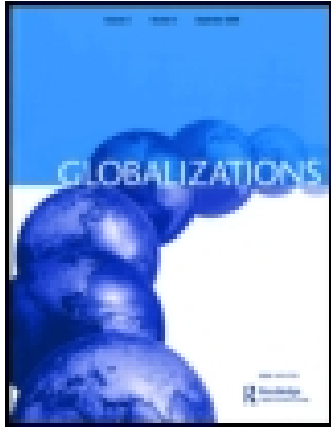


This article was downloaded by: [william carroll]

On: 21 January 2015, At: 15:41

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Globalizations

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rglo20>

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William K. Carroll^a

^a University of Victoria, Victoria, BC, Canada

Published online: 19 Jan 2015.



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To cite this article: William K. Carroll (2015): Modes of Cognitive Praxis in Transnational Alternative Policy Groups, *Globalizations*, DOI: [10.1080/14747731.2014.1001231](https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2014.1001231)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2014.1001231>

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Modes of Cognitive Praxis in Transnational Alternative Policy Groups

WILLIAM K. CARROLL

University of Victoria, Victoria, BC, Canada

ABSTRACT *Transnational alternative policy groups (TAPGs) are networks and centres within and around which counter-hegemonic knowledge is produced and mobilized among subaltern communities and critical social movements. Based on in-depth interviews with practitioners at 16 TAPGs, this article presents eight modes of cognitive praxis and discusses how they appear in the work of alternative policy groups. The eight modes are not sealed off from each other, but overlap and interpenetrate. In combination, these modes of cognitive praxis strive to produce transformative knowledge concomitantly with knowledge-based transformation. The analysis evidences tracings of a double dialectic in the cognitive praxis of alternative policy groups: a dialectic of theory and practice, and one of dialogue. It is in a forward movement—fostering solidaristic dialogue among counterpublics in combination with the iterative integration of theory and practice—that alternative knowledge makes its indispensable contribution to counter-hegemony.*

Keywords: counter-hegemony, alternative knowledge production, alternative knowledge mobilization, social movements, cognitive praxis, think tanks

Among the challenges faced by those interested in creating an alternative future is that of constructing counter-hegemonic strategies and visions: cognitive and cultural resources for a political shift from episodic, defensive resistance to responsible, radical proactivity.¹ In an era when a dual global crisis of economy and ecology opens space for a renewed radical imaginary, where are the sites for such collective imagining, and how might their activities be integrated with the agency of democratic movements?

This article focuses on *transnational alternative policy groups* (TAPGs): groups that, in dialogue with transnational publics and movements, produce evidence-based knowledge which

Correspondence Address: William K. Carroll, Department of Sociology, University of Victoria, 3800 Finnerty Road, Victoria, BC V8W 3P5, Canada. Email: wcarroll@uvic.ca

critiques hegemonic practices and perspectives and promotes alternatives. Since the 1970s, as an increasingly crisis-ridden neo-liberal globalization has reshaped the global political-economic terrain, transnational movements have developed as advocates of a ‘democratic globalization’ that aims to enrich human relations across space by empowering citizens and communities to participate in the decisions that govern their lives (Chase-Dunn, 2002; Smith & Wiest, 2012; Steger, Goodman, & Wilson, 2013). TAPGs have emerged in symbiosis with these movements, as collective intellectuals that facilitate the construction of a counter-hegemonic bloc and pose democratic alternatives to neo-liberal capitalism (Carroll 2013). TAPGs function as think tanks to an incipient global left. Unlike social movement organizations, which produce knowledge as they engage in collective action, TAPGs’ efforts are focused primarily on producing and mobilizing knowledge. Yet TAPGs are think tanks of a different sort from the conventional ones that advise political and corporate elites. TAPGs create knowledge that challenges existing corporate priorities and state policies, and that advocates alternative forms of economic, political, and cultural organization. They disseminate this knowledge not only via mainstream media venues but through activist networks and alternative media, and they often work collaboratively with social movements in implementing ideas. They are sites within and around which counter-hegemonic knowledge is produced and mobilized among subaltern communities and critical social movements.

Recent research has shown that compared to conventional think tanks and policy-planning groups, TAPGs have been slow to emerge, and have formed in much smaller numbers (Carroll, 2014). Like hegemonic groups, TAPGs are embedded in social networks, enabling them to mobilize knowledge among a diverse range of collective actors and publics (Carroll, 2013). But unlike such hegemonic groups as the Trilateral Commission, TAPGs are embedded in the networks of a nascent global left comprising social movements, progressive NGOs, alternative media, and the like (Carroll & Sapinski, 2013), which has far less extensive reach than elite policy-planning networks of the transnational capitalist class (Carroll, 2013). Although TAPGs share a commitment to global justice and ecological sustainability and a belief in the transformative power of grassroots democratic movements, rudimentary analysis of TAPG websites and documents has revealed a diversity of political perspectives, ranging from critical liberalism to the explicitly democratic socialist orientation of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (Carroll & Sapinski, 2013). Analysis of website content has also suggested that the practices of TAPGs differ procedurally and substantively from conventional think tanks. The latter consider how existing structures of transnational capitalism can be *replicated* and extended more efficiently or with less harmful human and ecological consequences, while TAPGs take up the question of *transformation*, critiquing hegemonic forms and identifying and advocating alternatives (Carroll, 2014). Among the unexplored issues are the actual ways in which TAPGs function as centres of alternative knowledge production and mobilization (alt KPM).

The literature on social movements and counter-hegemony provides a number of rich concepts for understanding how this occurs. In her theoretical reformulation of the ‘public sphere’, Fraser distinguishes a field of *subaltern counterpublics*, consisting of ‘parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs’ (1990, p. 67). TAPGs may be seen as contributing to counterpublics by helping to create and maintain the ‘disposition towards further political activism’ that comprises a *radical habitus* (Crossley, 2003, p. 50). Given that movement politics ebbs and flows in protest cycles (Tarrow, 2012), TAPGs can be seen as sustaining *oppositional culture* (Carroll & Ratner, 2001) by building *infrastructures of dissent* (Sears, 2014) during upturns

in activism and maintaining them as *abeyance structures* (Grey & Sawyer, 2008) in periods of movement quietude.

