



## Stealing the Fire. A Study of Emancipatory Practices in the Field of Communication

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### Abstract

This research addresses the emergence of emancipatory practices in the field of communication, as part of the growing mobilisations on media and communication issues. By emancipatory communication practices (ECP) I mean ways of social organising that seek to create alternatives to existing media and communication infrastructures. Examples of emancipatory communication practices include independent information platforms, ‘alternative’ radio and video productions, and the operation of communication infrastructures such as not-for-profit Internet Service Providers. By becoming involved in these activities, activists aim at bypassing the politics of enclosure and control enacted by states and business groups. They seek to empower groups and individuals to communicate on their own terms. The study focuses on two types of ECP that have emerged around an ‘old’ and a ‘new’ medium, namely community radio and radical internet projects. I analyse these projects as instances of organised collective action, and look at them through the lens of social movement research. In particular, I adopt an interactionist perspective (Melucci 1996), focusing on sense-making processes. I analyse movement formation and identity processes in order to understand how people mobilise on technological ‘expert’ issues. I investigate organisational structures to comprehend how organisations reflect the way collective identities are built around technology. I also look at action repertoires in interaction with perceived political opportunities. Not only do ECP activists mobilise ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ institutions, they also mobilise ‘beyond’ (i.e. supposedly independently of) the political process. Finally, I explore the networking strategies of ECP actors, and identify the respective ‘movement dynamics’. I analyse whether the collective action observed is a transnational social movement in the making. I argue that collective action on media and communication issues (that includes ECP, but also other groups) can be considered a ‘karst movement’. Like a karst river, such movement remains underground, surfacing only when the environmental conditions are favourable (e.g. where a policy window opens or following an episode of repression).



**Examining Board: David Snow (Univ. California, Irvine), Rainer Bauböck (EUI), Robert Hackett (Simon Fraser University), Stefania Milan (candidate) Donatella Della Porta (EUI) (Supervisor)**

Stefania Milan is currently a research assistant at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (RSCAS) at the European University Institute, and a Research Fellow at the Centre for Media and Communication Studies at the Central European University (CEU) in Budapest. At the RSCAS she works on Access to Citizenship in Europe project (EUCITAC). For EUCITAC, she is a member of the EUI team in charge of the consortium's coordination and oversees the definition and construction of the project website.

Stefania holds a PhD in Political and Social Sciences from the European University Institute, and a degree in Communication Sciences from the University of Padova. She has taught at the CEU and at the University of Lucerne, in Switzerland, where she was awarded the Excellent Teaching ("Hervorragende Lehre") title in 2009. She has contributed to many books and peer-reviewed journals, writing on citizens' participation in multilevel governance, social movements, media policy, internet governance, and grassroots media.

Stefania serves as co-chair of the Emerging Scholars Network of the International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMRC). She is a member of the editorial board of Platform: Journal of Media and Communication <<http://www.culture-communication.unimelb.edu.au/platform/>>, and a Research Associate of the Social Science Research Council. Stefania is also a freelance journalist and member of the UK National Union of Journalists.