

The Big We. Social Network Analysis for Citizens | Introduction | p. 1

The financial crisis is affecting people all over the world since 2007 in multiple ways: Beginning with the burst of the housing bubble in the US, continuing with governments spending billions to bail-out failing banks and companies and finally leading up to massive debts in public budgets as well as to disruptions in welfare institutions, in neoliberal economy and in the representative democracy.

Yet, the dark time of multiple crises is also a time of social innovations: Since 2011 social movements develop around the globe, looking for answers to the great variety of problems. From Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street to the squatting of public places in Southern Europe: Everywhere in the world the victims of the crises are gathering to protest against austerity and to demand real democracy. All these new social movements can also be seen as social laboratories. They experiment with new ways to consume, to work, to communicate and to allow for participation.

Among the societies, which are disrupted by austerity politics, new social agents, self-help groups, public initiatives, cooperatives, share economies, alternative media and progressive energy solutions are on the rise. The Berliner Gazette conference SLOW POLITICS sees all these new social phenomena of cooperation and transnational networking as an expression of a new feeling of togetherness, as a constituting process of a new demos and as new collective uprising for more participation and rights. In short: Those social phenomena are an expression of a new "Big We" – a term that served as the title for a workshop at SLOW POLITICS.

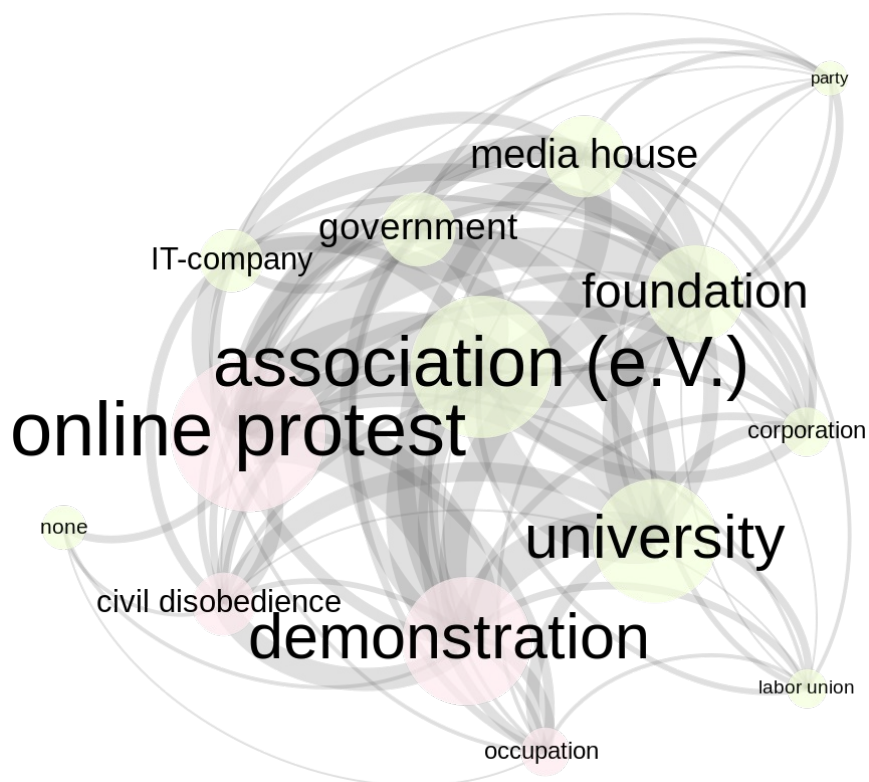
The workshop was about exploring the question, of how people unite and bundle their collective forces effectively in progressive networks. However, we didn't answer it in an abstract way. We tried to work out the Big We among the participants of the conference. Our workshop experiment was about visualizing possibilities for cooperation among the scientists, activists and the media folks joining the conference. We dealt with particular questions: What connects us? What are our unused connecting lines? Which connections could we make in the future? Which are our shared goals and values? Which are our shared political forms of actions? Are we involved in alternative forms of distribution? With whom do we want to work in the future? And how can we solve problems in the current crisis even better in a common way?

We used the tool Social Network Analysis to explore existing connections and furthermore to visualize possibilities of cooperation between us, that were hidden until then and which we didn't realize before. To reach this goal we created at SLOW POLITICS within the workshop "The Big We" six social network maps, using the data from a questionnaire that we developed prior to the conference and distributed among the participants of the SLOW POLITICS conference.