Significantly, alt KPM is integral to the *catharsis* from subalternity to counter-hegemony. As Gramsci argued, with catharsis

structure ceases to be an external force which crushes man, assimilates him to itself and makes him passive; and is transformed into a means of freedom, an instrument to create a new ethico-political form and a source of new initiatives. (1971, p. 367)

Alternative knowledge—including critiques of the existing order, policy alternatives, strategies for change, and wider visions of future possibilities—enables knowers to reject fatalism and to find (and create) in current circumstances levers for social transformation. From a Gramscian perspective, the prospects for transformation rest significantly on movements and counterpublics, acquiring and using such knowledge as part of a ‘counter-hegemonic generative politics that attempts to establish new institutions and practices that extend the role of civil society over the state and the economy’ (Williams, 2008, p. 9). Such generative politics comprise a ‘war of position’ spanning successive conjunctures, which strives to shift the balance of forces, to win space for radical alternatives, and to articulate ‘dissenting groups into a system of alliances capable of contesting bourgeois hegemony’, that is, a historical bloc (Carroll & Ratner, 2010, p. 8). What TAPGs contribute most directly to this complex process is ‘cognitive praxis’. As Eyerman and Jamison, who introduced the term, observe, ‘it is precisely in the creation, articulation, formulation of new thoughts and ideas—new knowledge—that a social movement defines itself in society’ (1991, p. 55). As they work across a range of political issues and in dialogue with movements and (counter)publics, TAPGs advance the struggle for ‘global cognitive justice’ which De Sousa Santos (2006, p. 145) sees as a necessary condition for global social justice.

Tilly (1978) has shown that as social movements emerged within capitalist modernity they developed a ‘repertoire of collective action’ suited to their strategic objectives. As organic intellectuals to global justice politics, TAPGs have similarly created a repertoire of alt KPM: ways of supplying intellectual fuel to transnational activism and oxygen to both subaltern counterpublics and atrophied public spheres. Some alternative knowledge practices—the public meeting, the pamphlet, the newspaper—reach back to the nineteenth century, before the emergence of alternative policy groups in the late decades of the twentieth century. In 1845, Frederick Engels published *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, based on extensive field research—an early example of critical policy research with a strong empirical base. Many other practices and approaches to producing and mobilizing alternative knowledge have emerged in the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries, in tandem with technological advances in communications, increasing literacy and advances in radical pedagogy and research practices.

This article analyses the repertoire of alt KPM as eight *modes of cognitive praxis*, and discusses how TAPGs draw differentially upon the repertoire.² Between July 2012 and June 2013, 91 practitioners in 16 TAPGs (8 based in the global south and 8 in the global north) were interviewed in depth (see Table 1). Each participating group satisfies three criteria, which define the concept of TAPG as a distinct agency of knowledge production and mobilization: (1) the group’s core function is *production and mobilization of knowledge*; (2) a significant part of that cognitive praxis takes up *transnational issues* and speaks to *transnational counterpublics*; and (3) *the group engages a wide range of issues*, that is, it is not highly specialized. Participating groups were selected from a larger set of 84 international organizations engaged

Table 1. Groups participating in this study

Est'd	Name	Acronym	No. of participants
1974	Transnational Institute (Amsterdam)	TNI	11
1975	Third World Forum (Dakar)	TWF	1
1976	Tricontinental Centre (Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium)	CETRI	1
1976	Centre de recherche et d'information pour le développement (Paris)	CRID	8
1982	Participatory Research in Asia (New Delhi)	PRIA	12
1984	Third World Network (Penang)	TWN	1
1984	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (Manila)	DAWN	7
1989	Third World Institute/Social Watch (Montevideo)	ITeM/SW	5
1990	Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (Berlin)	RosaLux	12
1994	International Forum on Globalization (San Francisco)	IFG	7
1995	Focus on the Global South (Bangkok)	Focus	10
1997	Network Institute for Global Democratization (Helsinki)	NIGD	1
1997	People's Plan Study Group (Tokyo)	PPSG	5
2001	Centre for Civil Society (Durban)	CCS	8
2005	Alternatives International (Montreal)	Alternatives	1
2005	India Institute for Critical Action: Centre in Movement (New Delhi)	CACIM	1

in research and knowledge production. The 84 were compiled from my own knowledge of the field combined with keyword searches in the online version of the *Yearbook of International Organizations*. The 16 participating organizations comprise a judgment sample. Each met the three specified selection criteria particularly well, compared to the other organizations, and in combination they 'represent' major regions of the global north and south.³

I made site visits to 10 of the TAPGs where I interviewed between 5 and 12 activist-researchers. A key protagonist (typically the executive director or founder) from the other six groups was interviewed, typically by Skype. The interview schedule consisted of 27 wide-ranging, open-ended questions. This article is based primarily on participants' responses to 12 questions which inquired into practices of alt KPM. The modes of cognitive praxis listed in Table 2 emerged from my dialogue with the data, after transcribed interviews were imported into an NVIVO qualitative analysis database. Analysis involved multiple readings of all transcripts. In a first pass, passages that were particularly illuminating in describing or reflecting on approaches to alt KPM were identified. In subsequent passes the specific categories of cognitive praxis in Table 2 took shape, as passages identified in the first pass were coded into (overlapping) categories, and as strong exemplars of each category were identified. Many of those exemplars are featured below. The modes summarized in Table 2 operate more at the level of strategy than tactics: they refer not to specific practices but to overall approaches in alt KPM, and can be seen as promoting a dialectic of knowledge production and social transformation. TAPGs strive to produce *transformative knowledge concomitantly with knowledge-based transformation*.

Importantly, there is no linear sequence implied by this listing, although the first item, *challenging hegemonic knowledge*, offers a good starting point. The remainder of this article puts flesh on this analytical skeleton by conveying insights and analyses from interviews with project participants, and by pointing out how the eight modes of cognitive praxis appear in the work of TAPGs.

