CONTESTED WATER: ANTI-WATER PRIVATIZATION MOVEMENTS IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

by

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Abstract

My dissertation compares two social movements opposed to water privatization in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada and Stockton, California, United States. While these movements emerged in response to similar global forces and institutions, they developed differently and had divergent outcomes. While the movement in Vancouver successfully prevented the privatization of local water services, the movement in Stockton failed to prevent water services from being privatized, although as a result of a legal challenge the private contract was eventually overturned.

Through a qualitative comparative analysis of data from 70 in-depth digitally recorded interviews with movement actors, I identify the specific underlying pathways that explain how cognitive, structural and relational mechanisms combine to shape mobilization, including how activists frame grievances, respond to opportunities, and utilize social networks to achieve their goals. My analysis also illuminates how each of these mechanisms is altered by the interplay between global and local processes, including international institutions and economic opportunity structures.

I identify four factors that explain mobilization emergence, trajectories and outcomes in the Vancouver and Stockton cases: 1) context-dependent socially constructed meanings of water, 2) differences in the use of frames, 3) differences in the nature of and responses to political opportunities 4) differences in the strength and cohesion of environmental-labour coalitions.

The findings contribute to the sociological understanding of social change in a global era. By revealing how global processes are constituted and reconstituted by local social movements – as well as how they interact with frames, opportunities and networks – my research adds a more nuanced and complete understanding of the specific ways globalization is shaping social
movement mobilization on the ground. The creation of *local solidarity* – achieved through the presence of *global connectors* and the synthesizing of transnational and situated frames – demonstrates the potential for social movements to move beyond identity or class-based politics to a more broad-based and inclusive counter-hegemonic movement. The findings demonstrate that successful challenges and alternatives to neoliberal globalization will not necessarily come from movements operating at the transnational level, but rather from locally-situated movements that are connected globally but rooted in local communities.
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Chapter 1: Introduction: Anti-Water Privatization Movements in the Age of Globalization

On a warm June evening in 2001, several hundred people attended a public meeting in Burnaby, British Columbia to voice their opposition to the Greater Vancouver Regional District’s (GVRD) plan to privatize the Seymour water filtration plant. As GVRD bureaucrats and elected officials waited inside the theatre to begin their presentation to the public, a group of activists made their way from the nearby skytrain station along the street towards the theatre. People chanted slogans and sang, while drums beat out a constant rhythm that grew louder as the crowd neared the entrance. Others carried banners with such slogans as “Keep our water public!” and “Don’t P3 in our water!” A ripple of blue – a theatre group, dressed in flowing blue costumes with faces painted blue and silver – snaked its way along the street. As they danced silently into the theatre and surrounded the GVRD representatives, they resembled a wave of water, flowing and moving in unison. “Those dancers were amazing,” said Amanda Jones¹, one of the organizers of the anti-water privatization protest, as she described the scene. “I remember them dancing behind the Chair of the meeting, doing all these crazy movements right behind him with their costumes and their banner, and it was like his head was just going to spin off his neck. I mean the imagery was so fantastic. It was brilliant.”

Amanda Jones is a community activist, and 37 year-old mother of two children, who has been involved in international human rights and social justice campaigns since she was a teenager. In 2001, she was working as a community organizer for a national social justice organization, the Citizens Action League, when she heard about a proposal by the Greater Vancouver Regional District’s Water Board to privatize the construction and operation of the

¹ All of the names of individuals and organizations used in this study are pseudonyms to protect the identity of my respondents.
new Seymour water filtration plant in North Vancouver, a facility that provides over forty percent of the clean drinking water to the region. The privatization plans proposed by the GVRD came at a time when Amanda Jones had been working closely with local, national and global water activists to organize a major international water conference in Vancouver to be held later that year. She had also recently returned from Cochabamba, Bolivia, where she learned about the negative consequences of water privatization first-hand, including enormous rate increases and cut-offs in poor neighbourhoods that had sparked a mass uprising, ultimately leading to the cancellation of the private water contract. These experiences shaped her concerns about water privatization, and her belief that “water is life” and should be protected as part of the commons.²

Amanda Jones had only recently been hired by the Citizen’s Action League, and soon realized this was her first major campaign. She was excited and eager to use her background in activism to help mobilize a major opposition movement to water privatization. In response to the GVRD proposal, she and her colleagues quickly began compiling information about water privatization, including stories about the deleterious consequences from communities around the world and the negative track records of many of the major multi-national water corporations who were bidding for control of the region’s water. Because the Citizen’s Action League had a national water campaign and was involved globally in movements to protect water as part of the public domain, Amanda Jones could draw on the informational and material resources, social networks and frames from these national and transnational movements. Yet, at the same time, with her background in community activism, she was also able to tap into a broad based network

² Although the type of contract proposed in Vancouver and Stockton is often referred to as a public-private partnership (P3), in this study I use the term privatization because it is how my respondents referred to the P3 proposals in their communities. Many respondents described using the term privatization strategically to counter what they saw as an attempt by their opponents to divert attention away from the issue of commodification of nature.
Mobilizing wide public support was considered vital to the campaign. During our interview, she described the importance of working in coalition with other community organizations,

How activism in general worked in Vancouver meant that we usually did most of our campaign organizing in coalition with others, and that was a really important piece of the work. And so we called a number of different organizations together that would have some kind of interest or expertise in the issue, like unions and environmentalists and anti-poverty groups, to see what we could do collectively. And we found people were really interested in the issue. There was also an international water conference being organized at the same time in Vancouver that had created a lot of buzz, and different organizations were working on their own water projects, so it was kind of a confluence of interests and timing that brought people together to get involved. So I would say it was a very broad initiative and it took many different forms. And that was one of the main reasons for our success.

Amanda Jones recognized the importance of broad-based coalitions for creating a powerful countermovement in response to the commodification of water. Because of their history working with organizations from diverse movement sectors, including environmental groups and labour unions, the Citizen’s Action League was instrumental in bringing together organizations with a stake in keeping water services in public hands. Many of the activists from these organizations had recently collaborated on anti-globalization and anti-trade campaigns. Their existing movement networks were instrumental for mobilizing a broad-based community coalition against water privatization that included labour unions, environmental and social justice groups.

Beyond these critical networks, the anti-water privatization movement in Vancouver was also shaped by the tactics, opportunities and frames provided by the broader anti-globalization movement. Activists utilized global narratives about water privatization, including emphasizing the threat to local democracy, accountability and community control from global economic institutions in order to mobilize public opposition to privatization and re-frame the way decision-makers viewed the issue. They also used disruptive and creative tactics designed to draw
attention to the importance of water as a source of life. “We put out flyers and did media work, but we also went out in costume on buses and the skytrain with information to try to bring people to the meetings,” explained Amanda Jones when describing the tactics used to mobilize the public and raise awareness of the dangers of water privatization. She continued,

We were also strategic in what we did at the meetings. We planted people around the audience that were prepared to ask specific questions and we had some chants prepared and that kind of thing. And we decided that we really needed to take over the meetings because the GVRD had sat us all down like a bunch of students, totally contrary to popular education style, and they were going to tell us what the scoop was. You know, all of that attitude. So we felt we needed to direct the meeting from our point of view and let them know that we understood the issue perhaps better than they did. And we did that really successfully, and it shocked them.

Amanda Jones’ description reveals the well-planned and organized campaign by anti-water privatization activists in Vancouver to disrupt meetings and counter the pro-privatization arguments presented by the GVRD.

While the meetings were noisy and disruptive, anti-water privatization activists drew on expertise demonstrating the risks from international trade agreements on the local control of resources and were strategic in presenting a unified message around trade and economic globalization. Amanda Jones described how the Citizens Action League was instrumental in bridging the concerns of diverse actors and organizations under the common rubric of threats from international financial and trade treaties. She explained,

The [Citizens Action League] really worked from kind of the trade perspective and privatization issues were major themes, so our materials focused on that. But what we were able to do working with other groups was to show how trade and privatization issues were important for environmental issues and jobs and poverty issues. Everything just sort of came together around that concern. And you know that was really effective because in the end, that is what convinced the GVRD. That is why they changed their minds. They were really worried about losing control under NAFTA.
Anti-water privatization activists in Vancouver drew on pre-existing networks, tactics and frames to build a movement against water privatization, pointing to the risks from trade agreements to local democratic accountability and the capacity of municipal governments to regulate and protect environmental resources. This strategy was instrumental in facilitating widespread mobilization, while at the same time opened up opportunities at the political level for a favourable outcome. Ultimately, after a second, equally boisterous public meeting in North Vancouver that saw an even larger crowd turn out to oppose water privatization, the GVRD reversed their decision to contract out water services to a private corporation, citing concerns over the impact of trade agreements on their ability to regulate water services. In a brief but fierce campaign, the anti-water privatization coalition in Vancouver had succeeded in preventing the privatization of water and keeping water services under public control.

Around the same time, a similar situation was developing in Stockton, California, where in the spring of 2001, a popular conservative mayor, backed by the majority on city council, announced plans to privatize the municipal wastewater treatment plant. In response to the proposal by the mayor and council, a coalition of citizens, representing environmental, labour and voter rights organizations came together to oppose water privatization. Many of the people involved in the anti-water privatization movement were unhappy with the mayor’s right wing agenda, and supported political campaigns opposing his re-election. This group of individuals included Bruce Owen, a retired businessman and board member of a local chapter of a national environmental organization and one of the founding members of the coalition steering committee. He described the opposition to privatization as a “natural fight” against the mayor and his “ultra conservative, anti-government” position.
The coalition in Stockton soon began holding meetings to organize a campaign against the privatization of water services. The steering committee decided to focus their efforts on presenting their arguments to the Stockton city council, and began organizing delegations to speak at council meetings. According to Bruce Owen, the strategy was to present a “rational and reasonable argument to the mayor”. “Our first priority was to gather the facts”, he said, explaining that the coalition wanted “to make sure that we had a valid analysis to present to council.” As part of their strategy to appear “rational” and “professional” some members of the steering committee opposed the desire by other coalition members – union members and youth activists, in particular – to utilize more disruptive tactics, including street protests and sit-ins. Bruce Owen felt that the “radical” element of the coalition and their focus on “candlelight vigils” would detract from the professional approach of the steering committee, and result in the dismissal of their arguments by the mayor and council. He described how the steering committee wanted to focus on the democratic accountability of elected officials and felt that disruptive tactics would work against them. He said,

We needed to be professional and business-minded. We felt we couldn’t risk being seen as too radical or as working for the unions. Although they were involved, we felt that that aspect of the movement had to be kept in the background. We did a lot of research, and we presented the facts at council meetings. We focused on the lack of accountability of the mayor and also on pressing for a public referendum on the privatization issue. We specifically chose the legal route over the philosophical route – you know water is life and all that – so we wouldn’t be seen as unprofessional or too radical. That was important.

Bruce Owen and other leaders of the anti-water privatization coalition felt that they should avoid presenting an ideological stance against water privatization, and thus focused their efforts on a factual cost-benefit analysis rather than a more general moral argument against the commodification of water. In fact, despite their opposition to water privatization in Stockton, not all of the activists involved in the movement, including Bruce Owen, were philosophically
opposed to water privatization, with many of them describing its suitability for other communities who lack infrastructure and expertise, including cities in the developing world and smaller communities in the United States.

The conservative approach by the movement in Stockton shaped the tactics used by the coalition. They focused their efforts on mounting a ballot initiative that, if successful, would have forced a referendum on the decision to privatize any municipal public service. Yet the negative focus of the campaign created divisions between elected officials and anti-water privatization activists, and failed to create openings for the movement to block the outsourcing of water services. Despite gathering enough signatures to have the ballot initiative accepted, the city council moved up the vote on privatization two weeks before the scheduled ballot initiative. As a result, the Stockton wastewater treatment plant was turned over to the private sector even though, two weeks later, the ballot initiative requiring voter approval on all privatization contracts successfully passed.

The tactical decision to focus on a voter-driven ballot initiative also created divisions within the coalition. Many of the union members who were involved in early mobilization efforts felt alienated by the focus on voter rights over the risks from corporate control of water. While the coalition steering committee emphasized local democratic process, the plant employees – who feared losing their jobs under a private contract – felt it was important to focus on the negative track record of multinational water firms in terms of job losses and water quality. Still other members of the coalition stressed the “global” nature of the problem and wanted to draw attention to the deleterious consequences of water privatization in other communities around the world as well as the risks to local democracy from international trade agreements.
Yet Bruce Owen and others on the steering committee felt that these arguments would shift attention away from what they believed was the critical issue: the democratic accountability of the municipal council. Bruce Owen felt that heavy involvement by the union representing the plant workers would be a “conflict of interest”. Although he appreciated their support for the cause, he felt that the coalition should remain neutral and not overtly support the union in their efforts to safeguard their jobs. He also felt that a focus on the global nature of the problem would detract from the “local” nature of the struggle and the importance of focusing on municipal electoral politics. He described how the conflict between the more radical elements of the coalition and those who advocated a less disruptive tactical approach ultimately prevented the movement from blocking privatization because it allowed the city a significant head start. “We failed because we started too late”, he explained. “By the time we got organized to do the initiative the city was already doing things in smoke-filled back rooms that the public was not aware of. Meanwhile we were busy holding vigils. While we are off doing that, the city is busy making plans in secret. That hurt our cause for sure.”

Despite a concerted effort by a coalition of union members, environmentalists, and voter rights advocates to block privatization plans by the city of Stockton, divisions within the movement in the choice of tactics and framing strategies failed to generate widespread mobilization. The persistent negative attacks on the mayor and council also constrained the movement’s ability to create openings for public input on the outsourcing of water services by reinforcing the division between authorities and activists. As a result, the movement was unable to block water privatization. Yet, rather than giving up in the face of defeat, the coalition fought back by mounting a legal challenge to privatization, arguing that the city of Stockton violated the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) by not requiring a full environmental assessment
of the proposed infrastructure upgrades to the municipal wastewater utility plant. In 2008, after a costly five year legal battle, the anti-water privatization coalition ultimately prevailed over the City of Stockton and succeeded in overturning the private contract.

*Comparing Social Movements Against Water Privatization*

The stories of Amanda Jones and Bruce Owen, two activists involved in the anti-water privatization movements in their communities – Vancouver, British Columbia, and Stockton, California – are reflective of the widespread opposition to water privatization that continues to play out in many communities around the world. Yet the stories from these two activists also demonstrate that, despite responding to similar threats, the movements in Vancouver and Stockton evolved differently. Why? This study answers that question by examining the mechanisms and processes that shape movements resisting neoliberal globalization on the ground. My aim is not simply to indentify the conditions that explain differences across similar movements, but also to illuminate the pathways by which these types of movements can both successfully resist global corporate hegemony and shape social policy at the community level. While the power of international economic institutions is increasing, the forms of resistance at the local level offer hope for creating alternatives to economic globalization, in part because they have clear targets and channels for participatory democracy. The responses by activists in this study demonstrate that neoliberal globalization is not inevitable, and that resistance and alternative visions to global hegemony are made possible through the power of social movements and the strengthening of local democracy.
Contested Water: Neoliberal Hegemony and Counterhegemony

Water is unique as a natural resource. No human can survive without access to water. At the same time, increasing demand and environmental threats – including industrial pollution, agriculture, urbanization, over-consumption and climate change – have given rise to a global water crisis (Meinzen-Dick and Ringler 2008). Much of Africa, Australia, the American Southwest and the Middle East are currently facing serious issues of scarcity and conflict over access to fresh water. As water levels and quality decline, demand for water is increasing and the world’s capacity to meet the needs of current and future generations is endangered. Currently, over 1.1 billion people do not have regular access to fresh water, while over 2.5 billion lack access to sanitation services (Catley-Carlson 2003). The massive increase in urbanization worldwide has put tremendous pressure on municipal water systems to provide both clean drinking water and sanitation services to the billions of people in need. In many cities, lack of infrastructure and high levels of poverty prevent access to clean drinking water or sanitation services for billions of people around the world (Jehl 2004). In urban areas globally, continued disinvestment in municipal infrastructure has left cities grappling with how to pay for critical upgrades to water service infrastructure in concert with growing pressure to outsource water services to private sector firms (Tal 2006).

In the era of neoliberal globalization the global water crisis is largely being dealt with through the increased commodification of water and privatization of water services, reflective of the growing shift of capital into new social and ecological domains (Roberts 2008). Neoliberalism – often called economic globalization or simply globalization – emerged in the 1970s with the rise of Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the U.S. and is characterized by a rolling back of the Keynesian welfare state and a shift to market-oriented
economic policies (Harvey 2005, Tickell and Peck 2003). These policies – which are often referred to as the ‘Washington Consensus’ include deregulation and privatization of public sector institutions and services, trade liberalization, decreased public spending, erosion of labour and employment protections, and an emphasis on individual liberty over the collective social good (Standing 2002, Tickell and Peck 2003, Harvey 2005, Leitner et al. 2007). The promotion and expansion of neoliberalism is linked to the increasing power and influence of global institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund and the expansion of International Trade Agreements (Peck and Tickell 2002, Stiglitz 2002, Goldman 2007, Hackworth 2007). Water has become a focus of economic restructuring as multinational water corporations compete for ownership of the world’s fresh water, new global regulations in trade and services emerge, and the push by international financial institutions to make water privatization a condition for loans to developing countries increases (Clarke 2003, Goldman 2007).

As capital becomes increasingly mobile and national and local governments more beholden to international trade agreements and the pressures from global economic integration, the involvement of the private sector in the delivery of public services is rapidly growing. A particular target for restructuring is municipal infrastructure, as deteriorating facilities combined with a lack of investment have led to the privatization of water services. In the United States, and to some extent in Canada, race and class tensions are often at the heart of the debate around cuts to public services (Galabuzi 2004, Giroux 2004, Hosang 2010). In many cases, opposition to public services is predicated on the ground that they benefit the “undeserving poor” (Bosco 1994, Simich et al. 2005, Larsen 2008, Hosang 2010). In California, the ballot initiative process has often been targeted at dismantling progressive policies and public programs that largely benefit low income, racialized and immigrant populations (Hosang 2010). In recent decades, ballot initiatives have been launched to deny public benefits to undocumented immigrants (Garcia 1995), to end affirmative action policies (Miller 1999) or to enact welfare reform (Bosco 1994). Yet the debate about water privatization is less directly linked to race and class dynamics, in part due to the strong public support for public investment in water services (Lunz Research Companies 2005). At the same time, the increased privatization of public water utilities globally is likely to reinforce economic and racial inequality because it disproportionately negatively affects lower income and racialized populations especially in the Global South (Goldman 2007).

A 2006 report by the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC) revealed that the World Bank estimates a doubling of water privatization by 2011 across the globe, encompassing almost 40% of the market (Tal 2006).
with severe budget constraints (a problem likely to become worse as a result of the global financial crisis) force governments to turn to the private sector for financial investment in both infrastructure and services. Multinational corporations also target cities for lucrative and relatively risk-free infrastructure contracts, and local governments are often unable to resist the pressures from both corporate lobbyists and federal governments pushing private sector investment (Peck and Tickell 2002).

Because water – and by extension waste water treatment – is so vitally important to human health, the economy and the environment, it is a vulnerable target for private sector investment. Scarcity and necessity mean that investing in water services has become highly profitable for global capital investment, with many analysts referring to water as the “new oil”. Municipal water privatization is a prime example of neoliberal globalization because it is linked to the rise and entrenchment of global financial institutions as well as to powerful multinational water firms seeking to invest in municipal infrastructure. Global water firms, supported by global institutions that promote private sector participation in water treatment and delivery, such as the *World Water Forum*, lobby and pressure municipal governments to outsource public water services (Goldman 2007, Barlow and Clarke 2003).

Market-based models are considered the solution to the problem of water scarcity and declining infrastructure; the basic argument being that by assigning property rights to water, private corporations will invest in infrastructure, resources will be reallocated properly and conservation will be encouraged (Low and Gleeson 1998). From this perspective, water is seen as a commodity to be regulated in the global market place, where corporations compete for

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access to the world’s fresh water resources. The push for water privatization in cities around the world is facilitated by the increasing power of multinational water firms and international financial institutions as well as the emergence of a network of international water agencies that promote the privatization of water worldwide (Barlow and Clark 2003).  

Yet despite the initial focus on water privatization as both a lucrative investment for the private sector and a way for governments to allocate resources more efficiently, more recently the commodification of water is being “sold” by the World Bank and other global financial institutions, including multinational water firms, as a means of providing clean water to the billions of people who currently lack access worldwide, thereby reducing inequality (Goldman 2007). Many scholars argue that the rise of water privatization in the developing world is a form of neocolonialism as Northern-based water firms gain control over an increasingly large portion of the world’s water supplies, with more and more people in the Global South dependent on European or American corporations for access to the most critical life-sustaining resource (Shiva 2002, Goldman 2007). 

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6 These agencies include the Global Water Partnership, the World Water Council and the World Commission on Water, which include representatives from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the major multinational water companies in top level positions. These agencies recognize water as an economic good and actively promote water privatization (Barlow and Clarke 2003).

7 Michael Goldman (2007) refers to this phenomena as “green neoliberalism” and argues that the “pro-poor” policy promoted by the World Bank and other global financial institutions is driven by three factors; the emergence of an international network of elite policy makers, who are increasingly seen as the new water experts, the linking of development loans to private sector investment in water services and the implementation of what he calls “green-neoliberal” loan conditions for countries wishing to access foreign capital (2007: 790).

8 In 2000, more than 460 million people – the majority located in the Global South – had their water supplied by a handful of mostly European water firms (Goldman 2007). This number is expected to grow to over 1.5 billion by 2015 (Shrybman 2002).
Yet while the highest growth areas for water service restructuring over the last two decades has occurred in the Global South, including Africa, Asia and Latin America, water privatization is not restricted to cities and countries in the developing world.