The Big We. Social Network Analysis for Citizens | Maps | p. 2**1. Forms of political action and institutions**

In this map you can see which kinds of political action members of our target group have already participated in and to which institutions they are connected. Probably the most interesting result of this map is that there are only a few people who are 'classically political' engaged: Only a few are active in party politics and unions and there are also only a few people engaged locally. They are rather active in universities, in media, in societies and charities, they are politically engaged in a new way. People use new forms of online protesting as well as demonstrations as a classic means of social expression.

Our conclusion from this is: Political engagement in huge organizations is losing some of its appeal to a group that is urban as well as online. People from this group rather seem to see their work and their self-created social network as a foundation for their political actions. They are mostly interested in uncomplicated and noncommittal ways to participate in protests and actions they continuously work in smaller cooperatives otherwise.



All maps are actually interactive – accessible on this website:

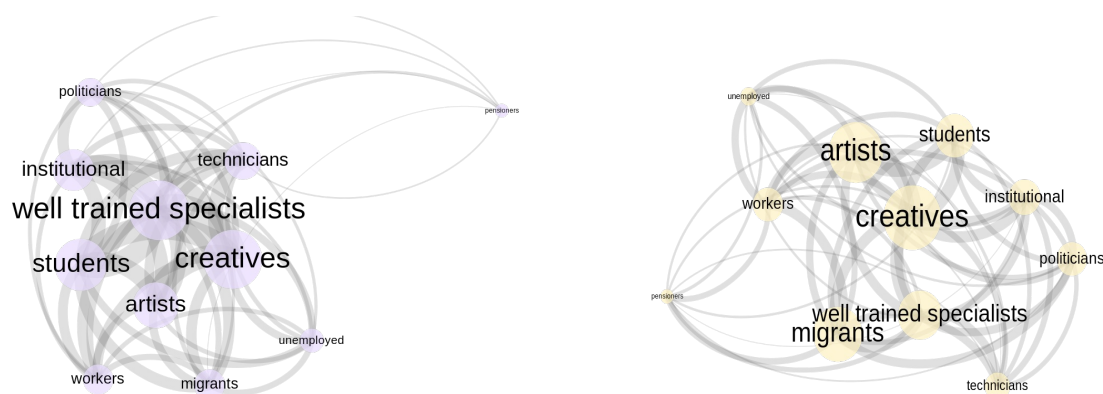
<http://thebigwe.github.io/snm.html>

The Big We. Social Network Analysis for Citizens | Maps | p. 3

2 and 3. Cooperations and wishes for cooperation

In both maps you can see with whom people are currently working with and with whom they would like to work in the future. Probably the most interesting result of these maps is that we can divide both visualizations roughly into two groups. Many people already work with skilled workers, students and artists and want to keep working with them. There is another big group in our maps with whom few people are working at the moment and few people wish to work with them in the future. In this other group there are the unemployed and unskilled workers, as well as migrants, politicians and pensioners. These groups are off the center in both cards with the only exception being migrants with whom lots of participants wish to work more in the future.

Our conclusion from this is: Besides being skeptical towards established politics, there is little motivation to work with people that are neither well educated nor creative nor physically fit. Without assuming that the second group is actually described by this, people seem to have neither time nor space to integrate the others into their projects. This could indicate a high demand on efficiency and efficacy in the projects of the people who joined this questionnaire/conference, which in turn leads to an unwanted selection and exclusion.



All maps are actually interactive – accessible on this website:

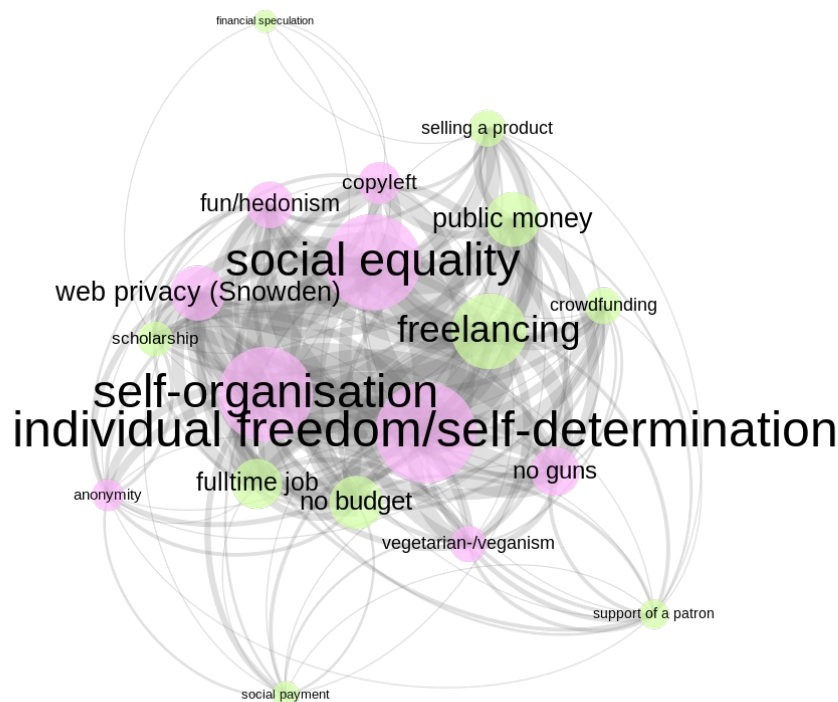
<http://thebigwe.github.io/snm.html>

The Big We. Social Network Analysis for Citizens | Maps | p. 4

4. Values and Financing

In this map, we visualized which values are most important to our participants and also how they're financing themselves and their projects. Probably the most interesting result of this map is that most of our participants marked individual freedom, social equality and self organization as their most important values. Many of them also work freelance or don't have a regular income at all. The third most common means of financing themselves and their projects is public money.

Our conclusion from this is: Our individual values influence our decisions about how we work and how we finance ourselves. People who value individual freedom and social equality prefer working outside the standard employer/employee relationship. They seem to be looking for autonomous and flexible working schedules as e.g. freelancing allows for. Their values of freedom and equality also seem to discourage them from financing themselves and their work with market based means such as sales and trading. A lot of people seem to value autonomous work with partners, which they choose on their own. Another prominent choice is applying for public money.



All maps are actually interactive – accessible on this website:

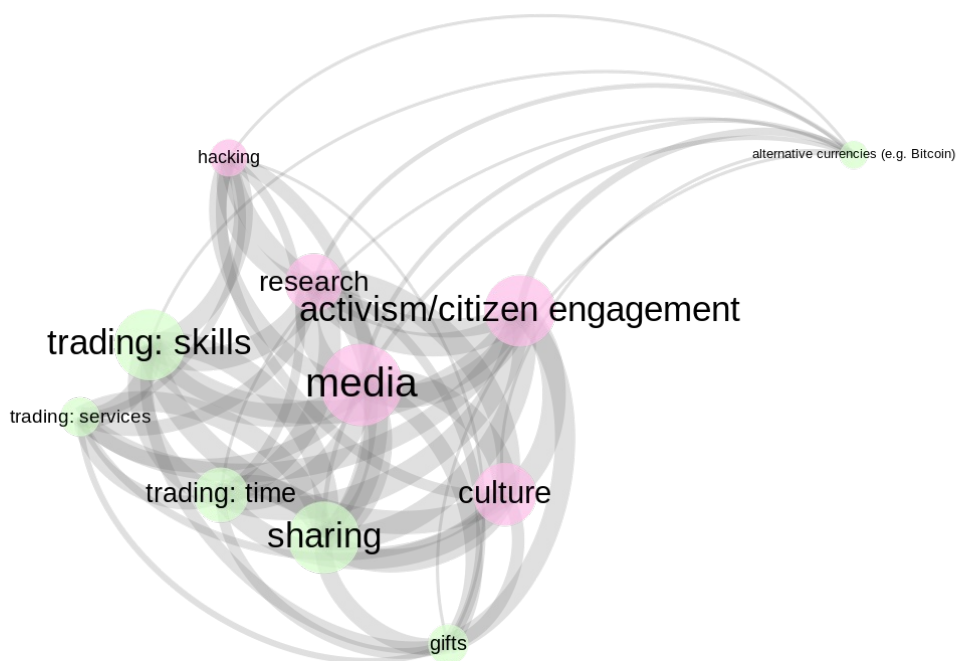
<http://thebigwe.github.io/snm.html>

The Big We. Social Network Analysis for Citizens | Maps | p. 5

5. Alternative forms of exchange and distribution

In this map we visualized which alternative forms of exchange and distribution, which are used by hackers, political activists, media folks, scientists and creative artists. Probably the most interesting result in this map is that each group is already quite involved in the booming field of share-economy. Even though the participants often use the internet for their projects and their work mostly relies on virtual networks the crypto-currency 'Bitcoin' seems not to be very popular. In their projects they rather rely on the mutual exchange of techniques, time and complementary work to achieve their goals in a cooperative manner.

Our conclusion from this is: The participants of the SLOW POLITICS conference don't rely on established exchanges (like work and wages). They rather use the new culture of sharing to achieve their goals in their own networks. Their credo could be: To complement each other is better and more efficient than competition.



All maps are actually interactive – accessible on this website:
<http://thebigwe.github.io/snm.html>