Table 2. Modes of cognitive praxis

Name	Description
<i>Challenging</i> hegemonic knowledge	Contesting and disrupting the common sense of hegemony through critical research, scholarship, and other means
Mobilizing alt knowledge through <i>engaging</i> with dominant institutions	Pursuing outsider strategies that engage the integral state strategically from an oppositional stance, and/or insider strategies of dialogue and negotiation with select elements of the integral state
<i>Empowering</i> the grassroots through participation and capacity building	Helping to foster activist capabilities and communities and, within those communities, organic intellectuals who produce their own knowledge as a basis for transformative collective agency
Building <i>solidarities</i> through dialogical KPM	Through cross-sectoral, cross-cultural, and other dialogues, bridging gaps, breaking silos, and undoing hierarchies that divide and limit effectivity of movements as forces for transformation
<i>Integrating</i> theory and practice	Dialectically unifying the practical, experiential knowledge of activists trying to change the world with theoretical knowledge on how that world is structured and how it might be transformed
Creating <i>spaces</i> for reflection and invention	Producing and sustaining physical, social, and virtual spaces where new ideas can breathe and begin to live
<i>Systematizing</i> and disseminating alternative knowledge	Making alt knowledge robust, rich in comparative nuance, applicable across contexts, and thus useful in practice; disseminating the product to various publics and constituencies
<i>Prefiguring</i> alternative futures from present practices	Identifying real potentialities for living otherwise, analysing how they can be strengthened, mobilizing knowledge of these openings within counterpublics and general publics

Challenging Hegemonic Knowledge

Hegemonic knowledge is sedimented in a whole array of dominant institutions—the state, the economy, and mainstream media to mention the three most obvious ones. It comprises an ensemble of discourses grounded in historical relations of power—colonialism and racism, class relations of capitalism as well as precapitalist survivals, patriarchy and heteronormativity, the instrumental rationalities that prioritize profit and efficiency while marginalizing concerns for ecological sustainability and the quality of life. *Challenging and disrupting the common sense of hegemony* is perhaps the most basic element in the repertoire of alt KPM.

Often, this is accomplished through *research and analysis* that exposes the injustices or irrationalities of dominant practices. These efforts are addressed to three principal publics: the ‘general public’, ‘expert’ communities of practice that are typically located in and around state and inter-governmental policy networks, and the counterpublics that live within critical movement cultures. All TAPGs are extensively involved in mobilizing knowledge produced elsewhere. A number of them have extensive capacity to produce original research and analysis. This work sometimes takes the form of exposés of inequalities and injustices, as in IFG’s ‘outing the plutocracy’ work, which has used a network-analytical methodology to map out connections linking the billionaire Koch brothers (far-right Tea Party funders) into the Keystone pipeline proposal and into the wider political field of conservative academe, neo-liberal think tanks, ‘congressional collaborators’, and corporate media.⁴ This research genre resembles the critical investigative journalism that Khadija Sharife practices at CCS: a ‘triangle’ of investigative reporting, activist campaigning, and state-centred policy, which, when connected together, can effect real

change. Thus, TAPGs need to combine research with other modes of cognitive praxis—to mobilize critical knowledge to interested publics who can give it political traction.

A good deal of counter-hegemonic policy research involves ‘busting myths’ whose veracity often appears self-evident, given the pervasiveness of neo-liberalism’s mantra of freedom=markets=efficiency=progress. As Dorothy Guerrero, activist-researcher at the Focus Bangkok office, told me, part of myth-busting involves setting neo-liberal policy in a global context—connecting the dots to expose ‘the ugly face of neo-liberalism: the face that shows people being squeezed out of society—people that are losing social welfare that they deserve, or the fact that rights and entitlements are eroding’.

Challenging hegemonic knowledge can carry another radical meaning. Sometimes the hegemony that TAPGs challenge is that which prevails within the global justice movement itself. To fulfil their promise in producing alternative knowledge for social change, TAPGs need to practice a ‘critical engagement’ that, as Jun Borrás offered, is critical in two senses. Not only is one critical of mainstream nostrums; one turns a critical lens on the popular alternatives that arise from the grassroots, which may fail to break decisively enough from the mainstream. ‘So for example on land-grabbing, you have all these discourses by social movements [that] the answer should be land reform.’ But land reform, on the model of the 1950s and 1960s, does not, in Borrás’s view, adequately encompass popular aspirations for economic democracy. At TNI, discussion among Fellows in 2012 led to a notion of ‘land sovereignty’ (inspired in part by La Via Campesina’s ‘food sovereignty’) which strives for an effective alternative vision to land-grabbing. ‘Land sovereignty is the right of working peoples to have effective access to, use of, and control over land and the benefits of its use and occupation, where land is understood as resource, territory, and landscape’ (Franco & Borrás, 2012).

This example, implying as it does a political entitlement, pushes on to a second mode of cognitive praxis, which (like all others) depends on ongoing challenges to hegemonic knowledge, but foregrounds a specific arena of practice: states, inter-governmental bodies and other sites of institutionalized power.

Mobilizing Alternative Knowledge through Engaging with Dominant Institutions

An influential current in contemporary radical politics advocates the cumulative emptying out of the power of capital and of the state (cf. Day, 2006; Holloway, 2002). However, in an era of increasing state coercive force—whether through militarism, the criminalization of dissent, or increased surveillance—this strategy has less and less purchase. For instance, Milios and Triandafilidou’s (2013) study of Greek politics concludes that in neo-liberal Europe ‘it is not possible, to change the world without taking power in and beyond the state’. Movements for global justice ignore the state at their peril. Retreating and opting out are really not viable options. As sites of cognitive praxis, many TAPGs mobilize alternative knowledge through engagement with state power.⁵ Here, I take a broad view of the state, as an ensemble of political and social institutions that reproduce a way of life, through varying measures of coercive and consensual practices. These dominant institutions—governmental, military, educational, and mass media—make up what Gramsci called the ‘integral state’—‘a dialectical unity of civil society and political society’ (Thomas, 2009, p. 148; Gramsci, 1971). To be effective, counter-hegemonic cognitive praxis must engage with these institutions critically and carefully.

We can distinguish insider and outsider strategies of engagement. Most *outsider strategies* do not address states directly, but orient themselves strategically to the problem of state (including inter-governmental) power. The point is not only to register protest but to present clear

arguments against the hegemonic project, and, if feasible, to articulate an alternative. Perhaps the most dramatic instances of outside engagement with states involve TAPGs influencing policy by *subverting it or preventing certain moves from taking place*. This requires political mobilization; and for this reason ‘outsider’ engagements with states bleed into two other modes of cognitive praxis—empowering the grassroots and building solidarities dialogically.