With the spread of neoliberalism in the 1990s, water marketization has increased across Europe and North America, particularly in England, Germany and France, and in the last decade, in the United States and Canada (Barlow and Clarke 2003). Despite the promotion of water privatization as a means of improving infrastructure and water quality as well as ensuring environmental and economic efficiency, the actual outcomes of outsourcing water services to private firms has been problematic and disappointing in many communities around the world. Problems include rate increases, cut-offs for those who cannot afford to pay, and failure to complete promised infrastructure investments (Castro 2007). In many cities, both in the Global North and the South, the deleterious consequences of water privatization have resulted in community resistance against water privatization as well as increased government regulation to monitor and oversee private water service delivery (Conca 2006, Goldman 2007).

In communities around the world, clashes between local governments and citizens’ movements around the management of public services and resources have become widespread.

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9 According to Schoenberger (2003), private sector investment in environmental management and municipal infrastructure – including wastewater treatment and water delivery services – is concentrated in advanced industrial countries despite the need for investment in developing countries. This is due in part to the withdrawal of the state from the delivery of public services as well as the relatively risk free nature of investing in cities in advanced economies.

10 For example, while water privatization in England has to some extent improved water quality and infrastructure, at the same time, inequality in terms of ability to pay has increased, while private water companies have collected record profits (Bakker 2004). Despite the argument that privatization would facilitate less government intervention, growing inequality in terms of ability to pay for water services has actually forced an increase in regulatory oversight (Goldman 2007).
In the case of the privatization of water services, the negative consequences of water marketization – including increased rates, lack of investment in infrastructure and disconnections for those who cannot pay – has resulted in the rise of anti-water privatization movements globally – from Cochabamba, Bolivia to Orange Farm, South Africa, to Atlanta, Georgia (Shiva 2002, Barlow and Clarke 2003, Goldman 2007). Anti-water privatization activists reject the notion of water as an economic good and claim instead that it should be considered part of the commons. These activists advocate water policies that reflect the principles of ecological, social and distributive justice in order to ensure the conservation and fair and equal distribution of water for current and future generations (Bakker 2007, Terhorst 2008).

Anti-water privatization movements are reflective of Karl Polanyi’s double movement thesis; as government policies and international financial regulations pave the way for expanded market economies, countermovements will emerge to resist the expansion of market regulation into social and environmental domains (Polanyi 2001). The increasing pressure on governments to outsource water services and the resistance to privatization by anti-water privatization movements presents a valuable research opportunity for examining the dynamics of counterhegemonic resistance because these movements are challenging the logic of commodification and the deregulation of the global economy at the expense of social and environmental well-being.

While many scholars have argued that anti-globalization movements represent a neo-Polanyian countermovement and should be examined in order to gain a better understanding of globalization and its alternatives (Evans 2000, Munck 2002, Peck and Tickell 2002, Burawoy
2003, Birchfield 2005 and Dryzek 2006), few studies specifically investigate the concrete social processes by which this counter-hegemony occurs, including the mobilization of resources and organizational networks by social movements on the ground in response to global forces. In the case of water privatization, while there has been considerable research examining the policies and outcomes of outsourcing water services (Bakker 2004, Goldman 2007), there has been little research examining the countermovements that arise in response to water privatization in local communities.

Local anti-water privatization movements are well-suited for investigating these processes because they operate at the global-local nexus. On the one hand, multinational water firms, transnational policy networks, and global financial and trade institutions offer global solutions to what they perceive as a local problem – the decline in public investment for water infrastructure and services. At the same time, while these global institutions are indeed hegemonic, they are more vulnerable to counter-movements at the local level because they represent clear and tangible targets for resistance, and because local political opportunity structures are more accessible to social movement actors than those in the national or international arena. Furthermore, because these movements bring together locally-rooted

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11 For example Dryzek (2006) argues that counter-movements resisting globalization can broaden the understanding of the effects of neoliberal globalization because they have “succeeded in opening up space for debate about the winners and losers from globalization, and on the effect of economic globalization on public goods such as environmental quality – globally and more locally.” (2006: 109).

12 Hackworth (2007) argues that neoliberal governance at the local level has been driven by non local processes, including bond-rating agencies and international monetary institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), who encourage the shift to neoliberal policies by connecting local institutions to global capital markets. He argues that the shift toward neoliberalism in cities across North America is a result of a dual process: the simultaneous downward shift of regulatory power to local governments and upward shift of power to global financial and regulatory institutions – what he calls glocalization (2007:42). Peck and Tickell (2002) argue that this shift has created a power imbalance in favour of global institutions through greater capital mobility and financial regulatory power, forcing municipal governments to cope with the consequences of federal disinvestment and deregulation by adopting more neoliberal policies and practices (2002).
networks – often from diverse and previously divided movement sectors – and resources in order to protect the well-being of the community, they are more socially cohesive and reflective of a shared collective identity than anti-globalization movements occurring in transnational spaces.\(^\text{13}\)

Local movements that recognize the interplay between the global and the local are well positioned to counter the pressure of increasing encroachment of global capital on local environmental systems and resources and offer viable alternatives to the neoliberal project.\(^\text{14}\)

The Contested Water study focuses on local social movement organizing against water privatization. It examines the reasons why these movements emerge in response to the outsourcing of water services from the perspective of social movement actors. Through a comparative analysis of two anti-water privatization movements – in Vancouver, British Columbia and Stockton, California – I examine the factors that shape the emergence, development and outcomes of these movements, including how global processes shape mobilization on the ground. Table 1.1 presents the similarities and differences between the two cases. While activists in both places were facing to similar threats - the proposed outsourcing of local water services to global water firms – and shared similar beliefs in the importance of

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\(^{13}\) Most research examining resistance to globalization focuses on transnational spaces of contention (Smith 2002, Kay 2005, della Porta et al. 2006) while research on domestic movements tends to focus on national level political process (Cress and Snow 2000). Cress and Snow (2000) argue that there is little empirical research examining the applicability of transnational or national theories of contention for explaining local movements, despite a growing shift to more localized contention. As anti-water privatization movements are shaped by opportunities and processes operating at both the local and global scale, investigating these movements is important for advancing the theoretical understanding of how global issues shape movements on the ground and whether existing theories of transnational and national social movements hold true for local forms of contention.

\(^{14}\) Leitner et al. (2007) argue that focusing only on macro level neoliberal globalization without examining its contestations on the ground works to “reinforce its hegemonic status” and contend that to understand both neoliberalism and its alternatives requires a “close and empirically grounded analysis.” Cities, they claim, offer a good opportunity to study resistance to the neoliberal agenda because they operate at the “the scale at which state policies and practices are particularly sensitive to democratic pressure and local agendas” (2007:2). Sassen (2000) argues that cities are fundamental to the new political economy as the regulatory power of the nation state shifts downwards, creating new openings for non-state actors to operate, including corporations and social movement actors. Social movements respond to this power shift by creating new identities and possibilities for shaping policy at the urban level.
protecting water as part of the commons, they responded differently. These differences reflect the divergent movement building conditions of each place and the implications of these divergences for movement outcomes. While both places involved cross-movement coalitions,

Table 1.1 Comparing Vancouver, British Columbia and Stockton, California

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Cases</th>
<th>Vancouver, BC</th>
<th>Stockton, California</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Proposal</strong></td>
<td>2001 Proposal to Outsource Water Services</td>
<td>2002 Proposal to Outsource Water Services</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Multinational Water Firms Shortlisted for Contract</td>
<td>Multinational Water Firms Shortlisted for Contract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Response</strong></td>
<td>Desire to Protect Water as Part of the Commons</td>
<td>Desire to Protect Water as Part of the Commons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cross-Movement Coalition Organizes in Opposition</td>
<td>Cross-Movement Coalition Organizes in Opposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frames</strong></td>
<td>Focus on Global Threats to Local Democracy</td>
<td>Focus on Local Political Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tactics</strong></td>
<td>Grassroots Mobilization</td>
<td>Voter-Driven Ballot Initiative</td>
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<td>Legal Opinion on NAFTA</td>
<td>Electoral Referendum</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome</strong></td>
<td>Water Remains under Public Control</td>
<td>Privatization in 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Private Contract Overturned in 2008</td>
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</tbody>
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they used different frames and tactics, with the movement in Stockton focusing on local political process and relying on a voter-driven ballot initiative, while the movement in Vancouver focused on mobilizing broad public support and drawing attention to the global risks from international institutions. And while the movement in Vancouver successfully prevented water privatization, in Stockton the water system was privatized for 5 years, until the private contract was overturned through a legal challenge in 2008. Because of these similarities and differences, I thought that these two movements would make an important and interesting comparison in order to understand the mechanisms and processes that explain these distinct local responses to similar global phenomena. As I show in the following chapters, the divergent mobilization trajectories and outcomes of the two movements are explained by differences in frames, opportunities and networks, demonstrating the importance of these mechanisms – and how they combine together – for shaping social movements. In the context of the increasing pressure on cities to outsource public services, the differences in the emergence, development and outcomes of these movements offer important insights into resistance to neoliberal globalization – particularly the encroachment of private capital into the natural world – and the factors that shape local social movements in a globalized world.

Although the initial success versus failure outcome differences between the movements in Vancouver and Stockton provided the original comparative ethnographic point of entry for this study, the eventual reversal of privatization in Stockton complicated the success-failure framework. Yet despite the eventual convergence in terms of outcomes, the two movements clearly experienced divergent trajectories that reflect the complex movement building conditions of each place. These differences are important for understanding how similar threats play out across different contexts and for understanding the particularities of local social movement mobilization in an era of globalization.

In this study, I draw upon Tarrow (1998) and Tilly’s (2004) definition of a social movement. Tarrow (1998:4) defines social movements as “collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interactions with elites, opponents and authorities.” Tilly (2004) argues that there are three major components to social movements: 1) a sustained and public claim against target authorities; 2) engagement in political action including forming coalitions, organizing public meetings, rallies and demonstrations, and using the media to highlight claims; and 3) what he calls WUNC displays, where social movement actors publicly display their worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment (Tilly 2004). In this study I use the term social movement to describe
What Lies Ahead: A Chapter by Chapter Outline

In the following chapters, I present the findings from my comparative study of the anti-water privatization movements in Vancouver, British Columbia and Stockton, California. The study utilizes a process-oriented approach to social movements, and examines the dynamic interaction of mechanisms of contention, including ideology and frames, opportunities and networks in order to explain the similarities and differences across the two cases. From the analysis of these two divergent cases, important patterns emerge that advance the understanding of localized forms of contention in the broader context of globalization.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical context of the research, and describes how the analysis of anti-privatization movements will advance theories of social movements and globalization. I draw upon empirical and theoretical insights from research on social movements, environmental sociology and globalization in order to present a framework for examining anti-water privatization movements. I discuss important gaps in existing theoretical approaches that limit a thorough understanding of localized forms of resistance to globalization, and present a case for adopting a more dynamic approach to the study of contention that examines how combinations of multiple mechanisms – including ideology, frames, political opportunities and networks – shape contention. While most research on social movements either focuses on the role of a particular mechanism such as political opportunity structures or networks in shaping mobilization, or adopts a static or linear approach to contention (McAdam et al. 2001), my study reveals that multiple mechanisms interact to produce particular outcomes, and thus demonstrates
the importance of adopting a more holistic and dynamic approach to the study of social movements.

In this chapter, I also discuss the need to adopt a situated, bottom-up analysis of local movements responding to neoliberal globalization in order to understand the interplay between global and local processes. Finally, I conclude with the assertion that because anti-water privatization movements are shaped by both global and local processes, they offer a potential avenue for contributing to the clarification of current theoretical debates about the effects of transnational social movements and globalization on localized forms of contention.

Chapter 3 presents the research design and methodology utilized for my comparative study of anti-water privatization movements. I describe the qualitative comparative research design, including the selection of the cases, the sampling strategy that I used to recruit respondents, the use of semi-structured interviews and archival documents, the limitations to the research design and the data analysis. This chapter describes how the qualitative comparative approach facilitated an in-depth comparison of two movements opposing water privatization, and allowed me to uncover the complex interactions between multiple mechanisms of contention, including how transnational institutions, networks and frames influence the trajectories and outcomes of social movements on the ground. This chapter also includes a detailed description of the sample of 70 respondents interviewed and presents descriptive statistics in order to show that they are demographically similar and comparable across the two cases. I present additional methodological detail about the Contested Water study, including a summary of the interview protocol, in the Methodology Appendix.

Chapter 4 examines the context-dependent meanings of water that shape political mobilization in by activists in Vancouver and Stockton and establishes the similar responses to
water privatization in each city, including the importance of water as part of the commons. I specifically examine how constructions of water are tied to situated knowledge, including people’s everyday lived experiences and how these meanings shape participation in the anti-water privatization movements in Vancouver and Stockton. The findings presented in this chapter are used to advance the understanding of the role of ideology in mobilization as separate from frames, to clarify the difference between social-psychological processes and strategic meaning work, including how ideology is related to the pre-movement perceptions of social movement actors. In the case of water, the responses of activists in Vancouver and Stockton demonstrate that understandings of water are shaped by notions of power, justice and spirituality and these symbolic meanings explain their strong desire to mobilize against the privatization of water in their communities.

This chapter demonstrates that social movements – particularly those that seek to protect the commons – are shaped by more than structural mechanisms such as political opportunities, and networks, and are also influenced by the social and cultural experiences of movement actors, including their emotional and visceral attachments to place. I conclude by discussing the need for social movement scholars need to incorporate into their analyses of contention the ideological processes that shape mobilization – beyond strategic frame analysis – in order to understand how pre-movement meanings influence movement participation.

Chapter 5 focuses on differences in the framing strategies between the anti-water privatization movements in Vancouver and Stockton. Here I move beyond an examination of broader ideological beliefs to investigate the role of strategically constructed frames in shaping the diverse trajectories and outcomes of the two movements. Despite sharing similar ideological understandings of water as part of the commons, the two movements utilized different frames.
These differences begin to reveal the divergent movement building conditions between Vancouver and Stockton. The findings demonstrate that the linking of global and local frames is critical for strengthening the claims of local movements responding to global processes. I argue that the framing strategy utilized by the movement in Vancouver was critical to creating opportunities for a favourable outcome because it specifically linked global issues with local concerns – through the presence of global connectors – and as a result facilitated a sense of local solidarity in the face of threats from international financial and trade institutions. In contrast, activists in Stockton did not utilize global framing strategies and instead focused their claims on local political accountability, entrenching the divide between activists and elites. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the importance of examining the global context of localized contention and the use of global frames by local movements resisting neoliberal globalization.

Chapter 6 focuses on differences in political context and opportunities between the two cases and the impact of these differences on movement development and outcomes. While the anti-water privatization movements in Vancouver and Stockton faced similar external threats – the proposed privatization of municipal water services – these movements followed different mobilization trajectories that contributed to divergent outcomes. The findings demonstrate that differences in political context, including the degree of institutional openness, the presence or absence of pre-existing movements, and the divergent responses by activists to opportunities and targets – including those at the local and global level – explain the divergent trajectories and outcomes of the two movements. I argue that movements that synthesize global and local opportunities by engaging in strategic localism generate a sense local solidarity that unites authorities with activists under a shared desire to protect local resources from global economic
and institutional threats. I conclude by calling for a reconceptualised understanding of political process that moves beyond a focus on macro level opportunity structures to investigate the interplay between opportunities and agency, as well as the role of multi-level opportunity structures – at the local and global scale – for understanding the dynamics of local movements in a global context.

Chapter 7 examines cross-movement coalition building in the anti-water privatization movements in Vancouver and Stockton, and describes how movements to protect water as a public resource facilitate alliances between traditionally oppositional movement sectors, including labour and environmental movements. I describe the importance of cross-movement coalition building, especially in the context of localized resistance to neoliberal globalization. The chapter contrasts coalition building in Stockton and Vancouver in order to demonstrate that an important factor for explaining the success or failure of anti-water privatization movements is the presence or absence of strong, broad-based coalitions that unite previously disconnected groups under a common frame and shared tactics.

The findings presented in this chapter demonstrate that the strength of labour-environmental coalitions is tied to organizational cultures and the presence of bridge builders. Specifically, I argue that the strength of the labour-environmental coalition in Vancouver is explained by a broader culture of social movement unionism versus the more traditional business

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17 Mair (1997) refers to the practice of multinational firms embedding themselves in the culture and practices of local sites as “strategic localization”. This idea has been applied to the study of labour movements. For example, Herod (2001) argues that while in many cases labour unions can successfully challenge transnational corporations by organizing transnationally, in other cases workers and union activists have been highly effective when they organize locally in response to globalization by engaging in “strategic localization” because they are able to target specific “on the ground” policies and practices of transnational corporations. Snitow and Kaufman (2007) refer to the localized forms of resistance to the outsourcing of water services to multinational water firms as “strategic localism”.
unionism of the labour movement in Stockton. Differences in the nature and strength of the labour-environmental coalitions between the Stockton and Vancouver cases are also explained by the presence or absence of key bridge building organizations. In Vancouver, the presence of a social justice organization proved critical for bridging the divide between labour and environmental organizations because of its capacity to link movement frames by merging environmental and labour concerns with global issues such as trade and corporate ideology. In Stockton, the absence of a bridge building organization resulted in a fractured coalition, with labour unions focused on job related issues and community organizations centered on democratic accountability. The findings presented in this chapter demonstrate that under the right conditions, alliances between the labour and environmental movements can be a potentially powerful force against the increasing commodification of nature, and offer alternatives to neo-liberal globalization.

Chapter 8 concludes the dissertation with a summary of the main findings of the study and a discussion of the broader theoretical implications. This study contributes to debates about local social movements in a globalizing world, and advances our understanding of the dynamic processes that combine to shape mobilization, from an on the ground perspective. This chapter describes how the findings of the research address the gaps in the social movements and transnationalism research literatures. First, by adopting a multi-scale analysis of the interactions between ideology and frames, opportunities and networks, I provide a more thorough and dynamic explanation of social movements, and thus move beyond the limitations of previous research that examines these mechanisms separately.

Second, by providing an on-the-ground analysis of the anti-water privatization movements in Vancouver and Stockton from the perspective of social movement actors, my
study reveals how globalization shapes contention at the local level and provides a more nuanced understanding of the local-global movement nexus. The findings demonstrate the specific pathways by which global processes are constituted and reconstituted by social movement actors at the local level, including how they interact with frames, opportunities and networks.

Each of the chapters in this dissertation presents one part of a more complete explanation of social movements. Yet my goal in this study is not just to explicate what factors shape anti-water privatization movements. I am also interested in contributing to a sociological understanding of the role of social movements for resisting and offering alternatives to economic globalization. My research on anti-water privatization movements reveals the growing link between local contestations and global power structures. While most research on globalization emphasizes the hegemony of global capitalism, my research reveals the counter-hegemonic power of communities, and demonstrates that successful challenges and alternatives to neoliberal globalization will not necessarily originate from transnational movements, but rather from situated movements that are connected to global networks and resources, but rooted in local communities.
Chapter 2: Globalization and Local Social Movements: A Framework for Comparing Anti-Water Privatization Movements

Introduction

This chapter presents the conceptual and theoretical framework I use to explain the emergence, trajectories and outcomes of anti-water privatization movements in Vancouver and Stockton and for explaining the differential development of these movements in response to similar forces. Building on the work of scholars in the area of social movements, environmental sociology and globalization, I examine the interactions between three processes – frames, political opportunities and coalitions – and their role in shaping the mobilization patterns of the two movements, in the context of local responses to neoliberal globalization and policies around environmental resources. In the context of these theoretical frameworks, I argue that movements implicated in transnational flows of capital and power should be examined differently than those that are disconnected from international institutions and opportunities. I also contend that local movements should be investigated differently than movements operating at a global scale because the processes that shape them – including frames, opportunities and networks – operate in different ways at the local versus the national or transnational level. Because local movements responding to neoliberal globalization are implicated in both local and international processes, the study of these movements – including anti-water privatization movements – offer a way to clarify theoretical contestations around transnationalism, economic globalization and its effects on local social movement mobilization and outcomes.¹

¹ Tarrow (2002) argues that despite a growing debate about the importance of global protest, there is a lack of empirical evidence demonstrating the causal mechanisms that explain how globalization shapes localized forms of contention. I argue that global processes – including flows of capital and international institutions such as multinational corporations and international trade and investment treaties – provide new threats and opportunities for social movements at the local level, affecting the kinds of networks, frames and tactics utilized by activists.
Research on Social Movements

Over the last fifty years, there has been increasing interest in the study of social movements, and the development of a theory of contention that explains not only why, but how, individuals engage in activism. Scholarly research in this area generally falls into one of three categories: political process – which examines the role of the political institutional context in shaping mobilization and outcomes – network analysis – which examines the importance of individual, organizational and movement ties for mobilization and outcomes – and framing – which investigates the construction of meaning by movement organizations in order to mobilize constituents and create openings for favourable outcomes. More recently, scholars of contentious politics have pointed to the need for a more dynamic approach to the study of contention that examines the interplay between these three overarching categories (see McAdam et al. 2001, Meyer 2004 and Tilly and Tarrow 2007). While these three areas of investigation offer valuable theoretical tools for understanding and explaining social movements, there are limitations to each approach, particularly for understanding the dynamics of local movements resisting neoliberal globalization. With the increasing importance of globalization and its impact on social movements, there is a growing body of research that investigates the role of transnational institutions, frames and networks for shaping social movements in a globalizing world. Many scholars argue transnational institutions have growing influence over the distribution of resources and environmental risk and claim that social problems, in particular those that are ecological in nature, are increasingly disembedded from local context, affecting the way local movements mobilize (Beck 1999, Pellow 2007, Gould et al. 2008). Yet, at the same time, environmental sociologists point to the importance of local context for shaping constructions of nature and mobilization around environmental resources (McNaghten and Urry 1998, Satterfield
Understanding how globalization influences social movements on the ground, including how it shapes political opportunities, frames and network dynamics requires a reconceptualised model of social movements.

