facilitation, Sanitation, Food, Direct Action, and Safe Spaces. The demand was clear: “It’s time for democracy and

not corporatocracy”⁵ In doing so, the initial call to occupy Wall Street on this representative day aimed to restore democracy by making the political system independent from the power of money. The demand to clean up Washington from corruption seemed to find support by everyone, irrelevant to particular political orientations.

The Obama campaign in which many of the protesters participated had left not only disappointment on thousands, who had believed that real change was possible, but also made the strikers aware of the power of mobilizing people through digital channels, which was the case in the President’s political campaign.

The September 17th demonstration with the occupation of Zuccotti Park was followed by various demonstrations in New York and other cities in the United States. The more the police arrested people and repressed the demonstrations, the more videos and images were shared on social platforms to mobilize people. With the help of *Anonymous* (which should play a major role in upcoming occupy movements) names of those policemen were revealed, who acted brutally against the demonstrators.

Occupy Wall Street not only spread across the country, with large protests being held in hundreds of cities and communities, but also found global solidarity among diverse geographies. Following the *Movimiento 15-M* (a name for the Spanish Indignadas given due to the date of the May 15 2011 protests in Spain), it was decided with worldwide support to hold the next round of protests on October 15. More than 951 protests in 82 different countries were held on this date. By adopting the same structures and methods, the protesters not only continued the charming spirit of these movements, but also established a global phenomenon that is not limited to a particular region, because of the universal nature of the issues.

#Occupy: The Branding of Global Resistance

Since the emergence of the ‘original’ occupy movement in New York, the label ‘Occupy’ be-

came an Omni-brand for global resistance. From natural disasters relief (*Occupy Sandy*) to opposition to GM crops (*Occupy Monsanto*) to the defence of the arrested protesters during the occupation (*Occupy Arrests*), the epithet became associated with all sorts of protests. It has also been applied retroactively to the Arab Spring (*Occupy Tahrir*) to accommodate the uprisings into the soil of the Occupy movement series.

Coming up with the power of social media in the post millennium decade, like Twitter and Facebook, the label “Occupy” aroused to an instantly recognizable symbol for all kind of global struggle. But the use of the quick and interconnected networks requires also an equally global and clear language to ensure that the sent message will receive fast and doubtless. With the hashtag ‘#Occupy’ everybody immediately associated ‘something’, which makes the data transfer uncomplicated. For instance, if the latest Occupy Protests in Turkey against the corrupt management of Public Space have been titled as “Citizens against the Gezi Park Mall in Istanbul”, it might have been more informative, but surely less effective and attention grabbing. Branding your protest with Occupy, you can easily make use of the already existing infrastructure and especially the media attention from all over the world. Particularly in case of an absence of domestic media, the protesters are depending on foreign broadcasting. Mostly self appointed democratic and high industrialized countries turn their heads, if there is ‘again’ an occupation for the sake of democracy, liberty, freedom of speech etc. In this sense, the label occupy is mostly associated positively and embraces international movements that have at least some common lines with the origin OWS.

Conclusion

Throughout history social movements have been the initiator of social change. What stemmed from a crisis, which started to make daily life unbearable followed by a distrust against political institutions. The protesters of Tahrir, Barcelona or New York, went on 2011 to the streets to make their demands visible, to change the system or even change the ruler.

Hereafter, we can note, that the Occupy Movement, which found wide coverage as such, can be traced to the OWS in September 2011. Nevertheless it was emphasized above that OWS had its own inspiring moments in the self-discovery phase, floating from the Middle East and Southern Europe to Zuccotti Park.

Therefore, the Occupy movements are mosaics from different resistances. By adding their own country-specific tradition (like in the current case of Turkey or Brazil) the movement receives its own unique touch. In this sense, the own style

of numerous Occupy movements makes it difficult to compare although there are some recognizable coincidences.

Hitherto, the label Occupy is regarded positively, especially in the Western world. Due to this many activists decided to accommodate their protest under this brand, which not only offers current structures and advices particular steps but above all guarantees a memorable media echo. This can change as soon as the brand 'Occupy' becomes a term with negative connotations.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Castells, Manuel: Networks of Outrage and Hope. Social Movements in the Internet Age. Malden/Cambridge 2012., p. 159
- 2 Muhammed Bouazizi, who set himself on fire on 17 December 2010 in Tunisia.
- 3 Following Castell I will refer to the Spanish movement as "indignadas" (and not the male version of *indignados*)
- 4 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/oct/17/occupy-protests-world-list-map>
- 5 Castells p. 160



- Şikâyet -
- Sayın Başkan uzun süredir aramıyorsunuz... hep meşgul ve cevapsız mı şikâyet ediyor dediniz - -
NSA kayıtları öyle demiyor ama