Within the annals of alter-globalization, the outsider strategy pursued in the late 1990s by IFG is legendary. In 1997, it was able to obtain a highly confidential draft of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), which circulated to allies including *Observatoire de la Mondialisation*, of which TNI Board President Susan George was president. *Observatoire* mobilized public opposition in France, which as it gained extensive media coverage pushed the Socialist government to set up a commission of inquiry. As Susan George recounted, at the inquiry, *Observatoire*’s testimony, as it took up an insider strategy, shaped France’s ultimate position on MAI. When the French government decided to bail from the deal in October 1998, the MAI was dead in the water.

A year and a month later, negotiators were scheduled to convene in Seattle for a Ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Again, IFG engaged strategically, as an outsider to the inter-governmental process at the WTO Ministerial at Seattle. Many of the tens of thousands of protestors who helped close down the WTO Ministerial had, shortly before its convening, attended a three-day IFG teach-in focused on the injustices and irrationalities of capitalist globalization. The respective derailments of the MAI and the WTO Ministerial in 1998 and 1999 were outcomes of complex processes, but they illustrate the role that TAPGs can play, with allies, within those processes.

Insider approaches are predicated on the insight that dominant institutions are not monolithic; they are made up of many sites and agents with varying degrees of openness to alternatives. Most of the groups participating in this project use insider approaches to some extent and in various ways, mindful of the dangers of co-optation that may appear along the way.

Such dangers can be subtle and incremental. NIGD’s Teivo Teivainen told a cautionary tale of how the Finnish Foreign Ministry’s support for an NIGD-initiated campaign for international financial and other reforms to promote global democracy, with input coming from social movements, morphed into something else:

Those aims were soon watered down with sort of ‘let’s include all relevant stakeholders,’ in the approach to the process that the Finnish government took. . . . If you want to include all possible stakeholders, such as the International Chamber of Commerce, then it means you are not going to be able to produce transformative proposals.

Better results have been obtained in insider engagements with governments of Latin America’s pink tide. As Daniel Chavez commented, TNI’s recent efforts to ‘mainstream’ its policy work vis-à-vis governments, and in particular to convene in Latin America ‘some kind of open discussion, exchange of ideas among people doing research and people governing public enterprises’, have enabled TNI to put its alternative policy ideas on increasing participatory democracy into practice—a crucial innovation if Andean socialism is to avoid replicating statist hierarchical management as a form of political domination. Clearly, insider approaches that work with politically progressive regimes are distinct in character from those that engage with liberal, including neo-liberal, administrations and state managers. In either case, however, engagement’s impact can be magnified by building in practices that help empower the grassroots. Mindful of the need to engage states in ways that help empower civil society, the TNI’s informal policy dialogues, which rotate from country to country, try to bridge between government

and local civil society. In TNI's Drugs and Democracy program, deft strategic judgement in working with 'government officials who we think are open enough to think outside of the box' (Pien Metaal) has paid social dividends, as in Uruguay's recent legalization of cannabis.

Focus also includes a cautious insider approach in its repertoire of cognitive praxis. Administrator Andrew de Sousa explained how Focus approaches state and inter-governmental bodies in solidarity with allies. 'We do have the inside connections, but it's done as part of the coalition.' Focus's insider strategy takes up the standpoint of the underdog, insists that knowledge gained is shared broadly with the movement constituency. Sometimes a carefully implemented insider strategy can be effective in ways that outsiders cannot. TNI's agrarian justice campaign works closely with La Via, yet TNI also sits at the table at the UN FAO's Committee on Food Security. At these discussions, TNI can, as a research-oriented organization once removed from grassroots activism, present a radical analysis without being dismissed out of hand.

In other contexts, groups like DAWN have devised informal approaches to reform institutions and dominant practices by influencing key individuals. DAWN Economist Marina Durano has employed such micro-strategies in conveying feminist insights to left-leaning male economists who have some direct influence in development policy circles.

Empowering the Grassroots through Participation and Capacity Building

Third, we can distinguish a range of approaches that produce alternative knowledge by *empowering the grassroots*: helping to foster activist communities, capabilities, and organic intellectuals who produce their own knowledge, and whose collective agency can itself be a transformative force. I have discerned three kinds of approaches to grassroots empowerment: popular education, *participatory KPM*, and *participatory action research (PAR)*. All TAPGs engage in the venerable practice of *popular education*: a crucial way of nurturing counterpublics and of influencing the general public. Since 2000, CRID has convened a biannual 3–4 day Summer University on International Solidarity. CRID proposes a thematic for each rendition (in 2012 it was Citizens in Solidarity Reinventing the World), but the training sessions and workshops that constitute it are organized by participating groups, which numbered approximately 130 in 2012. The University's purpose is to train and educate activists in new developments and approaches, within 'a very open space for everybody to bring many things to share', as CRID Director Nathalie Pere-Marzano told me. RosaLux's Academy for Political Education offers political training courses as well as 'conferences and workshops, weekend seminars and a variety of other events' all with the goal of providing people with 'the knowledge that can empower them and enable them to act'.⁶ IFG teach-ins, mentioned earlier, have ranged across many topics, offering critical analysis to activists, so that they are in a better position to make strategic judgements and to spread the knowledge further in their communities.

Participatory approaches consciously *build capacity* for the self-generation of alternative knowledge within counterpublics and general publics. In part, this involves helping subalterns gain voice, breaking from the monological paternalism of traditional pedagogies. An instance can be seen in Social Watch's methodology of 'watching'. Through monitoring state compliance with social covenants and human rights, and through reporting and sharing information across the network of 80 national movement groups, the grassroots activists who comprise Social Watch have their alternative knowledge recognized, validated, and voiced at inter-governmental forums and other sites of institutional power. In the process, they become more capacitated as social-justice protagonists. DAWN's extensive work within its training institutes and its

ongoing regional consultations and workshops on Gender, Economic and Ecological Justice (GEEJ) provide other exemplars. These efforts are strongly attuned to activists' needs to conduct their own research and critical analysis and to learn how to deal effectively with media. In 2012 DAWN brought a team of over 20 activists to Rio+20—members of DAWN plus GEEJ trainees—so that the latter could learn advocacy by doing it. As Nicole Bridegain explained, this is 'our new way of working ... [a] participatory approach—not only sharing the knowledge in training but also in advocacy spheres'.