**Political Process: Understanding the Political Context of Contention**

During the last three decades the political process model has been the key theoretical approach for explaining contentious politics. Political process models emphasize the role of the political institutional context and how it shapes the opportunities and resources of social movement actors and organizations. Political process theory addressed earlier theories of collective behaviour that highlighted social disintegration or breakdown as the cause of social protest, viewing it largely as irrational (Tarrow 1998, Morris 2000). Political process theory also sought to address the weaknesses of resource mobilization theory, and its tendency to focus exclusively on social movements themselves – in particular the economic resources available to movement organizations – while ignoring the importance of the larger political environment to mobilization. While resource mobilization theory countered the irrationality thesis of collective behaviour, it failed to account for either the external political opportunities that provided openings in the system for challengers or for the cultural processes – identity, agency and meaning work – that are key elements of mobilization (Tarrow 1998, Meyer 2004).

The political process approach emphasizes the importance of the political context – including the degree of openness of the political system, the stability of political institutions,

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2 McCarthy and Zald (1977) formulated the first theoretical and empirical challenge to social breakdown theories of contention by developing a theory of resource mobilization, which demonstrated that social movements result from the rational choices and actions of individuals and organizations. Resource mobilization theorists focused on the ways in which movements are shaped by the availability of economic, social and political resources as well as the ability of organizations to mobilize and sustain those resources (McCarthy and Zald 1977, Tarrow 1998).
divisions within the political elite and their willingness to accept movement claims, and the
degree of repression by the state – in shaping the strategies and tactics of movement activists and
providing the opportunities that influence their success or failure (McAdam 1996, Tarrow 1998,
Meyer 2004). Political process theorists argue that contentious politics can only be understood in
relation to wider political structures and systems because all social protest is inherently political.
Movements thus operate within the political arena with the goal of influencing policy and
achieving political representation. Moreover, the state shapes both conflict – by providing
grievances around which movements organize – and the alliances necessary for the mobilization
to emerge and develop (McAdam 1996, Jenkins and Klandermans 1995, Meyer 2004). Of
particular importance to political process theorists is the notion of political opportunity structures
– the aspects of the external political environment that provide incentives for people to engage in
contentious politics by affecting their perceptions of success or failure – which link collective
action to the state (Tarrow 1998, McAdam et al. 2001, Tarrow and Tilly 2007).

Research on political process offers valuable insights in to the role of political context for
shaping opportunities for mobilization and outcomes. Doug McAdam’s (1982) study of the civil
rights movement in the United States was one of the first studies to highlight the importance of
external conditions of mobilization. This study challenged previous theories of collective
behaviour, including resource mobilization theory, by demonstrating that civil rights activism
emerged as a powerful movement in response to opportunities created by external context,
including declining state repression, increased African-American migration to urban areas, the
end of legalized racial segregation and the passage of the civil rights bills by Congress. These
changes provided African Americans with a sense of “cognitive liberation” that facilitated civil
rights mobilization (McAdam 1982).
Political process theory also provides a useful framework for comparing movements cross nationally and for understanding how structural differences between countries shape the divergent trajectories of episodes of collective behaviour. For example, Dryzek and his colleagues (2003) compare four industrialized democratic countries – Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom and Norway – and examine the relationship between environmental movements and the state in order to determine the causal pathways for bridging environmental concerns and economic policies. Their findings demonstrate that the state is of enormous importance to social movement outcomes, revealing that movements whose goals align with the central interests of the state are more successful in influencing policy than those whose goals conflict with those of the state (Dryzek et al. 2003).

Similarly, Joppke’s (1993) research comparing the U.S. and West German anti-nuclear movements examines differences in state structure and opportunities. He argues that differences in the historical processes that shaped political institutions explain the differences in the both the strategic choices and structure of anti-nuclear movements in each country. In the United States, the relative openness of the political system coupled with the autonomous character of civil society organizations, created the opportunities at the state level for the movement to advance their claims. At the same time, in Germany, the statist and closed nature of the government constrained the anti-nuclear movement’s ability to channel their grievances through state institutions, resulting in a much more radical, anti-government movement than its counterpart in the United States.

Other research demonstrates the link between political opportunities and movement tactics. For example, in order to explain the link between political structures and movement radicalism, including levels of organized political violence, della Porta (1995) compared social
movements in Italy and Germany between 1969 and 1982. Using a political process approach, her research challenges previous theories of political violence that draw a link between economic instability and political violence, and reveals that the preconditions for violence lie in the political institutional structure of a given state. Despite having different economic trajectories – for example, Italy experienced greater economic instability than Germany – both countries experienced long periods of political violence by groups opposing the state. Her comparative analysis demonstrates that similarities in political opportunity structures – including the lack of openings for movement demands to be integrated into the political system – explains episodes of political violence in both countries.³

While political process theory provides a useful framework for analyzing the external political conditions of mobilization, there are limitations to this approach, particularly for understanding localized mobilization in the context of neoliberal globalization and the regulation of environmental resources. Some scholars have criticized this approach for privileging the nation state over other scales of opportunity (Goodwin and Jasper 1999, Pellow 2001, Kay 2005). By placing the state at the centre of analysis, these scholars argue, political process theory is unable to adequately investigate the role of multi-level opportunities, including the role of transnational opportunity structures (Hamel et al. 2001, Khagram et al. 2002, Kay 2005, Pellow 2007) and the interplay between domestic and transnational opportunities (Ancelovici 2002, Meyer 2004, Josselin 2007). A second critique interrogates the overly static nature of the political process model, which favours political structures over broader political culture or the agency of movement actors (Joppke 1993, Goodwin and Jasper 1999, Meyer 2004) or structures

that lie outside of the polity, including economic institutions such as corporations (Pellow 2007, Schurman and Munro 2009).

Moving Beyond the State: Political Process and Multi-level Opportunity Structures

Most research using the political process model focuses on domestic opportunity structures, generally at the level of the nation-state. This is particularly true for cross-national comparative research seeking to explain the role of the state in shaping social outcomes, through in-depth analyses of differences and similarities across cases. While focusing on the nation-state as a unit of analysis can provide important insights about social reality including the important role of the state for mitigating inequality (Evans et al. 1985, Zuberi 2006), promoting citizenship or migration integration (Reitz 1998, Bloemraad 2006) and providing opportunities for social movements to organize and influence policy (Dryzek et al. 2003, Ferree et al. 2002), an exclusive focus on national-level institutions and processes is problematic because it ignores institutions and processes at other political levels as well as those that lie outside of the polity.

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4 Social science research often focuses on national level processes – economic and historical – to explain the social world, such as the historical economic development of capitalist states (see Evans et al. 1985), the presence or absence of social revolutions (see Skopol 1979 and Goodwin 2001), differences in social policies across countries (see Lipset 1990) or the historical trajectories of the welfare state (see Esping-Anderson 1990). There is no doubt that states are locations of both power and resources and should therefore be an important focus for sociological research. Research using the nation as the unit of analysis is useful for explaining social phenomena, including the role of the state in shaping processes of political incorporation and civic participation. For example, Bloemraad’s (2006) research comparing immigration policy differences between the United States and Canada demonstrates the central role of state institutional structures in creating a political community of new immigrants and encouraging citizenship acquisition, through the provision of material and symbolic resources. Other research that focuses on the nation state highlights the role of political context – in the form of opportunity structures and alliances with elites – in shaping mobilization. For example, Ferree et al.’s (2002) research on the abortion debate compares the United States and Germany and examines differences in state-level characteristics between the two countries to explain the divergence in the trajectories and outcomes of anti-abortion movements. By highlighting differences in state level structures and institutions, Ferree and her colleagues demonstrate that the multiple legal venues in the United States increased opportunities for movement claims to be heard versus the more closed nature of state institutions in Germany.
There is growing evidence that factors external to the nation-state – including cultural repertoires, agency, and transnational institutions – are critical for explaining social phenomena such as mobilization or inequality. In a rapidly changing world, where global structures are emerging as both sites of new power and the targets of resistance from below, it is important to include non-state institutions and processes as units of analysis for social research. Without a broader analysis that considers processes above and below the nation as units of analysis, the assumption is that the nation-state provides a full accounting of the causal mechanisms that explain contention in a global context. State-centred approaches do not allow for theorizing about processes outside of this realm of inquiry, or for understanding the interconnectedness between multi-level processes and structures (Goodwin and Jasper 1999, Pellow 2007, Josselin 2007).

Adherents of the political process approach argue that globalization is limited in its capacity to shape domestic movements because it cannot provide the resources, networks and opportunities necessary to sustain mobilization in the way that domestic factors can (Tarrow 2004; 2005b, Tilly and Tarrow 2007). Yet other social movement scholars point to the power of globalization to produce significant cultural changes – creating new global social relationships that increasingly shape social movements through transnational flows of ideas, resources and

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5 Tarrow and other scholars (Tarrow 1998, 2004, 2005b; Tilly and Tarrow 2007) claim that these transnational movements are not a new occurrence, but have existed for centuries, in the form of anti-slavery movements and workers revolutions, for example. Tarrow argues that what is being called a new transnational movement is more likely the temporary cross-border organization around specific, limited issues rather than a sustained social movement (1998; 2005b). He contends that although transnationalism can provide the resources for domestic movements to form, their outcomes and ability to sustain mobilization are still dependent on the political opportunities found in the particularities of the nation state and the strength of domestic social networks and resources. He also argues that because transnational movements are not an entirely new phenomenon, but rather an extension of traditional forms of contention to the international level, there is no need to abandon existing models of contentious politics – political process in particular – in favour of new theoretical explanations. Rather he suggests that social movement scholars continue to use the institutional approach of political process theory, focusing on the role of international structures such as opportunities, networks and resources in shaping transnational mobilization (Tarrow 1998, 2005b).

New research on transnationalism demonstrates how global processes are changing the nature of protest in terms of organizational structure (Fisher et al. 2005), cultural repertoires (Pellow 2007), collective identity (Smith 2002, della Porta et al. 2006), social networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998, Kay 2005) and the relationship of movements to the state (della Porta and Tarrow 2005b, della Porta et al. 2006). For example, Smith’s (2002) research on the 1999 anti-WTO protests in Seattle examines the global protest movement from the standpoint of the actors and networks involved. Her research demonstrates that global forces have created new transnational movement actors whose targets lie beyond the domestic level. Activists involved in the “battle of Seattle” used frames that reflect the global nature of the struggle, formed cross-national and cross-movement networks for cooperation, and adopted new collective identities that reflect a shared understanding of globalization.6 Similarly, della Porta et al.’s (2006) research on the 2001 G8 protests in Genoa and the 2002 European Social Forum in Florence demonstrates how globalization transforms people’s everyday lived experiences. Activists involved in global movements reach beyond the boundaries of domestic politics to respond to global opportunities for collective action and create a global civil society that responds to transnational issues. Although they argue that globalization does not eradicate national or

6 These frames included critiques of the global trading system including the lack of democratic accountability of international trade institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Smith 2002).
territorial identities, they do claim it has the power to transforms individuals’ everyday lived experiences and thus leads to forms of resistance against the globalization of economic, political and cultural processes.

As a result of the growing power of international institutions, some scholars argue that research on social movements must look beyond the state to the increasingly powerful “global polity” in which it is embedded, in order to understand how it alters the dynamics of domestic social movements (Smith and Johnston 2002, Ancelovici 2002, Kay 2005, Evans 2008). These scholars argue that existing social movement theories are limited in their ability to explain contention against neoliberal globalization, including how transnational processes shape domestic movements. For example, della Porta and her colleagues (2006) argue that new forms of transnational contention differ significantly from domestic movements that are the focus of traditional political process theories in form, repertoires, and in their relationship with political systems. Unlike domestic movements that are characterized by shared collective identities, formal network structures and who target domestic political structures, they argue that “globalization from below” takes on a radically new shape, characterized by multiple identities, weakly linked organizational structures, an interaction with multi-level political systems and a target shift from domestic to transnational power structures.

Transnational social movements further challenge political process theory, they argue, because they have emerged at a time when political opportunities are in decline. The globalization of economic and political systems and the resulting shift in power from national to supranational institutions and corporations results in fewer opportunities for contention at the domestic level and decreases access to political allies (della Porta et al. 2006). A decline in political opportunities should correspond with a period of demobilization, according to political
process theory (see McAdam 1982, Andrews 1997). However, as movements are increasingly marginalized from the political process due to a shift in power from the nation state to international market forces, the number of episodes of contentious politics is increasing rather than declining (Khagram et al. 2002, della Porta et al. 2006). Transnational movements are responding to these global power shifts with new forms of mobilization. Research on globalization and protest provides evidence that multiple level analyses are necessary for understanding and explaining how global processes play out across different social contexts.

*The Local-Global Nexus: Linking Local and International Opportunity Structures*

Just as the state-centered focus of political process theory limits its usefulness for understanding transnational opportunities and movements, it is also problematic for examining local opportunity structures and processes. Most research on transnationalism examines movements that operate at the global scale or the shift in contention from the local to the international level. Yet global processes and institutions also have an impact at the local level, in terms of the opportunities seized, the targets and tactics chosen and the networks formed by social movement actors to contest local problems and threats. Scholarly research on the globalization of protest demonstrates that social movements emerge both internationally and *locally* in response to international processes, which alter the way they are structured and how they develop (Guidry et al. 2000, Ancelovici 2002, Josselin 2007). Beyond transnational movements, globalization also influences localized forms of resistance and the responses of local actors to global opportunity structures and targets (Burawoy et al. 2000, Diani 2005). Looking

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7 Some scholars are emphasizing a shift in contentious politics, as domestic social movements respond to transnational processes (see Tarrow and McAdam 2005, Smith 2002, Rothman and Oliver 2002). For example Tarrow and McAdam (2005) use the term *scale shift* to demonstrate how contention moves from localized origins to the transnational level through the transference of frames, networks and repertoires.
beyond the nation state as unit of analysis also illuminates how global forces play out in local contexts, including how new representations of power at the local level are responding to and resisting economic globalization.

International opportunities and threats can shape the way local movements mobilize by providing a new source of grievance and new targets for action (Ancelovici 2002, Johnson and McCarthy 2005, Fisher et al. 2005, Pellow 2007). Local movement actors and organizations shift tactics and adopt frames in response to international policies and processes such as the global economic and political reorganization emerging from the shift to neoliberalism. For example, Chun’s (2009) ethnographic research on low-wage services sector workers in the United States and South Korea goes beyond a state-centred analysis of global economic restructuring in order to focus on locally-situated forms of resistance to globalization. Through a cultural analysis of union movements, Chun explicates how global forces are challenged, not through global level struggles, but by the historical and cultural discourses of particular contexts.

Other research points to differences in the way power is constituted and interpreted at the local versus national or international level. For example, Schiffman’s (1991) research on anti-war movements in California demonstrates that power is not always viewed as a coercive and negative force originating at the state level. Her research reveals that some local movements conceptualize power as a constructive force and this shapes the way they organize and respond to both local and transnational political opportunities and structures. Focusing exclusively on the nation-state a unit of analysis ignores power from below – the autonomous forms of de-centered or local power – and hence limits the understanding of how this form of power operates, both in
receiving the impact of and in offering resistance to globalization, including flows of global capital and transnational financial institutions.\textsuperscript{8}

In order to understand how the social world is shaped by multiple sites of social reality – at the local, national and international level – it is critical to expand the unit of observation beyond the nation state to examine how power is constituted at different scales of opportunity structure and to explain differences between local and international opportunities and their influence on social movements.\textsuperscript{9} The social is constituted by more than just macro-level processes occurring at the nation state level.\textsuperscript{10} Institutions and structures external to the state, such as global economic institutions and flows of capital are important for influencing state and local-level policies and the lived experiences of individuals. Globalization creates new problems and conflicts, shaping the subjective experiences of individuals “on the ground” and shifting the context for protest to the international realm (Keck and Sikkink 1998, Smith 2002, Khagram et al. 2002, Pellow 2007). While most research on globalization and social movements examines contention at the global-level, including the transnational flows of networks, resources and

\textsuperscript{8} There is also a growing body of research that examines differences in the way power is constituted at national versus transnational level (see Stillerman 2003 and Kay 2005). For example, Kay (2005) argues that theories of national political opportunity structure are inadequate in explaining new forms of power at the transnational level that do not depend on the structures of the nation state, including the emergence of transnational actors and the convergence of identities and interests, as well as new definitions of rights and how they are adjudicated at the international level.

\textsuperscript{9} Recent research examining differences between local and national political opportunity structures points to their differential effects on social movement organizing and policy decisions. See, for example, Bridge and McManus 2000, Diani 2005 and Fisher 2007. I argue that we need to extend this analysis to include an examination of the differences between local and transnational political opportunity structures.

\textsuperscript{10} Magnusson (2005) argues that we need to reconceptualise our concept of political power by decentering the state as the primary focus of attention. He contends that state sovereignty is in decline, particularly in its capacity to enact autonomous policies in the face of the increased power of global capital and institutions. An exclusive focus on the state as the central site of power, he argues, ignores the multiple and complex systems of power by which societies are governed, including new urban and global politics. He argues that the global city has become a new site for politics to play out, and thus we must decenter the state in order to understand and examine these multiple systems of power including the power of the global corporation and the rise of urban social movements (2005).
frames, local social movements are also an important form of resistance to globalization and thus merit greater attention.

As anti-water privatization movements are shaped by global as well as local processes and represent a form of grassroots resistance to neoliberal globalization, it is unclear whether the traditional political process approach, with its emphasis on the state as the central target of contention, is adequate for explaining the complex interplay between global forces and local contention. While political institutions at the state level clearly play a definitive role in shaping these kinds of movements, through economic and regulatory policies, and thus remain a key target for movement activists, there is a wider context – external to the domestic polity – that is also important for explaining the emergence, trajectories and outcomes of local social movements.

While the state often mediates local-global processes, there are other salient factors that explain resistance to neo-liberal globalization at the local level. For example, domestic political opportunities are constrained by the global institutions and processes in which they are embedded (Meyer 2003, Josselin 2007). Global flows of capital, multinational corporate power and international trade and financial institutions have increasing influence over domestic governments – national, regional and municipal – and their ability to regulate and control local resources (Peck and Tickell 2002, Castells 2003, Dryzek 2006). These transnational constraints can also alter the outcomes of local movements and the way they respond to opportunities, including the shift in power from domestic political institutions to non-state institutions such as multinational corporations and international financial bodies.

Meyer (2003), for example, argues that domestic political institutions are nested within larger international political context, which affects their ability to negotiate policies. The
capacity of domestic political institutions to overcome the constraining effects of exogenous institutions and structures and operate autonomously as well as the capacity for movements to contest policies locally, depends on the degree of “institutional slack” available. When decision making power is transferred from domestic to international structures, he contends, the degree of slack available to domestic institutions is diminished and thus autonomy is reduced (Meyer 2003). Other research examines the interplay between local and international opportunities. For example, Josselin’s (2007) comparative research on the Jubilee 2000 campaign in three countries found that shifts in domestic political structures combined with simultaneous international events were critical to the emergence and longevity of local movements.

I argue that movements that understand this dual nature of opportunities and targets and integrate both global and local processes into their tactical repertoires are more likely to be successful in achieving their goals.\textsuperscript{11} By synthesizing local and global opportunities through \textit{strategic localism}, movements draw attention to the vulnerability of local governments in the face of global power structures and create a sense of local solidarity that brings together activists and elites under a common fate. A broadening of the political process perspective that takes into account differences between local, national and international process as well as the interplay between them, is useful for investigating the dynamics of local movements embedded in global processes, including how new opportunities, threats and targets from the international realm affect mobilization and outcomes of social protest on the ground.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11} For example Ancelovici (2002) argues that domestic movements increase their power when they recognize that growing inequality within countries is at least in part explained by economic globalization. By defining the problem as both domestic and international, movements are able to seize opportunities beyond the domestic context.

\textsuperscript{12} Cress and Snow (2000) note that in the United States there has been a shift in contention from the national to the local level since the 1960s and argue that the political process model needs to be examined in light of this shift to examine whether the factors that explain national level mobilization and outcomes hold true for movements at the local context.
A reconceptualised political process perspective is also beneficial for understanding the importance of social movement geographies and what spatial scales mean for how power is constituted. The traditional political process model makes assumptions about the distribution of power within societies, presupposing that power located within formal state structures. For example, Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) argue that not all social movements target the state or seek political goals. Many contemporary movements target non-state actors or corporations or seek broader cultural or value changes rather than political change, including the environmental, women’s, gay and lesbian, and religious/spiritual movements. They claim that traditional conceptions of political process and the way it defines the relationship between the state and social movements is “rooted in fundamental assumptions about the nature of society and the operation of power” (2008:75). From this perspective, the state is the central source of power in society. This narrow definition of what constitutes power in relation to social movements, they argue, means many movements are dismissed as being merely “identity” movements and thus unimportant in terms of having broader political influence. These assumptions about the static, one-way nature of social power might not hold true at the local level, where the smaller distance between political elites and social movements means that power is more fluid and decentralized and that local social movement actors have a greater capacity to shape political opportunities and structures than activists involved in national or international movements.

*From the Polity to the Economy: Examining Non-state Targets and Opportunities*

While the traditional conception of political process – and its state-centric focus – is limited for understanding and explaining multi-level opportunity structures, it is also insufficient for understanding challenges to non-state targets. The central assumption of political process
theories – that all social movements consider state structures as the principal target for collective action and for providing opportunities for successful outcomes – means that other salient opportunity structures and targets are either ignored or minimized. In an era of economic globalization, many scholars argue that new targets beyond the state, including economic institutions such as corporations or global financial regulatory bodies and international trade agreements, are increasingly becoming key targets of protest and opportunity (Pellow 2001; 2007, Kay 2005, Walker et al. 2008, Schurman and Munro 2009). These scholars assert that transnational economic forces transcend the nation state through the movement of capital and jobs, as well as by shifting the enforcement and regulatory power, including labour and environmental protection, from domestic institutions to international regulatory bodies and multinational corporations (Pellow 2007, Peck and Tickell 2002, Dryzek 2006, Evans 2008). As a result, new problems and conflicts emerge as well as new targets for mobilization. For example, Pellow (2007) demonstrates that transnational environmental justice movements increasingly target multinational corporations as well as political structures in their efforts to reduce the flow of toxic waste to marginalized communities. And Schurman and Munro (2009) point to the importance of adopting a political economy approach for explaining anti-genetic engineering movements, by demonstrating that these movements take advantage of corporate and industry openings as well as political openings in order to shape social policies.