A third genre of grassroots empowerment, PAR combines knowledge production and participation with transformation. The promise of making the *transformation of reality* an integral part of alt KPM makes PAR an especially important methodology of grassroots empowerment and capacity building. PRIA has developed a remarkable array of PAR methodologies, available through its website and publications. In essence, PAR entails a process of knowledge co-creation: a dialogue between 'expert knowledge' and 'local knowledge' that is focussed around a shared project of social change (e.g. Greenwood & Levin, 2007). As in Marx's (1845/1968) thesis 11, the point is not only to arrive at an understanding, but to achieve that through a process that changes the situation or object one is trying to understand, by resolving a problem or contradiction. The transformation is not only situational—objective—but subjective: subordinated groups become empowered through their own participation in action research. Central in this approach, as summarized by the participants of a PRIA-hosted workshop, is a commitment to social change and empowerment that recognizes all involved as both subjects and researchers: 'there is no distinction between those who act and those who research' (Hill, n.d., p. 4).

Ultimately, what makes PAR promising in grassroots empowerment and capacity building is the power of participation to effect the double transformation that Marx (1845/1968, p. 28) wrote of in another of his theses: 'the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionising practice*.' In this, PAR overlaps with another mode of cognitive praxis: the integration of theory and practice.

Building Solidarities through Dialogical KPM

A fourth mode of cognitive praxis is *building solidarities through dialogue*. What is crucial here is to bridge gaps that otherwise limit the transformative power of democratic movements. The gaps—whether cognitive, identitarian, or social-relational—reproduce divisions, siloing knowledge, identities, and organization within narrow limits. These limits may be defined by national borders, movement issues, social-identity markers, or cultural discourses. Of course, the specific social-justice challenges facing a given group often necessitate an intense prioritization of goals and visions. But the need for convergence, for a differentiated understanding of cross-movement, cross-national solidarity is intensifying as the crisis of neo-liberal globalization deepens. Without convergence of strategies, organization and vision, counter-hegemonic knowledge remains scattered, and opposition to domination will not reach beyond the episodic forms of resistance that manifest grievances without offering real alternatives.

Against that backdrop, TAPGs build dialogical solidarities in a variety of ways. At ITeM/Social Watch, this occurs within an extensive transnational network of social justice advocates, creating dialogical bridges across places, within a human rights framework. The annual Social Watch *Report* is itself a bridging exercise, which thousands of watchers help author and then read—building cross-national consciousness and solidarity. Between the initial writing of

national reports and the final publication, Social Watch staff add value by integrating the knowledge thematically.

A popular method for building solidarities is that of *convening*. As embedded actors in transnational activist networks, TAPGs are optimally positioned to call people together for cross-sectoral discussion, strategizing, and new initiatives. Strong examples of convening are not difficult to find. IFG's many convenings have been hothouses for developing common strategy. Our World is Not For Sale initially emerged out of an IFG convening. Although Focus devotes much effort to popular education, publishing, and outreach via mass/social media,

at the same time we always do meetings where we can strategize with people . . . because we know at the end of the day when you are facing a policy engagement, sometimes agreements in a group where you have other networks—consensus is only on the common denominator. (Dorothy Guerrero)

Such strategy sessions build solidarities among activists, around specific initiatives. They put alternative knowledge to use in counter-hegemonic practice. The Third World Forum's activities consist largely of convenings of activist-intellectuals, recently in Ecuador, Egypt, and China, which are strategically aimed at building solidarities to enable what TWF founder Samir Amin called 'convergence with diversity'. Convening is a practice that builds solidarity and mutual understanding while enabling activists to sharpen their strategic analyses through mutual learning.

Building solidarities through dialogue goes against the hegemonic grain of commodified knowledge: it is a form of production that refuses enclosure, pointing towards a global knowledge commons. The objective is to share, to enrich each other, and (hopefully) to converge towards collaborative action. TNI has since Rio+20 been convening the international campaign against corporate impunity. As campaign coordinator Brid Brennan observed, what develops out of campaign strategy sessions is 'alternative knowledge that has collective ownership'.

Integrating Theory and Practice

For alternative knowledge to be effective, the traditional division between the teachers and the taught needs to be eroded and ultimately supplanted by relations of *co-investigation* (Freire, 1970, p. 68). This has important implications. In a dialectic of theory and practice, the practical, experiential knowledge of activists trying to change the world must be unified with theoretical knowledge that comprehends how that world is structured and how it might be transformed. Theoretical comprehension of alternatives, and the theorists who produce it, must be rooted in the school of practice, just as activism will be most effective if it proceeds from a veridical comprehension of reality. To bring Marx (1845/1968, p. 29) back into the conversation, 'social life is essentially *practical*. All mysteries which mislead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice'.

Several participants offered helpful perspectives and accounts of how TAPGs have actualized this mode of cognitive praxis. Although initially comprising academics, from the start the Third World Forum has rejected being 'a think tank of theoreticians'. As Samir Amin explained, TWF created the conditions for a theory/practice dialectic by encouraging the cohabitation, in local chapters, of leading activists and left intellectuals, enabling synthesis of struggle-based knowledge with critical-theoretical formulations. At DAWN, activist-scholars have worked within a political-strategic 'interlinkage' approach to advocacy and analysis. Gita Sen recalled,

we have adopted an approach that really integrates [theory and practice] from the beginning . . . We don't feel that we produce something, and then say, oh, now let's figure out what the activists think about it. It's theirs from the beginning . . . The amount of learning that happens through that is huge.

At TNI, Hilary Wainwright emphasized how a strong, ongoing communicative bond between activists and researchers ensures that the usefulness of alternative knowledge is 'inbuilt'.

For me, the alternative knowledge is coming from the activists partly . . . When I'm drafting things, I always try and check it back with the people that I'm working with, so I know in the process whether it's going to be useful. In a way, it's not like, we've got a product—how do we make it useful? It's like, what product is going to be useful? How do we develop it in a way which makes its usefulness inbuilt?

Creating Spaces for Reflection and Invention

These examples bring us to a sixth mode of cognitive praxis, linked particularly to what has just been discussed. To produce efficacious practico-theoretical knowledge it is necessary to create *spaces* where new ideas can breathe and begin to live. Critical spaces, whether physical or virtual, are integral to vivifying the theory/practice dialectic. Such spaces, as they enable self-development and reflection, are crucial not only for activist-researchers, but for empowering subalterns, and thus for building grassroots capacity. Although this mode overlaps with convenings, its thrust is more prefigurative. Spaces for reflection and invention are a step removed from the cut-and-thrust of strategy groups and coordinated campaigns. Their value lies in 'taking the lid off the box' (to borrow a metaphor invoked by Social Watch's Marcelo Jelen)—the box that *contains* us, and that makes the present seem so obdurate.