As nation-states and other levels of government are increasingly focused on economic growth and restructuring, and thus are implicated in the global hegemonic market discourse (see Evans 1995, Peck and Tickell 2002 and Dryzek 2006), it is not surprising that movements are beginning to target economic institutions as well as the state when making their claims and demanding policy and regulatory change. Political opportunity structure models that emphasize
the importance of political structures for shaping protest, neglect to consider the role of opportunities, targets and structures outside of the polity. Further, by mapping the political opportunity structure model directly onto transnational social movements, scholars have ignored the critical importance of multinational corporations and transnational institutions for both providing opportunities for mobilization and as targets of social movements (Kay 2005, Pellow 2007, Schurman and Munro 2009). As Pellow (2007) argues, corporations have increasing influence over the state, and thus it is important to focus on the role of both political and economic structures in shaping mobilization. He points out that political process models fail to consider the broader role of political economy, which is particularly important in an era of globalization. He offers an extension to the political process model – the “political economic process perspective” – which “acknowledges the intimate associations between formal political institutions (e.g., states and legislative bodies) and economic institutions (e.g., large corporations and banks) and their engagements with social movements. The political economic opportunity structure stresses the extensive influence of capital over nation-state policymaking, regulation, and politics and views corporations as equally likely to be the targets of social movement campaigns” (Pellow 2007: 62). Pellow argues that this approach is useful for studying transnational social movements because with the intensification of economic globalization, institutions above the state level, including multinational corporations have increasingly become the target of transnational movement organizations and campaigns, as activists attempt to influence corporate policies and behaviour (2007).

While scholars are correct in identifying the relationship between economic and political opportunity structures, most of the research in this area focuses on transnational social movement organizations and campaigns, shifting the attention from the nation-state to the transnational
sphere. Yet, with the increasing power of international trade agreements on domestic policymaking, the local context of contention also matters. At the local level, governments often have more power in the face of international trade and investment treaties because they are not the principal signatories of these treaties and because activists have more access to local policy makers. Hence activists have the capacity to influence policy decisions for protecting local resources from the encroachment of international trade and investment. Additionally, local advocacy often results in more successful outcomes than advocacy targeted at influencing national or international policy. Local movements have the power to influence policies and regulation because of their ability to participate in regulatory and decision-making bodies and their close access to political authorities (Andrews 2004, Andrews and Edwards 2005).

As a result of the complex interplay between transnational and domestic opportunity structures and the increasing importance of economic structures as both sites of policymaking and as targets for mobilization, I argue that social movement scholars can no longer understand local environmental politics by only investigating processes at the local level, nor can we understand the effects of transnational corporate and economic institutions by only examining their effect at the global level. In order to understand local movements resisting neoliberal globalization, it is critical to look at the intersections of global flows with local spaces (Castells 2007, Urry 2000, Presas and Mol 2006).  

13 Urry (2000) contends that global processes often strengthen rather than weaken local societies. He argues that, “[n]either the global nor the local can exist without the other. They develop in a symbiotic, irreversible and unstable set of relationships, in which each gets transformed through billions of iterations worldwide.” This complex relationship between the global and the local can result in what Urry calls “globalisation-deepening-localisation”. (2000:210).
A Dynamic Approach to Contention

Investigating the global-local nexus in relation to environmental resources and policies requires a reconceptualising of our understanding of social movements and societies more broadly in order to explain the dynamic and complex transformations of the social in an era of globalization. Many scholars argue that explaining how societies and nature are reconstituted by global flows of capital, networks and resources, requires a more fluid sociological analysis of global complexity (Urry 2000; 2003, Castells 2003, Presas and Mol 2006). For example, Urry (2000) argues that globalization and localization are entwined together through flows of resources and networks, and contends that rather than focus on traditional concepts such as social structures and societies, sociologists should pay more attention to these “mobilities” and their interdependence (2000:211).¹⁴

In relation to social movements, many scholars have criticized the overly static and structural nature of traditional theories of contention and proposed a more dynamic model for investigating the complex processes of social movements, including the interplay between political opportunities, relational processes, frames and ideology and agency (Joppke 1993, Gamson and Meyer 1996, Poletta 1999, Goodwin and Jasper 1999). These scholars argue that the political process model restricts the analysis of contention to an examination of static political structures and thus minimizes agency and emotion, as well as the relational and cultural dimensions of contention. Recent research on non-state processes that shape mobilization highlights the importance of social-psychological, cultural and relational mechanisms such as

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¹⁴ Urry (2000) distinguishes between traditional sociological concepts of vertical mobility, including educational, income, occupational and social mobility and what he refers to as new horizontal mobilities that encompass social and geographical spaces, including flows of people, waste and pollution, ideas and objects across social and geographic boundaries, in the context of a globalizing world.
identity (Satterfield 2002), meaning construction (Benford and Snow 2000, Johnston and Noakes 2005) and social networks (Diani 2003b, Mische 2008), as well as how they combine together and influence movement emergence and outcomes (McAdam et al. 2001, Tarrow and Tilly 2007, McAdam et al. 2008).

Other research highlights the fluid relationship between structural opportunities and movement culture and agency (Joppke 1993, Goodwin and Jasper 1999). For example, while he adopts a political process approach for explaining cross-national variation in movements, Joppke (1993) calls for a more dynamic opportunity structure model and argues that beyond political structures, political culture matters for explaining why movements emerge and mobilize. He points to the importance of “underlying schemes of cognition and operating norms... through which actors define their interests, interpret stakes of conflict, and map out strategies” (1993:14). Thus social movement actors do more than respond to and engage political opportunities; they create and open new opportunities through their social actions and constructed meanings. Activists have the capacity to alter and create opportunities through framing strategies, choice of targets, social ties and alliances with elites, and through pre-existing movements (Diani 1996, Andrews 2004, Pellow 2007, Staggenborg and Lecomte 2009).

Recently, prominent social movement scholars have begun to address the overly structural or static nature of some conceptions of contention and have called for a more dynamic approach to social movement theory that recognizes the complex interplay between different mechanisms and processes of contention (McAdam et al. 2001, Tarrow and Tilly 2007, McAdam et al. 2008). In *Dynamics of Contention*, for example, McAdam and his colleagues (2001) construct a model for understanding complex episodes of contention that seeks to address the problems inherent in existing theories of social movements. They argue that previous models are
limited because they do not recognize the complex and dynamic features of contentious politics, and treat them as static or linear. Further they argue that examining mechanisms, such as resources, political opportunities, networks and frames as discrete variables, rather than processes operating in tandem to produce episodes of contention, limits a full accounting of the causal conditions of protest. In light of these limitations, they call for a dynamic model that recognizes the processes and mechanisms that combine together in varying historical contexts. They stress the need to focus on environmental (external conditions of contention such as resources and opportunities), cognitive (individual and collective interpretations and perceptions including ideology and frames) and relational (interpersonal or inter-organizational connections) mechanisms that work together to form broader episodes of contention operating in a similar fashion across different situations (2001).

I argue that a more dynamic approach to the study of contention, including an examination of the relationship between ideology and frames, opportunity structures and networks is also useful for understanding the interplay between global processes and local movement dynamics. Global processes shape different aspects of movements, providing new opportunities for mobilization, creating new coalitions and networks and altering collective action frames. A model that allows for an investigation of the intersection of these processes and mechanisms is critical for understanding social movement complexity in a globalizing world.15

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15 I am guided by McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly’s (2001) call to examine mechanisms when studying social movements. In order to move beyond the static or linear approach of the movement career and cyclical approaches to contention, McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) argue that social movement scholars should adopt an interactive and dynamic model for explaining contentious politics, based on identifying mechanisms and processes and how they combine and recur to shape episodes of contention. They contend that social movements involve the interaction among different mechanisms -- environmental, relational and cognitive -- that are continual and recursive. They claim that, “by understanding which mechanisms and processes put an episode of contention in motion and where they take it, we can better understand why some episodes are brief while others are protracted, why some end in demobilization while others expand into revolution, and why some produce fundamental shifts in alignments and political culture why others leave behind nothing but a residue of bitter memories.” (2001: 67).
Figure 2.1 presents the theoretical framework that guides this research. It illustrates that the mechanisms that shape local movements in the context of globalization are neither linear nor static, but rather are interactive, continual and recursive (McAdam et al. 2001). The model demonstrates these types of movements are shaped by the interaction of global and local political and economic opportunity structures as well as by the pre-movement ideological beliefs of social movement actors. It also reveals the importance of movement agency, by demonstrating that the way in which activists respond to opportunities shapes relational, tactical and cognitive mechanisms, including the formation of movement coalitions as well as the choice of tactics and

**Figure 2.1 A Dynamic Model of Contention in an Era of Globalization**
frames. These mechanisms in turn shape the outcomes of movements by creating new opportunities for them to advance their claims.

A dynamic model allows for a full explanation of the stages of social movements including their emergence, development and outcomes. Most studies of contention focus on the emergence and mobilization stages of movements (McAdam et al. 1988, Tarrow 1998). Some scholars have argued that this is because research on social movements often privileges one causal mechanism and its impact on mobilization, such as political opportunities, rather than the multiple and complex processes that shape movements across their full cycles, including outcomes (Burnstein et al. 1995, Andrews 1997). A broader, more dynamic analysis is useful for analysing the consequences of social movements because it focuses on the interplay between external processes – including multi-level political and economic opportunity structures and internal processes such as social networks, individual and organizational ideology and framing strategies.16

**Framing Protest: The Cognitive Dimension of Social Movements**

As a way of moving beyond structural or static explanations of contention, many social movement scholars have pointed to the role of cognitive factors such as framing – the strategic construction of meaning – in shaping collective behaviour (Snow et al. 1986, Benford 1997, Goodwin and Jasper 1999, Benford and Snow 2000, Johnston and Noakes 2005). These scholars have called for more attention to the ideational and interpretive elements of contentious politics (Benford 1997, Goodwin and Jasper 1999, Polletta 1999). For example, Gamson and Meyer (1996) argue that the defining of opportunity is as important to movement mobilization as the...
existence of opportunity itself. Political opportunities are interpreted through cultural and
cognitive processes, they claim, hence these processes should be considered as important to the
emergence of social movements as the opportunities themselves.

Framing refers to the collective processes of meaning interpretation – the social
construction of meaning – that mediate between structural elements such as political
opportunities and mobilization (McAdam et al. 1996, Snow et al. 1986, Johnston and Noakes
2005). Drawing on Goffman’s (1974) idea of frame analysis – the ways in which people use
cognitive schema to interpret the world around them – Snow and his colleagues (1986) were the
first to apply this theory to the study of social movements. They outlined a systematic theoretical
framework for examining the social construction of meaning and the ways in which it is
negotiated by social movement actors and organizations through social interaction and cognitive
interpretations, bringing ideology and culture back into the centre of analysis (Snow et al. 1986).
They highlight the importance of interpreting opportunities and constructing grievances for
encouraging mobilization and support for movement goals.

Social movement organizations strategically attempt to align themselves with potential
movement recruits by linking together ideologically similar but previously disconnected frames,
and by extending their interpretive frames beyond their own interests and goals to include the
interests and values of those outside the movement (Snow et al, 1986, Benford 1997, Benford
and Snow 2000). For example, Benford’s (1993) research on the nuclear disarmament movement
in the United States, examines the choice of language used by social movement actors, and
demonstrates that activists’ choice of vocabulary, including its tone and force, is significant in
motivating people to join the cause. Other research points to the importance of master frames for
drawing support from a wide pool of individuals. Capek’s (1993) research on the environmental
justice movement in the United States, illustrates how local movements align themselves with master frames constructed by nationally-based movements in order to widen their pool of support. Local grassroots environmental organizations that used the frame of “environmental justice” – the essential message of national environmental justice movements – were successful in both increasing local participation and achieving political recognition because the frame resonated with a wider constituency than the immediate context of contention. And Carroll and Ratner’s (1996) research on master framing and social justice in British Columbia, using data from interviews with members of social justice organizations, reveals that movements that utilize “master frames” that resonate across issues, values and networks allows them to move beyond single-issue, ideological-driven causes, and thus draw on a larger pool of movement supporters. This research demonstrates that the use of broad-based frames that incorporate multiple grievances and interpretations of problems is more effective at building networks across diverse groups, mobilizing people to join their cause, and moving beyond single-issue politics to incorporate broader issues of social change.

While most of the research on social movement framing examines the specific processes of interpretive or meaning work, other scholars have argued for a more refined definition of frames that takes into account the interplay between framing strategies and other key processes of contention, including political opportunities, organizational culture and outcomes (Diani 1996, Benford 1997, Johnston and Noakes 2005). Diani’s (1996) research on regional political parties in Italy, for example, examines the link between political opportunity structures and frames. His research reveals that frame resonance is dependent on the type of political opportunity structure available to movements and demonstrates that social movement organizations that use frames that resonate with the opportunity structures in question are more likely to create the conditions...
for outcome success. Other research on framing and political opportunities demonstrates the link between the nature of political structures and the choice of frames utilized by social movement actors. For example, Ferree and colleagues’ (2002) cross-national comparative study of the abortion debate in the United States and Germany demonstrates that the distinct cultural and political opportunity structures of the United States and Germany influenced the framing discourse around abortion in each country. Anti-abortion movements are more successful in drawing attention to their grievances when the framing strategies are linked to the cultural and political national context, rather than to broader ideology.

Beyond national level structures and political culture, the linking of frames and opportunities is important at the local level as well. For example, Schneider’s (2005) research on Puerto Rican community movements in New York City demonstrates how organizations adopt frames in relation to local political opportunities. She examines three different grassroots movements within the Puerto Rican community in three different neighbourhoods and finds that the types of frames employed were contingent upon the structure of political opportunity at the local level, including the ethnic distribution of power and access to political elites.

Other research on framing and social movements demonstrates that beyond political opportunity structures, organizational ideology is also critical to shaping cognitive frame construction. For example, using research on welfare rights groups in the United States, Reese and Newcombe (2003) argue that ideology in the form of norms, values, and beliefs – the cultural code – of a particular organization mediates their response to the external political opportunities and shapes their use of collective action frames. Organizations with more rigid ideologies were less willing to frame their claims in ways that would maximize their mobilization potential due to a general unwillingness to compromise their core beliefs.
Conversely, organizations that were more pragmatic in their ideological outlook were more successful in maximizing support for their cause because of the use of frames that resonated with a wider audience (Reese and Newcombe 2003). Mobilizing potential and movement outcomes are dependent on more than simply the type of frame employed by social movement actors. These studies theoretically advance the concept of framing by pointing to the interplay between framing strategies and other structural factors such as organizational culture and political opportunities.

*Linking Local and Global Frames*

While existing research on framing points to the importance of frames for movements to link together previously disconnected organizations, increase mobilization and open up new opportunities for movement success, there is a lack of research on movements whose focus extends beyond the local context, and their use of global frames. Theories of risk and modernity (Beck 1992; 1999, Giddens 1991) point to the increasingly global nature of social and environmental problems, and suggest that global institutions have increasing influence over the regulation and distribution of resources and risk, disembedding these problems from the local context. Beck (1992; 1999) argues that environmental and social problems are being reframed in globalized terms and as a result, the context for social and political action has also shifted to the international arena. Social, economic and environmental transformations beyond the nation state are reshaping the way social movements operate at the local level as they respond to global shifts and problems with new ways of organizing and new framing strategies that attempt to respond to and resist the forces of globalization (Hamel et al. 2001, Ancelovici 2002, Conway 2004).
Recent research on the transnationalization of protest suggests that social movements respond to globalization by creating frames that connect local problems and grievances to the global realm in order to facilitate mobilization and influence outcomes (Ancelovici 2002, Smith 2002, Olesen 2005). Yet most research on globalization and contention focuses on transnational political opportunity structures and networks, and fails to examine the role of framing work for movement’s resisting economic globalization (see Keck and Sikkink 1995, Tarrow 2004, Kay 2005, Josselin 2007), including how interpretive processes help activists understand the complexities of globalization and how they shape local political context.

I argue that additional research should focus on how globalization is incorporated and synthesized into local movement frames in order to understand how global frames influence movement mobilization and outcomes on the ground. For example, Ancelovici’s (2002) research on the French anti-globalization movement demonstrates that framing global issues helps social movement actors and organizations connect domestic concerns with events and processes that are exogenous to the state. He argues that “collective interpretive processes play an important role in explaining the dynamics of contemporary contentious politics because it is through them that actors make sense of long-term structural changes such as globalization” (2002: 428). Anti-water privatization movements provide a useful lens for understanding the synthesis of global and local frames because they are simultaneously shaped by global processes, including multinational corporate power and international financial institutions, as well as being driven by local understandings of environmental resources and local political context.
Pre-mobilization Ideology versus Strategic Frames

Research on framing has also been criticized for not adequately distinguishing between the strategic frame work of social movement organizations and social-psychological characteristics of movement actors, such as ideology and systems of belief. Recently, scholars have called for a clarification of the conceptual difference between ideology and frames in order to understand their differential impact on mobilization (Oliver and Johnston 2005, Schurman and Munro 2006). While there has been considerable research on the instrumental use of frames in social movements and the relationship between strategic frames and other processes and mechanisms of contention, such as political opportunities and networks (see Noonan 1995, Diani 1996, Carroll and Ratner 1997), several social movement scholars have pointed to the lack of empirical research examining ideology and how this process differs from framing (Goodwin et al. 2001, Goodwin and Jasper 2004, Oliver and Johnson 2005, Schurman and Munro 2006). These scholars argue that social-psychological processes, such as emotions, thinking and ideology should be examined separately from the more concrete and strategic work of collective action frames in order to clarify their role across different stages of contention. For example, Oliver and Johnston (2005) point out that most research on cognitive work in social movements tends to amalgamate the concepts of ideology and broad belief systems with the strategic marketing of ideas – or frames – utilized by social movement actors into one overarching process of contention. They argue that this conflation has obscured a rigorous theoretical understanding of the separate role each process plays in shaping social movements, particularly at different stages of contention.

Investigating ideology as an important and distinct process from framing can also help explain why and how opposition to a particular problem emerges before mobilization and the
strategic construction of grievance frames occurs. For example, Schurman and Munro’s research (2006) examining the anti-genetic engineering movement demonstrates that the “thinking” work amongst scientists and intellectuals prior to mobilization was critical in creating the groundwork for a mass movement to emerge by articulating the problem and identifying the target. Drawing on the work of Eyerman and Jamison (1991), who argue that the “cognitive praxis” (or ideology) of individuals is what shapes movement collective identity and facilitates mobilization, Sherman and Munro (2006) demonstrate that social movements often begin with the intellectual work of a small network of individuals, and that without this pre-mobilization cognitive process “many movements simply would never materialize” (2006:4). In light of these findings they argue that additional empirical research is needed in order to understand how ideology is transformed into knowledge constructed for political action.

In the case of environmental social movements, elucidating differences between ideology and frames is particularly salient because of the complex relationships that individuals have with nature and the environment. In recent decades, the rise of environmental values has transformed the way individuals think about and interact with the environment and this value shift is important for explaining pre-mobilization attitudes and values that influence people’s decisions to participate in broader environmental movements. These social-psychological or ideological processes differ from the strategic frames utilized by environmental movement organizations and therefore should be examined as separate processes.

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17 Catton and Dunlap (1978) and Dunlap and Catton (1994) refer to this shift in values as the transformation from the “human exemptionalist paradigm” (HEP), where humans are considered superior to the environment (this was the dominant worldview from the Industrial Revolution to the mid 20th century), and the “new environmental paradigm” (NEP), which stresses the interdependence of humans and the environment and the need to recognize the ecological impact of social processes. They argue that the NEP is increasingly replacing HEP as the dominant worldview.
I argue that through a comparative lens these processes can be examined and refined, particularly for understanding how local context shapes ideology and frames. Social movement actors from similar movements in different contexts for example, reveal similar ideational understandings of a problem or phenomena that may motivate them to join a movement, but these understandings can be translated into different frames of contention later in the movement cycle, leading to divergent trajectories and outcomes. Clarifying the role of ideology and frames in social movements will help illuminate how intellectual and emotional understandings of problems, particularly those that are environmental in nature, are used to mobilize collective action and construct strategic and instrumental frames of contention.

Clarifying the Role of Ideology and Frames: Towards a Synthesis of Environmental Sociology and Social Movements

Ideology is particularly important to understand in light of movements that focus on environmental issues because socio-natural relationships are critical to shaping people’s worldviews and thus can shed light on why they mobilize to protect resources (McNaghten and Urry 1998, Satterfield 2002, Loftus and Lumsden 2008). In the context of movements mobilizing to protect environmental resources or prevent the commodification of nature, one important way to clarify the difference between pre-movement ideology and strategic frame construction is to bridge the literature on social movements and environmental sociology. Theories of environmental sociology, particularly those that focus on the social construction of nature, provide a theoretical understanding of the ideological processes from which environmental movements emerge.

Research on environmental sociology focuses on the socially constructed meanings that individuals attribute to the world around them as well as the social processes by which
environmental conditions are constructed and recognized as problems (McNaghten and Urry 1997, Hannigan 1995, Dunlap and Michelson 2002). Cultural and ideological processes are particularly relevant to understanding environmental movements because of the complex relationships people have with nature. Beyond social movement frames, individuals draw on cultural symbols or metaphors to make sense of the world around them (Greider and Garkovich 1994, McNaghten and Urry 1998, Urry 2000). Technological changes and paradigm shifts alter the self-definition of humans in relation to nature (Catton and Dunlap 1978, Dunlap and Catton 1994, Urry 2000). Theories of environmental sociology demonstrate that meaning is not derived by the nature of the material or external world, but rather in the social, political and cultural contexts in which nature is constructed (MacNaghten and Urry 1998).

Understanding how people assign meaning to their environments is essential in explaining the growing conflict over resources because cultural differences in perceptions of risk and trust produce different meanings of nature across time and space (McNaghten and Urry 1998, Espeland 1998, Satterfield 2002). For example, Satterfield’s (2002) research on the conflict over old-growth forests in Oregon examines people’s complex relationships to nature and how their interpretations of the world around them are shaped by local context. Satterfield utilizes a cultural analysis of the dispute over logging between environmentalists and loggers to understand how the processes of contention are expressed culturally. By examining locally-

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18 Using a sociology of knowledge approach, Greider and Granovich (1994) demonstrate that landscapes are reflections of cultural identity that change across time and space. Social groups use social and cultural constructions of the environment to “transform nature and the world that is there into meaningful, subjective phenomenon” (1994: 4). These symbols of landscape are what define relationships between humans and their natural environment. John Urry (2000) argues the way we understand society is reflected through metaphors, which give meaning to social life. At a given historical moment dominant metaphors become the socially accepted way of viewing reality and determine the way in which social reality is both viewed and contested. Changes in the predominant metaphors alter our understanding of things. Urry maintains that metaphors are “at the heart of social life” (2000: 46) and therefore should be a central focus of sociological inquiry.
situated practices, she is able to demonstrate that the imagined worlds of actors – the social construction of nature and identity – shape the political discourse of the movement. In addition, Loftus and Lumsden’s (2008) research on land settlements in post-apartheid South Africa, reveals that people’s day-to-day interactions with their surrounding environment are critical for shaping their worldviews and for explaining both the consolidation and contestation of hegemonic ideas and practices.

Drawing on theories of environmental sociology enhances the understanding of anti-water privatization movements by illuminating how social movement actors construct meanings of nature and environmental risk through the social, geographical and cultural processes in which they are embedded. In the case of water this is particularly important because of the deep emotional attachments individuals have to water as the source of life (Shiva 2002, Olivera and Lewis 2004). Further, the “locality” of water (both politically in terms of regulation and control and geographically through watershed boundaries) provides the specific context for the problem that shapes the ideology of movement actors and helps explain how intellectual knowledge is translated into the strategic political knowledge that drives mobilization. Illuminating people’s understandings of water helps clarify the difference between pre-mobilization emotional and ideological processes and the more strategic and instrumental frames utilized by movements to open up opportunities for success.

The process of negotiating symbols and meanings of nature should be a central focus of sociological inquiry because these ideological processes shed light on pre-mobilization values and beliefs of social movement actors and help explain individual participation in broader movements focused on environmental change. Understanding how nature is embedded in our senses, and through spatial and temporal boundaries can shed light on differences in metaphors
of nature across cultures and how those differences explain variation in environmental policies, construction of risk and harm and opportunities for mobilization across societies.

While there is considerable empirical research on environmental social movements as well as theoretical development about the social construction of nature, it is rare that these two approaches are synthesized. A linking of environmental sociology with social movement theories is beneficial to both subfields of sociology. While empirical studies of environmental social movements would add rigor to theoretical explanations of the environment and socio-natural relationships, environmental sociology – the social construction of nature in particular – is useful for heeding the call of Oliver and Johnston (2005), Schurman and Munro (2006) and other social movement scholars to treat ideology as distinct from collective action frames.

Networks and Coalitions: The Role of Relational Processes in Social Movements

Factors that explain the emergence, development and outcomes of social movements are not limited to interpretive dynamics or political structures but are also dependent on the social networks that exist between movement actors and organizations (Diani 1995, McAdam et al. 2001, Tindall 2002). Mobilizing structures are necessary for problems to be understood as collective rather than as individual challenges (McAdam 1996). Research on relational dynamics of social movements demonstrates that movements are comprised of complex network structures that mediate between individual actors, organizations and the polity (Baldassari and Diani 2007). Movement networks are critical in explaining collective identity (Friedman and McAdam 1992), mobilization potential through recruitment into a movement (Klandermans and

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19 Diani defines social movements as “networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups or associations engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity” (1992:13). He argues that treating movements as networks will clarify the distinction between social movements and other forms of contentious politics (Diani 2003a).

While research on social networks and social movements has provided important insights for understanding the structure of social movements, much of this research lacks an analysis of the broader dynamics and mechanisms that shape network interactions (McAdam 2003, Diani 2003a). Diani (2003a) argues that in order to strengthen sociological theory on social movement networks, it is essential that research move beyond descriptive accounts and delve into how networks matter by looking at specific dynamics of networks and how they mediate between individual actors and organizations, social movements and the state. Others argue that social network analysis is overly-structural in nature and should be broadened to include a better understanding of the social processes that shape social ties across movement organizations and transform particular social settings into sites of collective action, including the interplay between structural and cultural mechanisms such as organizational culture, individual agency, and shared identities and frames (McAdam 2003).

An important area for theoretical and empirical development is the role of brokerage in social movements. Research on the relational dynamics of social movements points to the importance of direct ties between movement organizations – both domestic and transnational – for information sharing, frame bridging, the mobilization of resources, and for influencing the political arena (Evans and Kay 2008, Diani and Bison 2004, Baldassari and Diani 2007). Other research on networks demonstrates that movements are not necessarily separate or discrete
entities, but are often connected to one another through the existence of bridging organizations or individuals, with multiple affiliations across groups, who link diverse movement organizations and enable broad coalitions (McAdam et al. 2001, Andrews and Edwards 2005, Roth 2003, Baldassarri and Diani 2007, Mische 2003; 2008). During episodes of contention, bridge builders facilitate the linking of previously disconnected individuals, organizations or movements – particularly those whose prior relationships were strained – through social ties and shared understandings of a particular grievance or problem, through a process called brokerage (Fernandez and Gould 1994, McAdam et al. 2001, Roth 2003, Diani 2003c, Gould 2003).

While research on brokerage has demonstrated the importance of social bonds for building cohesion between individuals and organizations and facilitating cross-movement networks, there is a need to refine and clarify how this process plays out beyond the recognition of the presence or absence of network structures. Several studies have pointed to the structural processes that underlie cross-movement coalitions. Baldassari and Diani (2007) and Mische (2008) underscore the importance of achieving the right balance between strong bonds and transaction bonds – informal ties – in order to facilitate a cohesive and integrated civil society. And Evans and Kay (2007) contend that brokerage operates across several levels; by linking networks between organizations and movements, by facilitating resource interdependence, through frame concordance and through the use of shared tactics.

While the existence of strong ties between movement sectors can shed light on the either the presence or absence of coalitions or their relative strength, it is also important to understand

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20 Diani’s (2003) research on environmental movement networks in Italy demonstrates that brokerage organizations are critical for the integration of movement networks, by facilitating communication between heterogeneous groups. And Roth (2003) argues that studying coalitions between previously disconnected movements (what she calls social movement interaction) can add to the theoretical development of social movement networks by shedding light on the brokerage processes that link movements and organizations, including shared resources, frames and personnel.
the processes that underlie coalition formation to be able to clarify how coalitions emerge and develop. While there is consensus on the growing importance of coalitions for explaining social movement outcomes, there is a lack of empirical evidence for theoretical development (Andrews and Edwards 2005). Examining underlying causal processes and mechanisms is useful for explaining why similar movements take different trajectories in terms of network structures and highlighting what factors contribute to the creation of cross-movement coalitions. For example, beyond the presence of structural conditions, such as formal or informal social ties, the emergence of networks or coalitions within and between movements is also shaped by cultural and social processes, including class, race, gender or identity (Rose 2000, Roth 2003, Pellow 2007). Individuals and organizations make decisions about their interests and goals based on existing cultural codes and social positions that can either facilitate or hinder alliance-building (Rose 2000, Roth 2003, Lopez 2004, Mische 2008). Examining the interplay between cultural and structural factors in shaping social movement networks is critical to advancing our theoretical understanding of network processes.

For example, Rose (2000) demonstrates that the existence of bridge builders are key for facilitating inter-class movements and coalitions that link activists and organizations from the peace, environmental and labour movements. In addition, Roth (2003) demonstrates how bridge builders can lead to positive social movement outcomes. By examining the overlapping links between the women’s movement and the labour movement, she demonstrates that the presence

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21 Most studies of social movement coalitions examine organizational cooperation in discrete movement sectors, including the women’s (Staggenborg 1986), civil rights (McAdam 1982) anti-nuclear (Benford 1993) and labour (Fantasia and Voss 2004) movements, while cross-movement coalition building remains under examined, although there is an emerging body of research on this topic (see Rose 2000, Roth 2003, Van Dyke 2003, Obach 2004, Borland 2008, and Beamish and Luebbers 2009). While this research offers important insights into cross-movement coalition formation, there is a need for more in-depth case studies in order to identify the specific pathways or social processes that shape successful cross-movement coalition formation and outcomes.
of women within unions with ties to the women’s movement shifted the focus for many unions from narrow labour market concerns to broader social issues affecting women and people of colour, which facilitated a revitalization within the labour movement that helped build membership and increase organizational power (Roth 2003). Other research demonstrates the role of bridge builders for facilitating or constraining communication between movements and organizations. For example, Mische’s (2008) research examining Brazilian youth activist networks reveals that the multiple affiliations of social actors contribute to distinct styles of leadership and communication for bridge builders that can constrain or enable effective coalition building.

While these studies make an important contribution to our understanding of the role of culture in shaping movement coalitions, most research on bridge builders focuses on individual actors who through ideological affinity broker relationships between organizations in different movements. Yet organizations can also facilitate bonds between individuals, organizations and movements. I argue that beyond individual cultural codes, organizational culture also matters for either facilitating or constraining brokerage and that more attention should be paid to the nature of the bridge building organizations involved in movement coalition-building.

Further, a clarification of the processes that underlie movement coalition building beyond the presence of social networks would also illuminate how coalitions shape movement outcomes. While most studies on cross-movement alliances focus on outcomes in terms of the creation of alliances themselves, I contend that in order to shed light on the success and strength of movement coalitions, it is important to examine outcomes in terms of creating new political
opportunities and favourable policy changes. The integration and power of civil society should be measured by more than the strength of network clusters between organizations and movements, and include an examination of political as well as structural outcomes. This would advance our understanding of not simply how social movement coalitions emerge both structurally and culturally, but what processes increase their capacity for creating opportunities for success.

Examining the political viability of movement coalitions would shed light on the role of broader social, political and economic processes in shaping coalitions and their outcomes. While much scholarly attention has focused on social movement coalitions in the context of specific episodes of contention and the structural conditions that underlie organizational alliances, there has been a lack of research on the broader coalitions involved in social and economic transformation. Most research on coalitions and networks examines discrete movements focusing on single-issue campaigns (see Diani 1995, Tindall 2004), or in the case of research on community-labour alliances on workplace-centered campaigns (see Lopez 2004, Obach 2004). While there has been considerable focus on the role of community-labour alliances in shaping labour revitalization and organizational culture for unions (Voss and Sherman 2000, Lopez 2004, Chun 2009), there has been little attention paid to the processes that facilitate or impede cross-movement coalition building and contribute to positive policy outcomes.

While Diani (1997) presents an analysis of networks creating social capital as an outcome of social movements, there is a lack of empirical research that examines the outcomes of social movement networks in terms of policy impacts. A notable exception is the research presented in the book How Social Movements Matter (Guigni et al. 1999) which examines social movement outcomes, including policy changes (Burstein 1999), institutional impact (Kriesi and Wisler 1999) and public discourse (della Porta 1999). This research highlights the need to move beyond analysis of movement emergence and development to examine the long-term social, cultural and political outcomes of social movements. Giugni (1998) argues that more research is needed to understand the institutional and cultural outcomes of social movements. He recommends comparative studies because they allow for the identification of similarities and differences that lead to particular outcomes in different contexts, and thus shed light on the causal dynamics that shape movement outcomes.
While scholars emphasize the role of movement coalitions in shaping mobilization and creating opportunities for success, the processes that determine how and why coalitions emerge, and how they inform broader economic and social policy decisions remain under-theorized. With the growing power of neoliberal globalization to reshape domestic social and economic policies, some scholars argue that social movement actors need to build strong cross-movement (and cross-border) coalitions that unite previously disconnected sectors, such as environmental, labour and social justice movements (Rose 2000, Obach 2004, Pellow 2007, Evans 2008, Brulle and Jenkins 2008). These coalitions are necessary, these scholars argue, for building a strong counter movement and offering concrete and viable policy alternatives to the deleterious social, economic and environmental consequences of economic globalization.

**Coalition Building in Response to Neoliberal Globalization**

The growing power of neoliberal globalization has the potential to bring together previously disconnected movements, including labour and environmental movements, especially in the local context. While there has been considerable research on the role of networks in generating transnational movements by uniting movements and activists across borders\(^{23}\), there is a dearth of research examining local coalition-building in response to globalization. Yet local-global connections through individual and movement networks, frame bridging and resource interdependence shape the emergence, trajectories and outcomes of local movements, particularly movements responding to global processes. Global opportunities, frames and networks are important in influencing local movements responding to processes of economic globalization, such as anti-water privatization movements and in shaping the emergence of

broad-based community coalitions. I argue that we need to refine our understanding movement coalitions in light of globalization in order to understand the processes and mechanisms that enable or constrain such coalitions and how critical network processes such as brokerage are reconstituted through globalization.

Research on coalitions in the context of neoliberal globalization would also help clarify the difference between social movement networks and coalitions. Diani and Bison (2004) for example, argue that social movement networks are characterized by a strong collective identity, while coalitions tend to lack such identity bonds and instead emerge through instrumental need in response to specific campaigns. Yet there is growing recognition among some scholars that in response to the deleterious consequences of economic globalization, many social movement sectors are shifting their attention from narrow, identity- or issue-based politics to focus on broader social change (Rose 2000, Lopez 2004, Pellow 2007, Evans 2008). The increasing importance of broader issues of social and economic justice has the potential to unite previously disconnected social movements under the common cause of countering neoliberal globalization and its consequences.

In his study on bridge building between the labour, environmental and peace movements, Rose (2000) demonstrates that economic globalization and the ensuing struggles for environmental and social justice have created the context for coalitions to organize across movement boundaries. Movements such as the labour, peace and environmental movements that previously operated in isolation from each other are now drawn together under common frames of justice in response to economic globalization. Other research on environmental-labour coalitions demonstrates that traditionally opposed movements are increasingly shedding old
class-based identities in favour of a shared understanding of challenging government and corporate power around environmental and social justice issues (Obach 2004, Estabrook 2007).

These broad-based coalitions reflect a shared collective identity around social and environmental justice that challenges traditional understandings of identity politics and social networks.\(^{24}\) In the case of water privatization, where the intersection between environmental, economic and social justice is critical, previously disconnected movements, including environmental, social justice and labour movements, bridge traditional divides and unite under the framework of creating a viable alternative to neoliberalism and economic globalization.

Coalition-building in the context of a new common politics of resistance is especially critical to examine at the local level because of the capacity of globalization to create strong collective identities amongst groups and individuals who otherwise would remain disconnected. While the implementation of neoliberal policies at the local level in cities around the world has impacted urban areas and reshaped local politics, it has also generated contestation from the grassroots as organizations come together to offer alternative visions and policies (Peck and Tickell 2002, Evans 2000, Dryzek 2006).\(^{25}\) Localized resistance movements are characterized by a sense of common fate and solidarity that has the potential to create a strong sense of collective identity.

\(^{24}\) Evans (2008) argues that conflict between environmental organizations and labour unions is often exaggerated, and points to numerous empirical examples of strong coalitions between labour and environmental movements, particularly in response to globalization. These coalitions include the “Teamsters and Turtles” in Seattle in 1999 and the Blue-Green Alliance between the United Steelworkers and the Sierra Club. Evans claims that to counter neoliberal globalization, such alliances are increasingly important.

\(^{25}\) These scholars argue that globalization cannot be fully understood without also examining the dynamics of resistance movements and their capacity to bring together networks of activists around the world to reshape policies and offer viable alternatives.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I draw upon empirical and theoretical insights from existing research on social movements, environmental sociology and globalization, including their strengths and limitations, to present a framework for investigating anti-water privatization movements in a comparative perspective. I present an overview of existing theoretical approaches to social movements, including political opportunities, frames and networks, and discuss their relevance and applicability in light of environmental social movements in the broader context of globalization. As I demonstrate, existing approaches, while providing an important framework from which to investigate episodes of contention, reveal important gaps that limit a thorough understanding of anti-water privatization movements and the divergent trajectories of the Vancouver and Stockton cases.

While most empirical studies of social movements tend to analyze political opportunities, frames and networks as discrete processes, treated separately, these processes cannot account for the emergence, development and outcomes of anti-water privatization movements. Instead I argue that it is critical to examine the interplay between these diverse mechanisms of contention. In order to understand the role of each of these processes in shaping anti-water privatization movements and in explaining differences between movements responding to similar threats, it is important to utilize a more dynamic theory of contention that encompasses multiple levels of analysis, including micro, meso and macro processes and how they combine to shape contention, as called for by prominent social movement scholars (see McAdam et al. 2001 and Tilly and Tarrow 2007). As anti-water privatization movements are shaped by people’s ideological and cultural understandings of water, as well as global processes that reshape local politics, it is also
critical to examine these movements in the context of theories of environmental sociology and globalization.

Each of the subsequent chapters interrogates a particular level of analysis and process of contention, including ideology and frames, political opportunities and coalitions. None of these analyses alone reveals the full story about why the movements in Vancouver and Stockton took divergent forms and outcomes, despite responding to similar forces. But examined together, this multi-dimensional approach offers a dynamic explanation of the complex and multiple processes that shape the emergence, development and outcomes of social movements.
Chapter 3: Analyzing Resistance from Below: Research Methods

In this chapter I describe the research methodology employed to study the anti-water privatization movements in Vancouver, British Columbia in Canada and Stockton, California in the United States. At heart of research design is a situated analysis – I examine the localized context of resistance to neoliberal globalization. Social scientists investigating globalization have argued that in order to fully understand its social, economic and environmental consequences, as well as its alternatives, it is critical to examine resistance to globalization, including challenges at the local level, as well as globalization itself (Burawoy et al. 2000, Peck and Tickell 2002, Dryzek 2006, Hackworth 2007, Evans 2008, Chun 2009). An in-depth comparison of two movements opposing water privatization provides the opportunity to uncover the complex interplay between local context and global forces, including how transnational processes and institutions influence the development and outcomes of social movements on the ground. The qualitative comparative design also illuminates the dynamic relationship between different processes that shape contention, including ideology and frames, multi-level opportunity structures and cross-movement networks.

In the following sections, I first describe the research methodology, including how the qualitative comparative approach allowed me to investigate the interaction of multiple episode-specific factors for explaining each movement’s development. Second, I provide a detailed discussion of the research design, including the selection of the cases, the sampling strategy and the use of semi-structured interviews and archival documents. Finally, I describe how I analyzed the data.
Using Comparative Qualitative Methods to Uncover Social Movement Complexity

In order to understand the dynamics that underlie anti-water privatization movements, I decided to utilize a cross-national comparative study of two social movements against water privatization in two contexts: Vancouver, British Columbia and Stockton, California. Based on in-depth interviews with activists and other stakeholders involved in these two movements, the comparative design allowed me to investigate key mechanisms and processes to help understand how these movements developed and diverged in the face of similar threats and globalization trends.

There is limited research on social movements based on in-depth comparative analysis. Most research on social movements either utilizes quantitative methods to identify causal relations between variables and generalize across cases, or focuses on in-depth descriptions of single cases. Although statistical methods are useful in that they allow researchers to generate broad theoretical and causal explanations that can be generalized across a large number of cases and populations, they lack an in-depth understanding of the processes that underlie contention and the complex interactions between them (Staggenborg 2008). While qualitative methods offer rich detail about particular cases, they remain descriptive in nature because they lack the explanatory power offered by a comparative approach (Voss and Sherman 2000).

The Insider’s Approach to Social Movements: Qualitative Methods

Over the past two decades, many prominent social movement scholars have pointed to the importance of meso and micro level mechanisms of collective behaviour and argued that qualitative and ethnographic methods are well-suited for examining these mechanisms as well as
how they combine with structural mechanisms to produce varying outcomes across cases (McAdam et al. 1988, Tarrow 1999, McAdam et al. 2001, Tilly and Tarrow 2007).¹

Staggenborg (2008) suggests that research on social movements needs to “go beyond identifying and listing mechanisms of contention to explaining how they work and why they have particular effects within cultural and political contexts” (2008:343). She argues that qualitative field work is well-suited to this task because it moves beyond measuring correlation between variables and offers in-depth and “complex analyses of processes embedded in historical contexts.” (2008:342). An in-depth ethnographic approach allows for an understanding of how diverse mechanisms and processes of contention interact with cultural and structural “systems of action” and thus is able to generate theoretical generalizations that are “likely to apply under similar conditions” (Staggenborg 2008:343).

The “insider’s approach” offered by qualitative methods provides rich descriptions and narratives about specific historical and cultural contexts, including people’s cultural and emotional interpretations of their social milieu (Goodwin and Horowitz 2002, Lamont and White 2009).² For example, Lopez (2004) argues that while quantitative analyses of social movements are able to tell us the “what” in episodes of contention, as in what happened, they are unable to shed light on the “why” and “how” of activism, including the obstacles, problems and internal struggles that must be overcome. He contends that it is important to focus on the “how” processes and mechanisms in order to be able to understand sociologically how movements

¹ For example, McAdam et al. (1988) argue that “what is needed is more systematic, qualitative fieldwork into the dynamics of collective action at the intermediate meso level. We remain convinced that it is the level at which most movement action occurs and of which we know the least.” (1988:729)

² Weber argued that understanding the subjective experiences of individuals is fundamental to understanding social phenomena – how individuals react to and organize their behaviour in response to their environment helps explain social action (Weber 1978 [1954])
organize, what the obstacles are and why they succeed as well as shed light on the complex interactions between relational, discursive and structural mechanisms (Lopez 2004).\(^3\)

McAdam (2003) suggests that utilizing qualitative methods in social movement research allows for a close examination of the processes that underlie meaning construction and relational dynamics as well as the dynamic interplay between the cultural and structural elements of collective behaviour. For example, Tilly (2001) argues that while relational mechanisms, such as brokerage, can, on their own, explain the linking of two or more social sites, this connection “does not in itself guarantee more effective coordination of action at the connected sites; that depends on initial conditions and combinations with other mechanisms” (2001: 25).