Among the groups participating in this project, CACIM's cognitive praxis is most directly centred on this mode. Its website advances, as a primary focus, 'the exploration of open space as a political-cultural concept, and the exploration of cyberspace as open space'. Of course, the World Social Forum has provided a transnational context for CACIM's work, and indeed much of the group's intellectual output consists of books, (co)edited by CACIM's Jai Sen, that analyse and reflect on the WSF.⁷ CACIM has endeavoured not only to reflect on current practice but to invent new ways of doing things. As Jai told me, CACIM's goal is 'building a culture of critical reflection and action—or critical reflection, thought and action'. Such prefiguration—creating the new out of what exists now—requires opening spaces rather than running in the well-worn tracks of past practice. A critical space which has been a significant source of new thinking is the annual fellows meetings at TNI, which initially was its centre of gravity and still serves an important function. At RosaLux's Institute for Critical Social Analysis, the most theoretical of the participating groups in this project, there is an appreciation of spaces of self-reflection, not only for intellectuals but indeed throughout society. Lutz Brangsch opined,

I think that the biggest problem is that the people don't know what they know. That means that, from my point of view, the most important is to create spaces where they can reflect what they know—what they can do, what are the bases they can use to act.

Creating spaces for reflection and self-development is crucial in empowering subalterns, as in PRIA's participatory-action initiatives in women's empowerment which, as Nandita Bhatt explained, create an 'enabling environment' for women to reflect, communicate, and begin to thrive collectively.

Systematizing and Disseminating Alternative Knowledge

A seventh mode of cognitive praxis also connects most directly with the theory/practice dialectic. To systematize alternative knowledge is to make it robust, rich in comparative nuance, applicable across contexts, and thus useful in practice. A classic venue for knowledge systematization is the book. Book-length treatments can provide in-depth analysis and systematize an alternative, establishing how, for instance, local water can be delivered in non-capitalist, participatory-democratic ways. *Reclaiming public water*, published by TNI in 2005 within its Water Justice project, and subsequently translated into 13 languages, is a good example. There have been many TAPG-produced books that follow this sequence. DAWN's *Development, crises and alternatives visions: Third world women's perspectives* (Sen and Grown, 1987) is a classic in a series that includes *About women's powers and wisdom* (2000) and *Latin America, a pending debate: Contributions in economics and politics from a gender perspective* (2007).⁸ The series of edited books on the WSF process, published by CACIM and featuring reflective analyses by leading activist-intellectuals, are required reading for anyone interested in one of the most important contemporary initiatives on the global left. RosaLux, Focus, TWN, PRIA, and TNI have not only produced many books and other major syntheses, but they also maintain information-rich websites on which alternative knowledge is continually being both synthesized and disseminated.

At PRIA, which has used the terminology 'knowledge systematization' for some time, a key constituency is practitioners of PAR and related approaches to knowledge democratization. For instance, PRIA's Learning Initiative on Citizen Participation and Local Governance works 'to systematize, analyze, debate and diffuse the knowledge arising from field-based innovations and expressions of democracy in local governance'.⁹ A related PRIA initiative has been the creation of Practice in Participation (PIP), a knowledge portal that enables transnational 'communities of practice' around themes such as Communication and Social Change, Local Self-Governance, and Community-Based Research. PIP 'aims at global south-to-south collaboration for preserving, maintaining and collaborating on issues and practices of social justice'.¹⁰ The PIP portal combines several modes of cognitive praxis. An open space in which its members can critically reflect, it helps deepen transnational solidarities while giving voice to marginalized practitioners, building capacity for advocacy and contributing to knowledge systematization.

Knowledge systematization is important not only for practitioners, activists, and counterpublics, but for other publics. ITeM/Social Watch, as part of its strategy of holding states to account, developed two global indexes of social justice: the Gender Equity Index (GEI) and the Basic Capability Index, which it releases annually, with the objective of getting play in the media mainstream. The GEI's 'tape measure' format provides a highly illuminating infographic that compares national and regional levels of gender inequity and explains the concept of equity. Accessible visualizations like the GEI (and the infographics that often accompany policy papers on the TNI website) systematize knowledge as popular-education resources that complement more textual communications.

These are a few examples of the many ways in which TAPGs systematize alternative knowledge and mobilize it among movements and publics. In doing so, they often use alternative and social media; indeed, they function as sites of such media.

Prefiguring Alternative Futures from Present Practices

I have taken the liberty at several junctures to link modes of cognitive praxis back to a seminal modern text on praxis—the Theses on Feuerbach. The second Thesis states:

The question whether objective [*gegenständliche*] truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a *practical* question. In practice, man must prove the truth, that is, the reality and power, the this-sidedness [*Diesseitigkeit*] of his thinking. (Marx 1845/1968, p. 28)

Our eighth mode highlights alternative knowledge that prefigures a transformed future by attending to its potentialities *as evident in current practices*, verging upon what Wright (2010) calls ‘real utopias’. The notion that practice itself is the source of knowledge is a basic insight in the theory/practice dialectic. Here, the knowledge in question concerns not simply ‘what exists’, but *what might be feasibly brought into existence* through practical interventions. As Candeias (2013) of RosaLux has written, the challenge is ‘creating a situation that does not yet exist’. To produce alternative knowledge, it is not enough to critique existing practices. The activist-researcher needs to identify, within existing realities, the real potentialities for living otherwise, to comprehend how such potentialities can be strengthened, and to mobilize knowledge of these openings within counterpublics and general publics. This mode of cognitive praxis is the most prefigurative. It points directly to a transformed future.

Focus is a group that has been active on this front, through its ‘deglobalization’ paradigm launched over a decade ago by founder Bello (2009). More recently, Pablo Solon, Focus’s Executive Director since 2012, has brought the *vivir bien* paradigm from his native Bolivia, where it lives in the practices of Indigenous communities and functions as a keystone of Andean socialism. *Vivir bien*—living well, not having more—is grounded in existing, local practice, yet it opens onto future possibilities of global scope, for which alternative policy groups can be self-critical protagonists and conveners.¹¹ Focus, by virtue of its transnational reach in the global south, has been testing the relevance of *vivir bien* in Philippines communities through dialogical engagement, to see whether a paradigm based in the grassroots practices of one place resonates elsewhere. Pablo Solon told me that *vivir bien*’s rootedness in Indigenous experiences resonates at the grassroots as a counter-hegemonic project, particularly in comparison with statist policies that transform from above.