Other scholars contend that the rich contextualization provided by qualitative methods is useful for understanding complex social processes, including examining globalization and resistance to it at the micro level (Burawoy 1991, Lamont 2009). Tarrow (2002) argues that most research on globalization and protest fails to demonstrate either theoretically or empirically the “concrete causal mechanisms connecting globalization to contentious outcomes.” (2002: 233). He contends that a dynamic model of contention that examines the interplay of different mechanisms and processes would enable scholars to demonstrate these causal mechanisms empirically because it generates a holistic account of episodes of contention, rather than a narrow focus on a single factor or stage of mobilization. Qualitative methods allow for an in-depth examination of how these mechanisms shape movements in their formation, diffusion and

\(^3\) While qualitative methods are able to tell us something about the social world above and beyond the abstract generalizations derived from quantitative research, the two methodologies are not incompatible. For example, the findings generated from an in-depth qualitative study can be used to inform the questions and variables for a subsequent study using a quantitative survey design. And insights from quantitative studies of social movements can drive the research questions for a more in-depth qualitative study.
outcomes by closely tracing the processes that shape actors’ experiences on the ground (Staggenborg 2008, Blee and Taylor 2002).

**Qualitative Comparative Social Movement Research**

While qualitative methods are well-suited to uncovering social movement complexity – including rich details about the structural, relational and cultural mechanisms of contention – their disadvantage lies in the tendency to provide narrative rather than analytical accounts of single cases. Social movement scholars have argued that qualitative comparative approaches could move beyond the pitfalls of single-case narratives and generate more analytical and explanatory accounts of social movement complexity, including the relationship between different mechanisms and processes of contention (McAdam et al. 1996, Voss and Sherman 2000, Cress and Snow 2000, Lopez 2004).

Comparing social movements advances the theoretical understanding of contentious politics and facilitates a better understanding of the variation between movements, including differences in frames, political opportunities and mobilizing structures and how they combine to shape the emergence and outcomes of social movements across time and space (McAdam et al 1996, Tilly and Tarrow 2007).

4 Recently, social movement scholars have called for more empirical research examining the different mechanisms and processes of contention in order to understand how they combine to produce variation in social movements across time and space (McAdam et al. 2001, Meyer 2004, Tilly and Tarrow 2007, McAdam et al. 2008). For example, in *Dynamics of Contention*, McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) compare 15 episodes of contention – from revolutions to social movements – to identify the recurrent causal mechanisms that shape contentious politics. They challenge the overly structural and static analyses of contentious politics and argue that contention is made up of a dynamic and interactive combination of processes, including environmental (resources and opportunities), relational (network ties and brokerage) and cognitive (individual and shared understandings) mechanisms.

By breaking down episodes of contentious politics into the critical processes and mechanisms that interact to produce them, McAdam and his colleagues argue that it is possible to compare the episodes in question with other examples of conflict that have occurred in different places and across history – from episodes as diverse as the Yellow Revolution in the Philippines to state building in Italy – as well as gain a full understanding of the entire process of episodes of contention, rather than narrowly focusing on movement emergence. Adopting a dynamic approach to the study of contention that examines the interplay between mechanisms such as identity construction, networks, and political opportunities, rather than treating them as separate and linear units of analysis, makes it
can move beyond the confines of a single case in order to develop theories of collective behaviour that are more generalizable (Tilly and Tarrow 2007).

**Some Limitations to the Qualitative Comparative Method**

Although the comparative case-analysis adds rigour to the proposed research design by increasing explanatory leverage and allowing for a holistic understanding of the complex relationship between different mechanisms of contention, there are some limitations to the methodology. These include the small number of non-randomly selected cases, and the inherent limits of qualitative methods. First, by examining only two cases, which are not randomly selected from a broader population of cases, there is a risk of not having enough variation to draw valid conclusions about the phenomenon under investigation (Rueschemeyer 2003). The small number of cases also limits the generalizability of the findings beyond the two cases under investigation as well as limiting the ability to deal with multiple causes because it is difficult to control for all independent variables with a small sample size (Lieberson 1991).

Second, there are inherent weaknesses in the use of qualitative methods. Using qualitative methods limits the replicability of the findings because qualitative researchers use multiple measurement methods to collect and interpret data and these different measures will produce distinct results (Neuman 2006). In addition, qualitative methods rely on samples that are not representative, and this limits the ability to produce accurate generalizations about a wider population.
While these limitations are important, the goal of the proposed research is not to generate statistically representative and generalizable conclusions, but to provide rich and detailed insights to clarify and deepen the understanding of social movements in specific contexts. In comparative research, it is often not possible to find a large-n sample size because researchers are usually comparing cases, not variables. Comparative studies often focus on social processes or episodes that have few examples in empirical reality, making it difficult to randomly select cases. In fact, comparative social researchers often select cases on the dependent variable because they reflect the full range of what they are trying to explain (Goodwin and Horowitz 2002). Further, qualitative data collection and analysis is an interactive process. The context of the research, including the changes that occur in field, drives the choice of measures, which are unique to the particular research and thus cannot be easily replicated (Neuman 2006).

Sample selection in qualitative research is based on the relevance to the research questions and theory guiding the research rather than on its representativeness (Small 2005). Utilizing theory to guide the research and grounding the theory in evidence through a detailed interpretation of the cases brings to light critical causal mechanisms and processes that shape anti-water privatization movements. Because qualitative comparative methods emphasize both patterns of similarity and difference across cases rather than covariation between variables, the researcher is able to gain a strong familiarity with the cases and uncover and interpret patterns of

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5 Goodwin and Horowitz (2002) argue that the strength of much qualitative work is not its methodological rigour per se, but the fact that it stays as close as possible to the phenomena that it is trying to understand. Small (2005; 2009) argues that the strength of qualitative work is its ability to uncover the how and the why of social reality rather than in providing generalizable data from large representative samples. He contends that qualitative research could be strengthened by improving the way in which the how and the why questions are asked and responses analyzed, rather than designing the research to make the samples more representative.

6 Skocpol (1979) argues that there are ways of dealing with the limitations of small-n comparisons in order to mitigate their impact. These methods include: Carefully selecting cases based on theory and current debates in the field and empirically grounding the research in evidence through a detailed interpretation of cases. This process can serve to both refine theory through evidence, and identify critical causal pathways, providing new ways to look at historical cases.
complexity and multiple causal conditions (King et al. 1994, Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003). Thus, despite the limitations, the findings of the research not only generate valuable insights into the divergent trajectories of these two cases of collective action, but also illuminate the complex interrelationship between global and local processes.

Contested Water Research Design: The Cases, Sampling Strategy and Data Analysis

In order to investigate the processes that explain the emergence, development and outcomes of anti-water privatization movements, I completed a cross-national qualitative comparative study of two movements opposing the privatization of municipal water services in Vancouver and Stockton. My fieldwork primarily involved qualitative methods, including 70 in-depth digitally-recorded interviews with actors involved in the two cases to identify the factors that explain both similarities and differences in movement trajectories. I supplemented the in-depth interviews with an analysis of textual documents, including media stories and organizational documents related to the two cases.

Why Anti-Water Privatization Movements?

I chose to examine anti-water privatization movements in order to empirically examine the situated processes of globalization in the context of theoretical contention over the role of transnational processes for shaping contentious politics. Recently, research on social movements and globalization has been dominated by the theoretical debate between scholars who argue that transnationalism has significantly transformed social movements in terms of collective identity, opportunities, networks and frames (see Smith 2001b and della Porta et al. 2006) and those who argue that domestic political processes remain the most important factor for explaining sustained and successful mobilization (see Tarrow 2005b and Tilly 2004). Tarrow (2002) argues that
despite this theoretical debate, there is a lack of empirical research demonstrating the concrete effects of globalization on mobilization. Other scholars point to the need to distinguish between the dynamics of local versus transnational movements resisting globalization in order to understand the historical and context-dependent effects of transnational forces (see Burawoy et al. 2000, Josselin 2007, Hackworth 2007, Evans 2008 and Chun 2009).7

Anti-water privatization movements are useful for advancing the understanding of localized resistance to transnational flows of capital and power because they lie at the intersection of the global and the local. Externally, they are shaped by global forces, including the push for neoliberal reforms at the municipal level, the pressure from multinational corporations to outsource water services and the impact of international trade and investment treaties.8 At the same time, they are intensely local, drawing on local constituents for mobilization, and dependent on the dynamics and structures of municipal governments. Examining local anti-water privatization from a comparative perspective is useful for understanding how and why global forces are reshaping local movements and for specifying the concrete ways in which this is occurring.

Comparing Movements in Vancouver and Stockton: The Cases

In order to investigate the nature of anti-water privatization movements, I focused my research on movements opposed to water privatization in two cities; Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada and Stockton, California, United States. The two cases represent distinct local

7 Most research on the globalization of protest examines movements operating at the transnational level (Smith 2002, Kay 2005, della Porta et al. 2006). Yet global processes play out differently depending on the scale of context (see Bridge and McManus 2000, Diani 2005, Josselin 2007). Hence it is necessary to examine local level resistance to globalization in order to understand whether the mechanisms and processes that shape global protest are similar to those that occur at the local level.

8 Evans (2008) argues that anti-water privatization movements are particularly interesting to study because of the myriad of cases around the world where activists are responding to similar global forces.
responses to similar global phenomena and hence allowed me to uncover, through comparison, what differentiates local responses to transnational processes. Several factors influenced the selection of these particular cases. Both movements occurred at relatively similar times (in 2001 and 2002-2003 respectively), and in the wider global context, occurred during a time of heightened anti-globalization protest and the rise of transnational movements. With the growing globalization of protest and the international attention to anti-water privatization movements, selecting two cases in different contexts is useful for examining the effect of global processes on local movements.

Both cases also share similarities beyond the global context of transnational protest. In both cities, the shortlisted companies were all subsidiaries of major multinational water corporations, and in each case, the privatization contracts were the largest ever proposed in the history of each country and hence had gained significant national and even international attention. As a result, both places were considered as “must wins” in order to stop the spread of water privatization to other municipalities. Both movements also involved broad community coalitions, including labour and environmental organizations and hence were useful for understanding the role of social movement coalitions for influencing the development and outcomes of these movements. British Columbia and California are useful comparative cases because both have strong history of social movement activism, particularly labour (Zuberi 2006, Milkman 2006) and environmental movements (Cormier and Tindall 2005, Robinson et al. 2007).

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9 The anti-WTO protest, dubbed the “Battle in Seattle” took place in 1999 (see Smith 2001b), while the G8 protest in Genoa occurred in 2001 (see della Porta et al. 2006). At the same time, activists from North and South America were organizing a mass protest against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) meeting in Quebec City in 2002. And, since 2001, the World Social Forum, which brings together activists and civil society from around the world to create a common vision for social, economic and environmental justice, has become one of the largest political gatherings in history (see Smith et al. 2008).
Yet while both movements were responding to similar forces and shared similar threats, they differed significantly in terms of form and outcomes, with activists in Vancouver successfully overturning the decision to privatize water, and the movement in Stockton initially failing to prevent privatization. 10 This variation in movement trajectories and outcomes provided the opportunity to empirically uncover, through comparison, what factors – including the role of global processes – enabled or constrained these two movements. Given the similarities between the two movements, I argue that Vancouver and Stockton are well suited for examining the processes that shape differences between the two movements. The similarities between these two cases created a quasi-experimental research opportunity to compare and contrast differences in mobilization patterns and outcomes.

“Keep our Water Public!”: Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

In the spring of 2001, the Greater Vancouver Water District (GVWD) Administration Board announced plans to contract a private-sector company to design, build and operate a water filtration plant at the Seymour reservoir in North Vancouver, which supplies water to 40 percent of the region’s population (Simpson 2001). The original plan for water filtration, under the GVWD’s Drinking Water Treatment Program, called for the construction of the Seymour water filtration plant by 2020, in order to bring the region’s water quality in compliance with Health Canada’s Guidelines for Drinking Water Quality (GVWD 1999). Yet in 1998, the plans for the construction of the Seymour filtration plant were accelerated to meet new provincial water

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10 While the movement in Stockton failed to prevent water privatization, through legal channels the anti-water privatization coalition was able to overturn privatization in 2008. As the movement in Stockton failed to prevent the privatization of their water system, which was their objective, it makes for an interesting contrasting case to the movement in Vancouver which successfully prevented the privatization of the water system. At the same time, it is important to note that despite failing to prevent the privatization of the water system, the movement in Stockton created the conditions that allowed for the eventual reversal of privatization through legal means. These two movements clearly experienced divergent trajectories that make for fruitful comparison and offer insights into the divergent mechanisms that shape movement building in these two contexts.
quality standards concerning turbidity, and because of growing evidence that the existing filtration system was not filtering out harmful contaminants, including the parasites Cryptosporidium and Giardia (GVWD 2001a). Because of these accelerated demands and the high cost of designing, building and operating the treatment plant – the estimated cost was 150 million dollars over 20 years – the GVWD made a decision to privatize the construction of the plant in order to lessen the financial costs for taxpayers (Vancouver Sun Editorial 2001).

The announcement of plans to privatize the water treatment plant sparked a public outcry and within days a coalition of concerned citizens and organizations had formed in opposition to the GVWD proposal. Prominent environmental, labour and social justice organizations organized public information sessions, sent delegates to the meetings of the GVWD Board and commissioned a legal opinion demonstrating the risk to local control over water from multinational trade agreements, such as NAFTA. Opponents of privatization were mainly concerned with the risks associated with contracting out water services to a multi-national firm, including the implications for local control and accountability in light of international trade agreements (BCPSEU 2001).

In June 2001, in response to pressure from municipalities in the region, including Burnaby and North Vancouver – whose city councils had voted for full public consultation on the proposed plans to privatize the Seymour filtration plant – the GVWD agreed to hold three public meetings in the region (Simpson 2001). Two of these meetings went ahead as scheduled.

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11 These parasites can cause outbreaks of gastrointestinal illness in populations supplied by the affected water source, as occurred in Walkerton, Ontario in the spring of 2000, when the water supply was contaminated with Cryptosporidium (Perkel 2002).

12 Smith 2001a

13 The BCPSEU is a pseudonym for the labour union that was at the centre of the anti-privatization movement in Vancouver. All of the names of individuals and organizations in this study are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the respondents.
At the first meeting, in Burnaby, over 400 people packed a crowded hall, with many more turned away due to fire regulations (Lees 2001). Those who attended the meeting represented a wide-range of environmental, labour and social justice groups, as well as municipal representatives from the majority of the municipalities that make up the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVWD 2001b). The Burnaby meeting lasted over four hours, as hundreds of people opposed to water privatization lined up to speak at the microphones and repeatedly requested a reversal of the GVWD decision to privatize the filtration plant (Lees 2001).

Two weeks later, at the second public meeting in North Vancouver – scheduled to last two hours, but continuing well into the night, finally culminating after five hours – more than 500 people turned out, with the overwhelming majority speaking out against privatization (GVWD 2001b). Similar to the meeting in Burnaby, the representatives of the GVWD faced a hostile audience, who regularly shouted angry boos at the bureaucrats who spoke from the podium in front of the crowd (Klein 2001). Representatives of labour unions, environmental groups, social justice organizations as well as members of the general public were united in their opposition to the privatization of the Seymour filtration plant, with most of the concern centering on the impact of international trade agreements on the ability of the regional government to regulate and control water resources (Klein 2001).

Despite scheduling a third and even fourth public meeting, the GVRD Water Board met for an in-camera session following the second meeting in North Vancouver, and – faced with the overwhelming negative public sentiment of the first two meetings – made the decision to reverse their decision to privatize the filtration plant. Instead, they decided to proceed with a traditional design-build model, citing concern over trade agreements and their effect on local governments’ control over resources.
In a press release issued that day by the Greater Vancouver Regional District Board, they revealed the rationale for the decision; the Chair of the Water Board said, “the public who attended the public consultation meetings, and those who corresponded with us, sent a very clear message. There is uncertainty about the impact of international trade treaties, NAFTA and GATS, and even though the risks may be small, the public did not want to take those risks no matter what efficiencies may be gained. We said we would listen. And we did. We took that “sober second look’ and changed our minds” (GVRD 2001). After several months of organizing a mounting opposition to water privatization, the movement in Vancouver had succeeded in keeping their water system under public control.

“Let the People Vote”: Stockton, California, USA

Facing a budget shortfall and strict environmental codes that required major upgrades to the local water treatment plant, the municipal government of Stockton, California, led by a Republican mayor and majority conservative city council, proposed plans to privatize the upgrading and operation of the plant in the spring of 2001 (Burke 2004). Valued at 600 million dollars over 20 years, the anticipated contract was the largest water contract ever proposed in US history (Skoloff 2003). The Mayor and his supporters on council argued that contracting with a private company to run the city’s water system – including control over the city’s drinking water, sewage, and storm water systems – would save the city money, keep water rates low and transfer environmental and public health regulatory compliance requirements from the public to the private sector (Public Citizen 2002).

Soon after the initial plans to privatize the water system were announced, a coalition of environmental, labour and voter rights organizations began to mobilize in opposition to the contract, organizing regular delegations to council meetings over the course of the following year
to speak out against the proposed privatization deal (*The Stockton Record* 2007). In the fall of 2002, when it appeared that the Stockton city council would proceed with the plans to privatize the water system despite growing opposition from the public, the anti-water privatization coalition decided to mount a ballot initiative requiring voter approval on all privatization contracts.\(^{14}\) They began organizing and collecting signatures, and by February 2003, had gathered over 18,000 signatures, successfully qualifying the initiative for a public vote on the issue of privatization (Public Citizen 2003).

In light of the predicted ballot victory for opponents of privatization, the Stockton city council decided to accelerate the vote on the private water contract. On February 19, 2003, just 13 days before the scheduled ballot initiative vote on Measure F, the city council voted to approve the $600 million contract, handing over full control over the city’s drinking water, sewage treatment and storm water systems to OMI-Thames Water – one of the major multinational corporations that own and operate water services around the world (Siders 2007). On March 4, 2003, the ballot initiative organized by the anti-water privatization passed by a margin of 60 percent (Skoloff 2003). Yet it was not retroactive, and thus did not reverse the city council’s decision to privatize Stockton’s water treatment system.

The members of the coalition were furious. In their news release responding to the city council vote approving the contract with OMI-Thames, one member of the anti-water privatization coalition declared, “Consumers are outraged, and we hope to reverse this decision. The battle isn’t over” (Public Citizen 2003). The anti-water privatization coalition began organizing a referendum campaign to overturn the contract with OMI-Thames.

\(^{14}\) Measure F, the ballot initiative organized by the anti-water privatization reads: “Amendment to the Stockton Municipal Code to Require a Public Vote on Action(s) by the City Council to sell, transfer, lease or encumber any part or interest in City Utilities or to enter into a contract in excess of five million dollars with any private or for-profit agency for the operation and maintenance or collection of revenue for City utilities (http://www.smartvoter.org/2003/03/04/ca/sj/meas/F/, accessed November 30, 2009).
Over the course of the next 30 days, members of the coalition attempted to gather enough signatures to overturn the city council vote in a referendum, as allowed under California Law.\textsuperscript{15} Despite their efforts, and as a result of a counter-referendum campaign headed by the Mayor of Stockton and OMI-Thames, the coalition was unable to collect the required number of signatures for the referendum to be placed on the ballot and to repeal the vote by the Stockton city council (Snitow and Kaufman 2007). As the anti-water privatization movement was unable to stop the privatization of the water treatment plant; ownership of the Stockton water system was turned over to OMI-Thames in March 2003.

The failure to prevent privatization was a devastating feat with major consequences for water treatment and delivery in Stockton, including job losses at the treatment plant, increased water rates and lack of investment in the required facility upgrades by OMI-Thames (Snitow and Kaufman 2007). Yet despite failing to gather enough signatures to hold a referendum to overturn the city council decision, the anti-water privatization coalition did not give up. Along with prominent environmental and voter-rights organizations, they filed a lawsuit under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) in May 2003. With the goal of reversing privatization of the treatment plant, they charged the city of Stockton and OMI-Thames for failing to complete an environmental assessment required under California law for any major new construction or facilities upgrade. One of the reasons that the City of Stockton failed to complete the proper review was their decision to move up the vote to privatize the water treatment plant before the scheduled ballot initiative that would have prevented their ability to outsource water services.

\textsuperscript{15} The referendum process allows a proposal – placed on the ballot by a citizen initiated petition – to overturn a law or vote enacted by the legislature. In California, citizens are required to collect signatures from ten percent of the population in order to have a referendum placed on the ballot (http://www.iandrinstitute.org/California.htm, accessed December 8, 2009).
Instead the city was forced to argue – in a court of law – that these major renovations were only “minor” and thus outside of the purview of the CEQA regulations (Snitow and Kaufman 2007).

The court battle lasted for over five years, with judges twice ruling in favour of the coalition. Both of these decisions were appealed by the City of Stockton and OMI-Thames, who were granted a new trial in 2004 (Tady 2007). After losing a third appeal in July 2007, the City of Stockton decided not to appeal the decision by the California Superior Court in favour of the coalition members. As a result, they voted to rescind the contract with OMI-Thames, a move which cost the city 1.5 million dollars. After five years under the control of a private company, the Stockton wastewater treatment plant was returned to municipal control in 2008 (Tady 2007). Despite the initial loss of the anti-water privatization movement, their successful ballot initiative combined with the council’s tactical error in rushing the decision to privatize, set the stage for future victory. Ultimately, the coalition was able to overturn water privatization and return control of the water system to the public sector.

Data Collection

The goal of my research design was to uncover, through comparison, the mechanisms and processes that enable or constrain anti-water privatization movements and to identify how context matters for movements responding to similar threats. In order to address these research objectives, I completed 70 digitally-recorded in-depth interviews with activists involved in the movements in Stockton, California and Vancouver, British Columbia from April 2008 to January 2009. I supplemented the in-depth interviews with an analysis of textual documents, such as media stories and organizational documents related to the two cases. The content analysis of documents provided additional evidence to support the findings based on the analysis of the transcripts of the interview data.
Sample Selection

During my field research, I used multiple approaches to purposively recruit a diverse range of movement actors involved in the Vancouver and Stockton cases, including leaders as well as rank and file participants. In order to accomplish this sampling objective, I utilized both purposive and snowball sampling strategies to recruit my sample of respondents. The respondents were selected because they met the criteria of being involved in the movements in question.

Although a random purposive sample adds credibility to the findings that are generalizable to a larger population (Patton 1990), it was not feasible to employ a random selection of respondents for this study because of the small number of respondents available and accessible. Purposive sampling represents one way of dealing with the limitations of a small-n population of potential respondents because it allows for a sample selection that permits an in-depth understanding of the phenomena in question, where the aim of the study is to examine the quality of the data rather than the quantity (Miles and Huberman 1994).

To identify and recruit potential respondents for the study, I began by researching archival documents, including media stories, minutes of public meetings and organizational websites to identify key leaders and social movement organizations involved in the anti-water privatization movements in Stockton and Vancouver. Each potential respondent then received a letter of introduction and request for a face-to-face interview. I utilized “snowball” sampling to secure interviews with other members of the movements by asking these key leaders to recommend other potential respondents for interviews. Snowball sampling is useful when trying to reach populations that are inaccessible or hard to find – as in the case of social movement participants – and thus may be the best method available because it helps determine key
respondents unknown to the researcher and increases the number of participants (Patton 1990, Edin and Lein 1997). For example, Edin and Lein (1997) found that the use of snowball sampling was important for recruiting new participants to their study, and for developing trust with these respondents, as they had been recommended by someone they knew and trusted. Finally, I used personal social networks in both cases to identify and secure interviews with specific respondents who would be otherwise difficult to locate or access.

Although the sampling methodology employed could not generate a statistically representative sample of movement participants, in combination, they generated data from a diverse set of actors involved in each of the two movements. In addition, as the identical sampling methodology was employed in each case, the consequences of some of the systematic biases inherent to my recruitment approach were mitigated as a result of the comparative design.

In the case of my research on anti-water privatization, the purpose is to provide an in-depth, holistic and multi-dimensional explanation for the emergence and outcomes of these two episodes of collective action. Purposive and snowball sampling are well-suited to this purpose because they generate access to respondents who are closely linked to and have an in-depth understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Miles and Huberman 1994). As Small (2005;2009) argues, the goal of qualitative research should not be to attempt to live up to the goals of quantitative design, but rather to maximize the potential strength of the qualitative method, and should be judged on the basis of the rationale for the study. While acknowledging the limitations in terms of generalizability, the samples recruited for in-depth interviews in each

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16 Selection bias was similar for both Vancouver and Stockton and thus while the study may not tell the complete story of social movement mobilization, it is useful for shedding light on the similarities and differences between the two movements and for providing confidence in the findings of the comparison.
case represent a substantial proportion of the population of movement actors in each case. The sampling strategy and use of in-depth interviews allowed for access to data that would have been impossible to obtain through surveys or other methodological approaches while also allowing me to collect rich data, ask follow-up questions and clarify responses.

The Interview Sample

Another indication of the comparability of the data collected from the movement actors in Stockton and Vancouver is the similarity in the demographic characteristics of the respondents interviewed. The tables below present the sample characteristics in both places by gender, age, marital status, education, employment status, personal and household income, ethnicity, union membership and organizational type. The tables reveal a fairly evenly matched sample between Stockton and Vancouver, with the differences illustrative of some of the interesting variation in the two movement contexts.

In terms of gender, I interviewed similar percentages of men and women in both places, with slightly more men included in the Stockton sample relative to Vancouver. As shown in table 3.1, I interviewed 21 men and 14 women in Stockton as compared to 19 men and 16 women in Vancouver.

Table 3.1 Respondents’ Gender by City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Stockton</th>
<th></th>
<th>Vancouver</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21 (60%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>19 (54%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14 (40%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>16 (46%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35 (100%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>35 (100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interview samples in both Vancouver and Stockton are also somewhat similar in terms of age of the respondents, with both samples including the largest concentration of respondents between the ages of 51 to 70 years old, as represented in table 3.2. While these two
age cohorts include 69% of the respondents in Stockton, they comprise 45% of the respondents in Vancouver. Overall, the sample included a somewhat higher percentage of younger respondents in Vancouver as compared to Stockton, with 34% under the age of 50 in Vancouver, compared to only 14% in Stockton.

Table 3.2 Respondents’ Age Distribution by City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Stockton</th>
<th>Vancouver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
<td>6 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>3 (8%)</td>
<td>5 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>15 (43%)</td>
<td>11 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-70</td>
<td>9 (26%)</td>
<td>5 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71-80</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81-90</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35 (100%)</td>
<td>32 (91%)*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Three respondents in Vancouver declined to respond to this question

In terms of marital status, the majority of respondents in Stockton and Vancouver were married, including 91% of the sample in Stockton and 71% of the sample in Vancouver. Table 3.3 also shows that more people who reported their marital status as single were interviewed in Vancouver as compared with Stockton (17% and 6% respectively).

Table 3.3 Respondents’ Marital Status by City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Stockton</th>
<th>Vancouver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
<td>6 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married/Common Law</td>
<td>32 (91%)</td>
<td>25 (71%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced/Separated</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35 (100%)</td>
<td>35 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In both Stockton and Vancouver, respondents were highly educated, with the vast majority of respondents in both places holding a university bachelor’s degree or higher. As
presented in table 3.4, in Stockton, 78% of respondents had a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to 89% in Vancouver. In Stockton, 46% of respondents held a Master’s or PhD degree, while in Vancouver 60% of respondents fell into this category.

Table 3.4 Respondents’ Level of Education by City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Level of Education</th>
<th>Stockton</th>
<th>Vancouver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Diploma</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Undergraduate Degree</td>
<td>11 (32%)</td>
<td>10 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Degree Masters</td>
<td>13 (38%)</td>
<td>18 (52%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Degree PhD</td>
<td>3 (8%)</td>
<td>3 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35 (100%)</td>
<td>35 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of employment, the majority of respondents in both Stockton and Vancouver were employed full-time (60% in both places), with somewhat more respondents working part time in Vancouver than in Stockton as shown in table 3.5. Twice as many respondents were retired in Stockton (23%) as compared to Vancouver (11%).

Table 3.5 Respondents’ Employment Status by City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>Stockton</th>
<th>Vancouver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>21 (60%)</td>
<td>21 (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>6 (17%)</td>
<td>8 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>8 (23%)</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35 (100%)</td>
<td>35 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The annual personal and household income levels of respondents in Stockton and Vancouver differed slightly, with the majority of respondents in Stockton earning personal and household income over $50,000 (62% and 67% of respondents who answered the questions.
respectively). As shown in Table 3.6, in Vancouver, personal income was more disperse across income levels, with less than half earning over $50,000 (39% of respondents who answered the question).

Table 3.6 Respondents’ Personal Income by City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Stockton</th>
<th>Vancouver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under $9,999</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000 to $19,999</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000 to $29,999</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
<td>3 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000 to $39,999</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000 to $49,999</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
<td>5 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 to $69,999</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$70,000 to $89,999</td>
<td>6 (17%)</td>
<td>5 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$90,000 to $100,000</td>
<td>6 (17%)</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over $100,000</td>
<td>6 (17%)</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27 (77%)*</td>
<td>28 (81%)**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 8 Respondents in Stockton declined to answer this question
** 7 Respondents in Vancouver declined to answer this question

As presented in table 3.7, in terms of household income, more respondents in Stockton reported a household income over $100,000 than respondents in Vancouver (43% and 29% respectively).

Table 3.7 Respondents’ Household Income by City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Stockton</th>
<th>Vancouver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under $9,999</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000 to $19,999</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000 to $29,999</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000 to $39,999</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000 to $49,999</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 to $69,999</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$70,000 to $89,999</td>
<td>5 (14%)</td>
<td>3 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$90,000 to $100,000</td>
<td>3 (8%)</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over $100,000</td>
<td>15 (43%)</td>
<td>10 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27 (77%)**</td>
<td>28 (81%)****</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** 8 Respondents in Stockton declined to answer this question
****7 Respondents in Vancouver declined to answer this question
In terms of ethnicity, the majority of respondents in Stockton and Vancouver self-identified as Caucasian, while the sample was somewhat more ethnically diverse in Stockton than in Vancouver. For example, as shown in table 3.8, 14% of respondents in Stockton self-identified as Hispanic, while only one person in Vancouver reported their ethnic background as being Hispanic. These differences unsurprisingly reflect differences between the larger populations of both cities.

**Table 3.8 Respondents’ Self-reported Ethnicity by City**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Stockton</th>
<th>Vancouver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>26 (74%)</td>
<td>32 (91%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American/Afro-Canadian</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>5 (14%)</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>35 (100%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>35 (100%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.9 reveals that the interview samples in both Stockton and Vancouver were evenly matched by union membership, with close to 40% of respondents in both places reporting being a member of a union.

**Table 3.9 Interview Sample by Union Membership**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member of a Union</th>
<th>Stockton</th>
<th>Vancouver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>13 (37%)</td>
<td>14 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>22 (63%)</td>
<td>21 (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>35 (100%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>35 (100%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The respondents in Stockton and Vancouver represented a diversity of organizations and institutions. These groups were categorized into broader organizational types, including environmental, labour, social justice, community organizations and government/political
institutions. In both cases, the samples were fairly evenly matched between these organizational categories, with similar numbers of respondents from environmental and labour organizations. I also interviewed the same number of political elites in both Stockton and Vancouver.

One difference between Stockton and Vancouver was the number of respondents from social justice organizations. As presented in table 3.10, in Vancouver, 20% of respondents were members of a social justice organization, while no respondents in Stockton were in this category. As discussed in Chapter 7, the presence or absence of a social justice organization was critical in explaining differences in the strength and cohesion of environmental-labour coalitions in Stockton and Vancouver, with the social justice organization in Vancouver playing a key bridge building role in the coalition.

Table 3.10 Respondents’ Organizational Affiliation by City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Organization</th>
<th>Stockton</th>
<th>Vancouver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>8 (23%)</td>
<td>10 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour Union</td>
<td>7 (20%)</td>
<td>5 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Organization</td>
<td>16 (46%)</td>
<td>9 (26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government/Political Elites</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35 (100%)</td>
<td>35 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the data presented in the tables above indicate some minor differences between the basic demographic characteristics of the interview samples in Stockton and Vancouver, at a broader level, the two groups of respondents appear surprisingly similar and comparable. From another perspective, these two samples do not immediately differ in fundamental ways that one might expect to bias the responses to interview questions in certain ways in one case as
compared to the other (as might be the case, for example, given social movement research about gendered differences in biographical availability if most of the sample in Stockton were men (see McAdam 1986)). Overall, the comparison of basic demographic sample characteristics supports the idea that the findings from these two cases are comparable, and that the differences in the movement trajectories and outcomes reveal something about variation in contexts, including political-institutional and organizational differences.

*Semi-Structured Interviews*

The 70 semi-structured digitally-recorded interviews lasted approximately one and a half to two hours and consisted of both open-ended and survey questions. The interviews were digitally-recorded in their entirety and the digital files subsequently transcribed. I also completed field reflection notes immediately after each interview in order to begin to record the context and reflect on insights provided by the interviews to connect to the broader literature. These reflection notes included developing some of my initial analytical insights and allowed me to identify emergent trends and hypotheses for testing during the post-transcription data analysis.

The semi-structured interviews allowed me to collect detailed information about people’s participation in the movements to explicate factors that influence their participation, including their values and behaviours and contextually-mediated understandings of water. The interviews also generated data on the role of frames, political opportunities and coalition-building and how these processes shaped movement trajectories and outcomes. Finally, the interviews allowed me to explicate the role of global processes – including transnational opportunities, networks and frames in shaping the movements in Vancouver and Stockton.17

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17 A further discussion of the interview process, questions and data analysis is included in the Methodology Appendix.
In person interviews are an important research tool for gathering information about people’s motivations for participating in social movements, and to generate data on the activities of social movement organizations and networks from the perspective of social movement actors themselves (Blee and Taylor 2002). The use of semi-structured interviews is particularly useful for understanding the complex processes that undergird movement mobilization and outcomes because they generate rich and detailed information about contention (Blee and Taylor 2002, Broadbent 2003, Lopez 2004). In combination with document analysis, which allows for a complementary understanding of patterns revealed through interviews, semi-structured interviewing enables a holistic and in-depth accounting of social movement complexity (McAdam 1988, Broadbent 2003, Staggenborg 1998).

**Document Analysis**

I supplemented the in-depth interviews with analysis of archival documents, such as media stories, organizational newsletters and other documents related to the anti-water privatization movements in Vancouver and Stockton. Analysis of these textual sources allowed me to identify key issues around decision-making, issue framing, tactics and strategies for mobilization in order to both complement the patterns obtained from interviews as well as understand differences between how issues are understood and framed by different groups across time. Using triangulation across data sources and data-collection procedures was useful for establishing consistency and in increasing confidence in the findings of the study (Sandelowski 1986, Farmer et al. 2006).

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18 Broadbent (2003) argues that in-depth interviewing is well suited for examining complex relational systems. His use of open-ended interviews in his research on Japanese environmental policy networks “brought forth the best information about these highly contested issues and political events” (2003: 212) because the interviews were able to generate detailed insights beyond people’s behaviours to the meanings they attached to their actions and those of other people in the environmental movement.
The documents analyzed were obtained using three different approaches. First, I completed a search of the *Lexus Nexus* news database for news articles from local and regional sources related to the two cases. A sample of 25 articles for the Stockton case and 17 articles for the GVRD case was obtained using this method. Second, I searched the websites of the organizations involved in the two cases in order to obtain documents related to the campaigns. The organizational documents included newsletters, press releases, brochures and other documents relating to the anti-water privatization campaigns. The organizations selected were groups that were considered as playing a significant role in the episode of collective action (they all received considerable media attention in the related news articles). In Vancouver, these groups included City Green, a local environmental organization, the British Columbia Public Service Employees Union (BCPSEU), and the Citizens Action League, an organization focused on social, economic and environmental justice. In Stockton, the groups include the Association of Democratic Voters, the Citizens Environmental Alliance and the Utility Workers Local 5 Union. Third, I contacted the aforementioned organizations in both Vancouver and Stockton and requested materials relating to the two cases. From these searches, I obtained 254 textual documents relating to the Vancouver case, and 111 documents pertaining to the Stockton episode. In total, I included 365 discrete documents in the coding and analysis.

*Data Analysis*

All together, the interview transcripts, archival documents and interview reflection notes generated thousands of pages of data for analysis. The data from the transcribed interviews, reflection notes and scanned and downloaded documents was coded and patterns of responses identified using Qualitative Social Research’s *NVivo 8* software. Using the text search function that identifies key words and search phrases from the pertinent documents, I identified major
themes and patterns in the data allowing me to test hypotheses based on the literature on social movements. The results of the text search function were collected into nodes representing mechanisms of contention, including frames, political opportunities, networks and global processes. The theme-based nodes represented patterns across the data that revealed the interplay of processes and mechanisms that explain the emergence, development and divergent outcomes of the anti-water privatization movements in Vancouver and Stockton. The pattern analysis process allowed me to uncover the nodes that were most prevalent across the two cases and thus helped me develop and test hypotheses for explaining differences between the two movements.19

The method of data analysis I used is based on the method of systematic process analysis or process tracing outlined by Peter Hall (2003). Hall argues that this method is useful for dealing with complex interaction effects and multiple-causality and for uncovering causal mechanisms when it is not possible isolate variation in all but one independent variable. Process tracing involves examining the role of hypothesized causal mechanisms in the same way across all cases to see if they are causally important. Through structured and detailed comparisons measuring the same causes and outcomes across each unit of observation, a researcher can identify variables that might otherwise be left out, uncover interaction effects, deal with multicausality and test theories and hypotheses (Hall 2003).

This analytical approach is similar to the method proposed by McAdam et al. (2001) and Tilly and Tarrow (2007) for dealing with social movement complexity by breaking down narratives into mechanisms. Although McAdam and his colleagues (2001) correctly identified the need for a more dynamic approach to the study of social movements – in particular to gain a better understanding of the interplay between different causal mechanisms – their model has

19 A more detailed discussion of coding and analysis procedures is presented in the Methodology Appendix.
been criticized for lacking rigour as a result of loosely defined concepts, and for being more
descriptive than analytical (Earl 2000, Lichbach 2005).

Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow acknowledge and respond to these criticisms in
*Contentious Politics* (2007), where they offer a more clear and precise method for breaking
down and observing mechanisms of contention, which allows for a more thorough empirical
application of their approach. For example, Tarrow and Tilly (2007) call for more systematic
comparisons across different systems and movements by breaking down episodes into their
composite mechanisms to see how they function together to produce mobilization. They outline a
three-step method for analyzing contentious politics: (1) begin with a description of the process
or episode of contention; (2) decompose the process into its basic causes or mechanisms; and
finally (3) reassemble the causes into a general account of how the process plays out (2007).
They contend that this approach allows for an in-depth understanding of both the variations and
the regularities of contentious politics because its focus is on both the social bases and political
context in which social movements operate.

Following this analytical framework for studying social movements, I isolated the
mechanisms involved in each case – through the use of coding – in order to observe how they
combine into broader causal processes. I then compared how these processes operated across the
different settings in order to understand the varying effects of the appearance or absence of a
particular mechanism to explain the divergence between the two movements. These mechanisms
and processes included ideology and frames, multi-level political and economic opportunities,
and networks and coalitions.
Conclusion

This chapter provides background information on my research design, methodological approach, cases, sampling and analysis of my study of anti-water privatization movements in Vancouver and Stockton. After providing a rationale for the comparative, qualitative approach, the chapter presents a detailed description of the research design, including case and sample selection, data collection, the use of interviews and archival documents and data analysis.

A detailed comparison of the demographic data of the samples in Stockton and Vancouver reveal that they are largely similar and empirically comparable across important dimensions, including gender, age, education, income and organizational affiliation. Given their broad similarities, comparing the respondents’ descriptions of the two movements provides important insights into the underlying mechanisms that explain the differences in movement trajectories and outcomes, allowing me to make several contributions to the literature on social movements.

Comparative qualitative research, through the use of in-depth interviews and textual analysis, provides an important set of empirical tools for investigating the dynamic interplay between macro, meso and micro level processes, and is useful for shedding light on the complex mechanisms and processes that shape social movements, including cognitive mechanisms, political context and mobilizing structures and how they are shaped by transnational forces. Although the small-n comparison of non-randomly selected cases is unable to generate generalizable or replicable findings, the goal of the research design is to provide an in-depth explanation of social movement dynamics in order to advance the understanding of contentious politics in a complex and globalizing world.
Qualitative social movement research, especially using a comparative case approach, highlights the importance of non-structural processes in explaining contention and provides a multi-dimensional explanation for the emergence, development and outcomes of mobilization. In a rapidly changing world, where cultural and economic production shifts across national and international boundaries, comparative qualitative research helps illuminate the pathways by which these social transformations shape individual life experiences and sheds light on the relationship between institutional power and the subjective “on the ground” experiences of social movement actors.
Chapter 4: The Meaning of Water: “The Commons” as a Socially Constructed Discourse

“Water is the matrix of culture, the basis of life.”

-- Vandana Shiva, Water Wars

In this chapter, I consider the role of cultural and social-psychological processes, and specifically examine the role of socially-constructed and context-dependent understandings of water in shaping movement mobilization. While the anti-water privatization movements in Vancouver and Stockton were shaped by external forces, including the neoliberal push for private sector investment in water services, their emergence is also explained by locally-situated meanings of water. Although the two movements diverged in terms of organizational and political dynamics, activists in both places revealed similar cognitive and emotional understandings of the public nature of water. This chapter investigates how meanings of water are intertwined with people’s situated experiences – including the historical, geographic and cultural contexts in which individuals are embedded – and discusses how activists imagined worlds shape their political beliefs and decisions to participate in the anti-privatization of water movement in their communities.

First, I argue that cognitive understandings of water are psychologically, historically and geographically influenced. In both Vancouver and Stockton, respondents described their emotional and spiritual attachments to water as well as the importance of “place” for shaping their understandings and for problematizing the commodification of water. In Vancouver, anti-privatization activists evoked a strong sense of attachment to and desire to protect proximal watersheds, while activists’ understandings of water in Stockton were shaped by the historical, geographical, and political realities of drought, delta pollution and pressures for water diversion.

Constructed meanings of water in both Vancouver and Stockton reflect the interplay between the commons and commodity, and ultimately shaped the political standpoint of activists in both places, that water is part of the commons and should remain in the public realm. The findings demonstrate that beyond external opportunities or threats, it is important to consider broader socio-cultural and historical mediations, including the role of emotion in contentious politics, and how these constructions inform decisions to participate in social movements, particularly those concerned with natural resources. I contend that a more thorough analysis of social-psychological processes will illuminate our sociological understanding of environmental conflict and policy outcomes, including how global processes are reconstituted by locally-situated meaning work.

**Social Constructionism: Making Sense of Nature**

Existing research on social movements points to structural factors such as networks, resources and political opportunities as guiding mobilization. While cognitive factors such as identity and meaning construction (framing) have received much attention from social movement scholars in recent years, the broader role of social-psychological processes – beyond movement specific framing strategies – in shaping movement participation has been undertheorized. These interpretive processes are either neglected in favour of attention to frames or considered to be indistinct from framing processes.\(^2\) Social movement scholars have tended to fuse ideology into frame analysis, leaving out the examination and analysis of broader cultural and ideological processes for explaining participation in movements. One of the reasons for this lack of attention to ideology stems from a rejection of early theories of collective behavior that emphasized the irrational nature of social

\(^2\) Although the social construction of ideology has been the focus of sociological analysis, particularly the sociology of knowledge (see Mannheim 1997 [1936]), it has been under-examined by scholars of contentious politics, whose constructionist analyses tend to privilege framing over the production of ideology.
movements. Since the 1970s, resource mobilization and political process approaches have emerged to counter previous theories of irrationality and social breakdown, de-emphasizing the social-psychological elements of contentious politics in favour of more structural or context-driven explanations (McCarthy and Zald 1977, Tarrow 1998, Morris 2000). While these theories correctly brought to light the rational and structural context for mobilization and demonstrated that social movements are not simply the result of irrational or emotional impulses, the shift away from social-psychological explanations downplays or ignores important processes such as the socially constructed meanings individuals attach to the world around them.