Other examples of alternative knowledge that prefigures a transformed future abound in the work of several TAPGs. TNI’s programs and projects in remunicipalization, public services and democracy, and alternative regionalisms offer parallel cognitive resources for transformative practice, grounded in well-established approaches. At RosaLux, the Institute for Critical Social Analysis has devoted considerable attention to prefigurative cognitive praxis, through ‘entry projects’, defined as ‘socio-cultural learning processes of the transformation of relations and the self-transformation of the actors’ (Brie, 2010). Rainer Rilling gave me the concrete example of an entry project for free public transport.

We tried to find fields for entry projects—for example, people should not pay for the public transit here in the town. . . . It’s just a small suggestion. You don’t have to buy something when you want to travel here in the town. You just get it.¹² It’s kind of an ‘entry project’, and [when] the ruling class says ‘no’ [we see] that this is an entry project, because in the background there are these big questions, and that’s the reason why they don’t allow it. . . . And when you talk about the whole field of commons, it has to do with entry projects: the real access questions which are the beginning of self-empowerment.

Such prefigurative proposals as free public transit, which have both social-justice and ecological value, can be implemented as ‘non-reformist’ reforms (Gorz, 1967). Over time, they make what seem now to be impossible transformations possible.

Conclusions

These modes of praxis implicate each other as internally related facets of a whole. Indeed, if we reflect on how the 16 TAPGs engage in multiple modes of cognitive praxis, we get a complicated map along the lines of [Figure 1](#).¹³

Two modes—challenging hegemony and building solidarities dialogically—are basic items in the toolkit, employed by virtually all TAPGs. Empowering the grassroots, engaging (whether as outsiders or insiders) with dominant institutions, systematizing and disseminating alternative knowledge, and integrating theory and practice are more selectively invoked. Creating spaces for reflection and invention and prefiguring alternative futures from present practices appear less commonly as modes of cognitive praxis, indicating that TAPGs tend to devote their limited resources more to critique and collective empowerment than to the construction and promulgation of alternative social visions. Nearly all TAPGs challenge hegemony, but only four of them engage extensively in prefigurative praxis. Three of those four—Focus, RosaLux, and TNI—centre their KPM upon radical left counter-hegemonic visions. These groups also place a strong emphasis on the dialectic of theory and practice, while engaging critically and selectively with states and inter-governmental bodies. The fourth TAPG that engages in prefigurative KPM—PRIA—emphasizes a more critical-liberal vision of participatory democracy through grassroots empowerment and engagement with state and inter-governmental bodies. While PRIA is heavily engaged in building solidarities through dialogue and in systematizing alternative knowledge, it is the one TAPG that does not in any concerted way challenge the hegemony of transnational neo-liberalism.

The mapping shows a great deal of diversity in how TAPGs go about producing and mobilizing knowledge for social change, and identifies in Focus, RosaLux, and TNI a subgroup of TAPGs whose repertoire of cognitive praxis consciously orients them to the formation of a global left.¹⁴ If Focus, RosaLux, and TNI are particularly important centres of transnational counter-hegemony, other TAPGs might be said to specialize in activities such as knowledge systemization

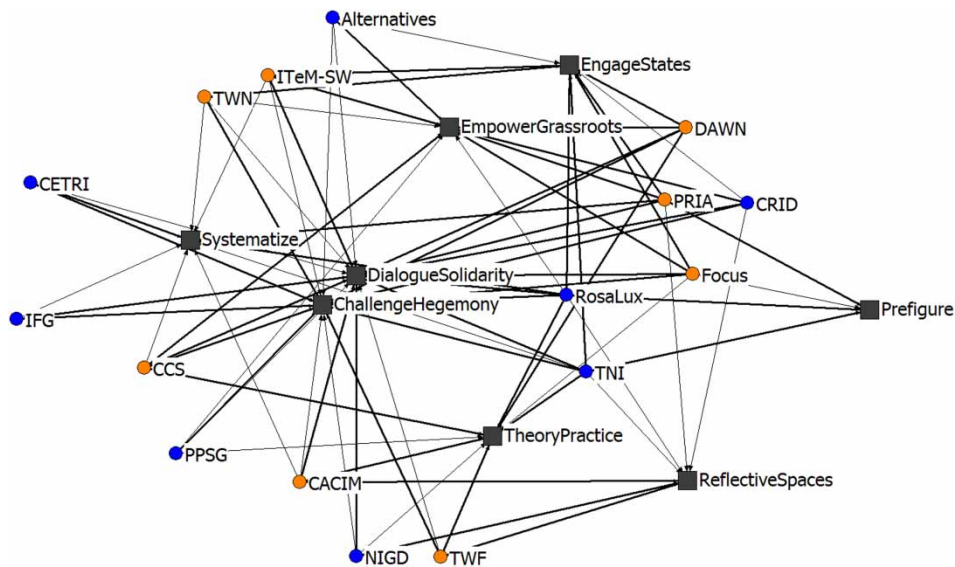


Figure 1. Predominant modes of cognitive praxis used by 16 TAPGs.

(e.g. IFG and CETRI), or in the combination of grassroots empowerment and engagement with statist bodies that characterizes the cognitive praxis of Alternatives, ITeM/Social Watch, and Third World Network. In short, our findings suggest an informal division of labour that differentiates TAPGs' contributions to the formation of a counter-hegemonic historical bloc.

The eight categories of cognitive praxis might be seen as constituting, in total, a typology; however, it is important to recall that their borders are not sealed off from each other, but overlap and interpenetrate. As we have seen, effective alt KPM typically means that a group combines various modes in a coherent initiative. In this sense the schema might be read as a checklist of some 'best practices' and could be useful in assessing ongoing projects and in designing new ones. In practical terms, one could reflect on how a given initiative enacts or articulates with each of the eight modes, and whether it might be redesigned so that its full transformative potential can be realized.

This article has presented an analysis of the modes of cognitive praxis on which TAPGs draw in fashioning their interventions. I have emphasized eight interlinked modes, as facets of a repertoire of alt KPM that offers many combinations of strategies and practices. In conclusion, let me underline this approach's debt to a *dialectical* view of knowledge and transformation.

There are two particularly important senses of dialectic in the typology: most evidently, the dialectic of theory and practice, which implies creation of critical spaces, the systematization of knowledge in interaction with practice, and the transformations that occur with prefigurative cognitive praxis. It is this instance of the dialectic that carries forward the foundational analysis of Marx in his 11 Theses of 1845.

But equally important is a second, ancient sense of dialectic, most evident in the building of solidarities through dialogue, which is closely imbricated in other modes of cognitive praxis such as grassroots empowerment and challenging hegemonic knowledge. This second instance is Socratic, epitomized in the notion that 'truth resides in the dialogue'. In this rendition, dialectic is 'the art of engaging in dialogue, and this union of dialectic and dialogue, in turn, as knowledge' (Notomi, 2004, paragraph 22). Sound knowledge arises out of dialogue, but so do the solidarities that enable democratic movements to move effectively together. This sense of dialectic is integral to the formation of robust counterpublics, the recuperation of a democratic public sphere, and thus the possibility of what Jürgen Habermas has called *communicative democracy*—a (counter-factual) situation in which all parties participate on a level playing field in the decisions that shape their lives.¹⁵

Thus, alt KPM operates within a double dialectic as its practitioners endeavour to engage with conjunctural political issues while producing cognitive supports for an alternative historical bloc. It is in a forward movement, combining *dialogue* among well-informed publics with the iterative *integration of theory and practice* that alternative knowledge makes its indispensable contribution to counter-hegemony, as TAPGs act organically within the social forces that challenge hegemony.

Finally, to reiterate our stating point, this double dialectic moves within a wider dialectic of social structure and agency, emphasized by Marx, Gramsci, and a host of other historical materialists. Alternative knowledge is integral to the catharsis through which 'structure' metamorphoses from the weight of the world into 'a means of freedom, an instrument to create a new ethico-political form and a source of new initiatives' (Gramsci 1971, p. 367).

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This work was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada [grant number 410-2011-0353].

Notes

- 1 In this article, counter-hegemony is used in the sense just employed (see Carroll & Ratner 2010 for further details). Other authors such as Smith and Weist (2012) use the term 'anti-systemic movements' to refer to much the same phenomenon.
- 2 Space does not permit discussion of each participating group; see Carroll (2014) for details on this and methodology. All quoted participants have agreed to this practice.
- 3 ZCom, a group included in (Carroll, 2013), did not respond to repeated requests. It was dropped from participation in this project and replaced by PRIA, a pioneer in participatory-action research as a cognitive praxis. In some respects, ZCom is more a site for alternative journalism and related communication than for alternative knowledge production *per se*; however, ZCom played a leading role in the development of 'participatory economics' (PARECON) and in founding the International Organization for a Participatory Society in 2012. For further discussion see (Carroll, 2013, 2014).
- 4 See <http://kochcash.org/the-kochtopus/>, accessed 26 July 2014.
- 5 Among the TAPGs studied here, only CACIM, with its emphasis on creating open spaces outside of institutionalized power (see below), does not in one way or another engage strategically and/or practically with states and dominant institutions.
- 6 See <http://rosalux.de/english/foundation/political-education.html>, accessed 1 August 2014.
- 7 See <http://cacim.net/wiki/tiki-index.php?page=Publications>, accessed 1 August 2014.
- 8 Many DAWN books are available *gratis* at <http://www.dawnnet.org/resources-books.php>, accessed 1 August 2014.
- 9 http://logolink.org/new/?page_id=13, accessed 3 August 2014.
- 10 <http://www.practiceinparticipation.org/index.php/pages/about-us>, accessed 3 August 2014.
- 11 See the extensive discussion of *vivir bien* at Systemic Alternatives <http://systemicalternatives.org/category/debate/vivir-bien-debate/>, an online initiative of Focus and aligned groups. Accessed 15 November 2014.
- 12 In January 2013, Tallinn became the first EU capital city to provide free public transport. See the RosaLux-sponsored site, Who Owns the World?, <http://www.who-owns-the-world.org/en/2013/08/26/tallinn-free-public-transport/>. Accessed 1 August 2014.
- 13 This diagram uses non-metric multidimensional scaling to show, in a two-dimensional space, each TAPG's primary modes of cognitive praxis with dark lines, and secondary modes with light lines. The diagram is based on a scheme in which primary modes were coded as '2', secondary modes as '1', and modes of little to no relevance to a given TAPG as '0'. Ratings were based on my judgements, from interviews and relevant documents. TAPGs based in the Global South are represented in orange; TAPGs based in the Global North are represented in blue.
- 14 Interestingly, a network analysis of the connections that embed TAPGs within 'global civil society' showed that these three TAPGs are linked to each other, and that all three tend to have collaborative relations with civil society groups committed to a politics of alter-globalization (Carroll & Sapinski, 2013, pp. 220, 232).
- 15 See Habermas (1987). It is important to view communicative democracy as a counter-factual, whose prospects depend on the elimination of power relations and hierarchies (e.g. of class, gender, race/ethnicity, and bureaucratic domination) that reach into and distort communicative processes, in favour of hegemonic interests. For a critical application and extension to issues of global justice see Fraser (2013, pp. 189–208).

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William K. Carroll's research interests are in the areas of the political economy of corporate capitalism, social movements and social change, and critical social theory and method. A member of the Sociology Department at the University of Victoria since 1981, he established the Interdisciplinary Undergraduate Program in Social Justice Studies at the University of Victoria in 2008 and served as its director from 2008 to 2012. Carroll was President from 2010 to 2014 of Economy and Society, a Research Committee of the International Sociological Association, and currently sits on the executive as Past President. His work has appeared in *International Sociology*, *Capital & Class*, *Global Networks*, *Sociology*, *Critical Sociology*, *Journal of World-System Research*, *Antipode*, *Sociological Review*, *Sociological Quarterly*, *Socialist Register*, *Media, Culture & Society*, *Studies in Social Justice* and *Socialist Studies*. His books include *The making of a transnational capitalist class*, *Corporate power in a globalizing world*, *Remaking media* (with Bob Hackett), *Critical strategies for social research*, and *Organizing dissent*. His current project, "Alternative policy groups and global civil society: Networks, discourses and practices of counter-hegemony," is a community-engaged initiative in knowledge co-creation through participatory field research, among other research methods.