Although frame analysis brought attention back to cognitive explanations for movement mobilization (see Snow et al. 1986, Benford 1997, Benford and Snow 2000, Johnston and Noakes 2005), most research on framing examines movement-specific frame strategies, minimizing the importance of broader ideational processes to social movements. Recent critiques of frame-analysis point to its failure to examine separately the negotiation and defining of movement-specific claims (frames) and broader social constructionist or ideological processes. Failure to acknowledge the differences between frames and ideology ignores the complexity of cultural and ideational processes and their unique role in mobilization (Jasper 1997, Oliver and Johnston 2005, Munson 2008). Oliver and Johnston (2005), for example, argue that using frames and ideology synonymously has obscured the theoretical development of frame analysis. They claim that there are enormous differences between complex systems of belief and the strategic production of knowledge claims – the marketing of ideas – by social movement actors during later stages of a mobilization, and suggest that ideology

---

3 Early theories of collective behaviour pointed to social breakdown as the cause of protest, viewing participation in social movements as largely irrational, driven by emotion and disconnected to any institutional or organizational structures (Morris 2000, Klandermans and Staggenborg 2002).

4 Theories of framing are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.
and frames should be considered as distinct concepts in order to understand the relationship between them.

In the context of anti-water privatization movements, this conceptual distinction is important, because individuals have deeply held beliefs about nature that are linked to broader social and cultural ideas as well geographic context. Many environmental sociologists have pointed to the importance of ideational work – including the metaphors of meaning individuals use to make sense of nature – for ecological valuing and explaining participation in environmental social movements (Hannigan 1995, McNaghten and Urry 1998, Robinson and Tindall 2008). These social constructions of nature underlie the mobilization process in social movements. Beyond the “marketing of ideas”, individuals are motivated by their social-psychological and cultural understandings of the social world. Because of the complex differences between frames and broader ideology, these processes should considered separately by social movement scholars in order to gain a better understanding of their role in the mobilization process (Oliver and Johnston 2005, Schurman and Munro 2006).

Socially-embedded processes are particularly important in shaping people’s participation in environmental movements because of the critical relationship between social practices and environmental valuing. Human perceptions and understandings of nature are intricately connected to the lived experiences of individuals which structure their notions of risk, trust and agency.

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5 Environmental sociologists have referred to individuals’ situated understandings of the environment as the social construction of nature (Greider and Garkovich 1994 and McNaghten and Urry 1998). This conception emerged from a broader social constructivist approach which views knowledge as being created through context and time-dependent social relations and structures (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

6 Clarifying the difference between frames and ideology would help refine the role of cognitive processes across movement stages. McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996) argue that while meaning and interpretive work is critical at the emergence, development and outcome phases of episodes of contention, the nature of these processes varies at each stage. In the later stages of a movement, they argue, meaning work is more likely to be the result of deliberate, negotiated and strategic decisions, than in earlier stages, when individuals rely more on identity or ideologically-driven meanings, and are less conscious about the significance of their interpretations and less strategic in formulating frames of contention.
(McNaghten and Urry 1998). Individuals use cultural codes as well as symbolic and linguistic tools to inform their relationships to nature as well as their political understandings of environmental problems. How nature is constructed is important to the defining of environmental issues as social problems and to the mobilization of people to call for political action (Hannigan 1995, Gould 1993b, Schreiber et al. 2003). Recent research on the social construction of nature illuminates the relationship between the conflict over resources and individual perceptions of nature, and demonstrates that environmental conflict – and the framing processes that emerge from this conflict – is often expressed culturally through people’s values and identities (Satterfield 2002). Water movements and the politics of framing around anti-water privatization are shaped by individual understandings of water, including the emotional and cultural dimensions of water.

I argue that ideology is important to include in the analysis of contentious politics, especially movements that focus on environmental issues. In order to understand people’s desire to protect the environment and conserve resources as well as what motivates their participation in environmental

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7 While social constructionism responds to the limits of realism (viewing nature as separate and distinct from the social), this approach has been criticized for failing to take into account the realities of nature or recognizing the autonomous actions of non-humans. These critics of the constructionist approach (see Haraway 1991 and Latour 1999; 2000) view nature as an “actant” itself and not simply an inert property, socially constructed by humans. Murphy offers a middle ground approach – constructionist realism – that bridges the nature/culture divide by recognizing that human constructions of nature are shaped by socio-economic power and culture as well as by the properties of the biophysical world (Murphy 2002; 2004). In this sense, he argues that conceptions of nature are influenced by prompts from “nature’s actants”, claiming that, “conceptions have material consequences, which can turn back to influence future conceptions.” (2004:253).

8 For example, Satterfield’s (2002) research analysing the dispute between environmental activists and loggers over old growth forests in Oregon illustrates the importance of people’s interpretive frames in shaping environmental conflict and policy outcomes. Using in-depth interviews with environmentalists and loggers, as well as participant observation in activist and logging communities, she examines how the locally-situated practices of the actors involved in logging disputes shape how they value the forest and points to the critical importance of non-utilitarian values – including people’s emotional and moral standpoints – in shaping political action (Satterfield 2002).

9 Research on movements that centre on water issues also demonstrates how people use cultural codes to inform their relationships to nature. For example, Espeland’s (1998) research on the conflict over dam construction in Arizona reveals how people’s understandings of water do not stem from institutional rationality, but rather are shaped by social, cultural, economic and historical contexts.
social movements, it is important to examine role of socially-embedded understandings of nature, including the role of the local context plays in shaping people’s perceptions of their surrounding environment and their political and social actions. In the case of water, emotional, visceral and sacred understandings of water are fundamental to understanding why people mobilize to protect water resources. The responses of activists in Vancouver and Stockton reveal water as being deeply imbued with symbolic meanings of power, justice and spirituality. For many people interviewed, water holds the very power of life. Without an understanding of people’s deep attachments to the natural environment – including life sustaining resources such as water – it is difficult to understand or explain why people would so passionately mobilize against the privatization of a water treatment plant, a facility that most individuals are either unaware of or do not consider in their day-to-day lives. In Vancouver and Stockton, anti-water privatization activists’ political understandings of water as part of the commons were tied their situated experiences, reflecting the local importance of water. These socially-embedded constructions of water created an emotional potency around water that fuelled mobilization and participation in the anti-water privatization movement in both places.

The Meaning of Water

In Vancouver and Stockton, anti-water privatization activists spoke of their emotional and spiritual connection to water and described its significance to their participation in the anti-water privatization movement in their community. Many activists interviewed revealed that had the movement focused on any other privatization issue than water they would not as readily joined the cause. The narratives of the activists in Vancouver and Stockton demonstrate the emotional and contextual significance of water for mobilizing people to join a social movement. For some, discussing their participation in the water movement provoked an emotional response. For others, it
revealed a connection to place; a testament to the unique geographical and historical characteristics of the community where they live.

*Vancouver*

It was a warm June evening in Vancouver in 2001, when Sandra Gibson, a 48-year-old office manager for the regional office of the Citizens Action League, led a delegation of activists and concerned citizens to a Greater Vancouver Regional District public consultation session to express their concerns about the proposed plan to privatize water services in the region. She was nervous. Because of her previous work as a union organizer, she had some experience speaking in front of large crowds, but this time she worried that she would be overcome by emotion when reaching the microphone because of her strong feelings about water. Sandra Gibson feels both an emotional and spiritual attachment to water. She spoke to me of the beauty of a rain drop, the wonder of a waterfall, and how as a child she loved to splash in puddles and watch her reflection in the mirrored surface of a pond. “Water was magical. Beautiful,” she said when describing her childhood conceptions of water.

When Sandra Gibson first heard about the GVRD’s proposed privatization plans, she was outraged and, “felt like crying”. Although she has been involved for as long as she can remember in activist work, she told me that the anti-water privatization movement was different than any other campaign she had previously been involved in because it was about water. She described the emotional importance of water and its role in facilitating her willingness to join the movement,

There is something about water. [It’s] an issue that is close to everybody’s heart. When you look at the tape [of the public consultation session], you will see that people got up and cried because they were so emotional about water, and so nervous to say anything but they said it anyway... I remember one person standing up at that mike on the third meeting and all she could do was cry; she was so nervous. And all she said was, ‘It’s my water. Leave it alone.’ And she starting crying. It was amazing. That’s what mattered. It wasn’t all these great
speeches. It wasn’t. It was the power of water and what it means to people. That’s what made me go out there and speak.

Sandra Gibson’s response reveals the role of individual’s emotional and visceral attachments to water in motivating respondents to join the movement. Similar to many of the anti-water privatization activists interviewed for this study, Sandra Gibson described her emotional connection and feelings around water as being fundamental to her participation in the movement. Unlike other issues, she felt it was something she could easily relate to because, “it means so much in my daily life. It isn’t out there somewhere, it is right here.” She described water as something exciting and powerful; that made people less inhibited to fight against privatization, and drew them together because of shared understandings and concerns. She explained,

If it had been about something else, something other than water, I wouldn’t have had the same reaction. I absolutely think that if it hadn’t been water, because it is so important, I don’t know what response we would have got... They came, and I think that is because it was water. I really don’t think they would have come if it was energy. I don’t think they would relate the same. It was just so easy for people to relate to and grasp. I mean, come on, you can think about water in a 100 different ways. You play in it, you drink it, your kids like it, you have a bath in it. I mean all those kinds of things people relate to. So I think that because it was water, it was easier to deal with even than trees. And, when I think it got articulated that we can’t survive without water, water is life, it began to hit people how important it is for us all. You know, here I am thinking about water all by myself and there are all these other people thinking about it. That was important for bringing us all together for sure.

Her description of water demonstrates the complex and multi-dimensional understandings that many activists held, while at the same time points to the potential to bring together actors from diverse social worlds under a shared understanding of water’s importance in people’s day-to-day lives.

Water encompasses social, economic and environmental concerns that cut across divisions between individuals and movements, including traditional left-right social divides. It has the ability to transcend the environmental realm and mobilize people who do not consider themselves environmentalists. Sandra Gibson does not call herself an environmentalist because environmental
concerns are not “at the top of [her] list”. Yet protecting water is her main priority because it “is more than an environmental resource” and ties into issues of social justice and globalization, two of her most passionate interests. Water facilitates the coming together of diverse groups of people because of its many dimensions, including its social, environmental, economic, cultural, and spiritual importance.

Many other activists interviewed in Vancouver echoed Sandra Gibson’s sentiments about the significance of water and its ability to mobilize a diverse group of people. Mike O’Neill, the national water campaigner for the Citizen’s Action League, a organization focused on social and environmental justice, told me that he believed the movement came together quickly and with so many diverse supporters because it was focused on water, which he considers one of the “easiest issues to organize around,” especially in relation to privatization. He explained, “I think because it was about water, it made it that much more compelling. You know, as we’ve seen in other public services, even health care, that’s a harder sell – ‘don’t bring the private sector in’. But on water it wasn’t a hard sell.”

Mike O’Neill, a 40-year-old father of two children, lives and works in Ottawa. He travelled to Vancouver in 2001 to help organize the movement against water privatization. Over the past 15 years, he has worked as a campaigner and community organizer on issues of social and environmental justice, and considers the anti-water privatization movement in Vancouver as one of the most successful movements he has been involved with. For him it was inspirational. He explained that, in his opinion, no other movement since has achieved a similar “level of grassroots support and energy”. Mike O’Neill credits, in part, the significance of water, describing it as “the kind of issue that hits you on your dining room table. Do I trust the water that is coming out of my tap? Water is a really nuts and bolts issue. It just resonates and brings people together. People just
aren’t going to chance it when it comes to water.” Like many of his fellow anti-water privatization activists, Mike O’Neill expressed the sense of concern attached to water privatization because of the daily importance water holds in people’s lives. The emotional attachments described by many respondents in Vancouver reveal their socially and culturally constructed relationships to the natural world. Their connection to water extends beyond viewing it as an ecological resource to be managed and regulated. The daily interactions that people have with water are socially and culturally embedded – from bathing to quenching one’s thirst or being caught in the rain without an umbrella – and these lived experiences shape the meanings they attach to what they consider a precious resource.

Mark Spencer, a 55-year-old elected official, has been involved in regional politics for over twenty years, including having served previously on the Greater Vancouver Regional District Water Board. In all his years in local politics, he told me that he has never witnessed a more contentious issue than the struggle over water privatization. He described water as one of the most significant issues for constituents in the Vancouver region, arguing that for people it was more important than the economy. He explained that water is a much a social and cultural issue as a political concern. He believes water resonates with people because of their deeply held beliefs and described how people mobilized quickly in response to proposed plans to privatize water in the region because they value water so dearly. He said,

Why was the response so huge? Because it was about water. I think that the gut issue, the issue that people reacted emotionally and viscerally to was someone else controlling our water. Water is seen as such a right by people. It is seen as the source of life. Clean water is part of their heritage... The reason this [issue] had such resonance with the public really relates as much to... people’s relationship with a natural resource like water as it does the political reality of three P’s [public-private partnerships]. We have never been able to repeat that reaction with any other issue. That is the power of water.
Mark Spencer shares the vision of water as a human right.\textsuperscript{10} He told me that he joined the movement opposing privatization because of his passionate belief in protecting water for current and future generations, describing his wish for his six grandchildren to experience the beauty of the local natural environment as he did when growing up in British Columbia. Mark Spencer believes that threats to water are not only ecological, but also socio-political, and explained his fear that future wars will erupt over water because, “it is the source of everything”. At the same time, he believes that those fears fuel the kind of passion and emotion that is necessary for political change. He said, “So you need emotional issues because they are the kind of issues that get people’s attention and make them open their eyes and get involved in their communities. And then they become open to the other issues about economics and issues about local control and flexibility and those kinds of things. So emotion is needed. It is needed to create change.” The emotional dimension of water drives the passion in local water politics, channelling individual anger and deep-seeded feelings about local water issues into political action.\textsuperscript{11}

Beyond emotional attachments, locally embedded historical, geographic and political contexts also matter for people’s understandings of water. In Vancouver, water is central to people’s daily lived experience. From the frequent rainfall, to the surrounding rainforests, the particularities of

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\item Pellow (2007) argues that environmental justice movements in the United States that emphasize broader human rights concerns are more successful than those that focus only on issues of race and class. He contends that connecting environmental justice concerns with human rights provides the way forward for such movements to be successful in their claims because human rights is a globally recognized and legally enshrined concept and thus resonates widely with political opportunity structures, both locally and internationally.

\item Recently some social movement scholars have called for more attention to the role of emotion in social movements, arguing that emotive and sensorial responses are particularly important in motivating people to join a movement (Jasper and Paulsen 1995, Jasper 1997). Activists capitalize on the anger and indignation expressed by individuals in response to particular events and situations to target opponents and propose solutions (Gamson 1992, Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2001). Research on environmental movements underscores the significance of emotional processes which are rooted to people’s deep attachments to nature (McNaghten and Urry 1998, Satterfield 2000). The role of emotion in driving political beliefs and actions around water is of particular relevance because of the notions of power associated with water as a source of life. For example, Espeland’s (1998) research on the conflict over water resources in the American West demonstrates the emotional potency of water through its link to local wealth and power.
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place drive how many respondents in Vancouver view and understand water. Sean Becker, a 39-year-old community educator and executive director for a local NGO that raises awareness about issues of globalization, human rights and sustainability, began his interview by telling me about the importance of water to citizens in the region, describing how local watersheds shape people’s understandings about water. He said,

Water is a big deal for folks here. Water is important for all Canadians and has a particular significance in BC and it also resonates strongly in the Lower Mainland, because of our watersheds. People can see the watersheds every day. So they know where their water comes from, and that helps them understand the importance of protecting water. People here think about water all the time. I think it is also – and I am getting a little ethereal here – because it is such a rainy place here so we have this infinity for the water we have, and I think it is because so much of it is on us! [laughs]. But I do think that is how it plays out on a local-level somehow. It is different here than other places in BC and Canada, because of the watersheds.

He reveals a strong attachment to place as expressed by many respondents in Vancouver. The closeness to nature that many people described shaped their perceptions of environmental risk and desire to protect water from outside forces. Sean Becker devotes his time to community education about economic globalization, organizing public meetings and designing educational workshops for school children across the Lower Mainland. He told me that water is the issue where people most readily make the connection between privatization and environmental risk, particularly in the Lower Mainland, because of “the beauty and closeness of the watersheds”. For many Vancouver anti-privatization activists, local watershed protection was clearly a motivating factor for joining the movement and for the politicization of water.

Many activists in Vancouver view the visibility and proximity of the watersheds as driving local water politics. “Water in Vancouver is quite political, I think, because you can see the watersheds, they are right there. And if you log in the watersheds, your water is dirty. There is a direct connection,” explained Sherry Carruthers, a 28-year-old youth activist and environmental
consultant for the regional government. She continued, “Here, we are very much like, ‘Our water comes from there and if you do something bad to that then... It is all very direct. It is not like some aquifer somewhere or like in Toronto, where it is very distant, it’s not visible.” Sherry Carruthers moved to Vancouver from Ontario when she was a teenager in order to join the environmental movement, and add her voice to the struggle to protect wilderness in British Columbia. Unlike the cities in Eastern Canada, where she grew up, where suburban sprawl is rampant, and nature is a “long car-ride away”, Sherry Carruthers credits the closeness of the natural environment in Vancouver for transforming her environmental ethic and shaping her desire to fight for the protection of the watersheds. While she described the geographic and ecological importance of watersheds in shaping the politics of water in the region, she also spoke of the historical significance of water and watershed protection. She said,

We have the benefit of decades of history of people fighting to protect water and save the watersheds. People did a lot of work over many, many years stopping the logging in the watersheds, way before this privatization thing ever came up... And so they had kind of politicized people. In the spring when the melt would happen they would just be like, ‘Well, the water is dirty, there are no trees to hold up the dirt.’ And so people were very aware and they knew that we needed to protect water and stop the watersheds from being logged.

Previous movements to protect local watersheds by stopping logging practices had fuelled many activists’ desire to protect the water supply, setting the stage for opposition to water privatization.¹²

The socio-natural relations that are constituted through local settings are critical to the formulation of people’s worldviews, including the understanding of water as both a public trust and a human right and to the contestation of particular systems of belief. In Vancouver, watershed protection informs many people’s commitments to water conservation and to keeping water in the

¹² In 1999, the GVRD Board of directors adopted a no logging policy for the North Shore watersheds that supply water to the region. This new policy was the result of a decade long campaign by environmental groups to stop industrial logging in the watersheds because of threats to water quality and soil erosion (Society Promoting Environmental Conservation 1999).
public realm. People’s attachments to water in Vancouver reflect a profound mistrust of the private sector and of global capitalism, as well as a strong support for public control of resources Mark Spencer described how anti-water privatization activists in Vancouver felt they needed to stand up for public water systems because it is one of the last remaining publicly controlled resources in the province. He said,

It was a line they drew, and it was a line they drew where they’d been pushed into the corner far enough... It was sort of like, ‘Well we’ve got air and we’ve got water and nothing else. It’s all we’ve got left. We’re not giving those up.’ So there was a certain degree of last standitis that was attached to it. They felt that the private sector and corporations have taken almost everything over, that on every corner is a McDonalds and every business is a franchise. They felt that they had been commercialized and advertised into oblivion and that it was too much. So there was a certain degree of people just hitting their last straw and that factor was there.

People involved in the anti-water privatization movement in Vancouver considered water as one of the last remaining resources of the global commons.

Mark Spencer went on to explain that people in Vancouver who opposed privatization did so because they feared that private sector involvement would threaten water quality and supply. He said,

We recognize how blessed we are in Canada to be able to have this public water. People saw it as being a heritage item for Canadians and commodifying it was contrary to their values... I also think that there were the kind of issues about water quality issues, that our water supply would not be taken care of properly and there is probably a belief on the part of the public that... the private sector is more likely to be negligent than a public entity. And in looking after something like water, if somebody is motivated by profit there is more chance that they are going to forget to do their duty, so there was that fear too.

Concerns over the effect of outsourcing on the quality of the water supply were also shaped by previous episodes of water-borne illness that had recently occurred across Canada. In May 2000, thousands of people became ill and seven people died as a result of drinking water contaminated with E. coli bacteria in Walkerton, Ontario (Perkel 2002, Ali 2004). Many people have argued that the privatization of water testing laboratories, combined with the neoliberal policies of the provincial government at the time, led to mismanagement of water quality reporting and a loosening of environmental and health regulations (Perkel 2002, Prudham 2003). Ali (2004) uses a socio-ecological approach to argue that the E.coli outbreak was the result of the interconnections between the social and ecological settings as well as the interplay of multi-scale political economic factors, including the interaction of globalization – international agribusiness and neoliberal policies - with the local political and ecological context.
Mark Spencer recognizes the incompatibility of water protection and the neoliberalization of nature. In Vancouver, social-psychological and context-driven understandings of water shaped a sense of collective belief in the importance of water as a public trust. Activists described water as belonging to them, as part their heritage and part of a commons that should be protected from market forces. The rejection of the commodification of the environment by anti-water privatization activists reflect an understanding of the interdependence of humans and nature.14

Sandra Gibson described the sense of public ownership that she and others in Vancouver felt about water. She said,

I mean my gut response without intellectualizing it, a lot is simply because people identify water as something that belongs to them, that it is not something you pay for, that it is there, that it is God given. Nobody thinks about walking down to a river and having to pay for anything about it… So I think that is why so many people got involved. They were just beginning to realize that there are trade issues and corporate issues. They were beginning to realize that there are politics involved in water. I don’t think people realized that before.

For anti-water privatization activists in Vancouver, public control signified something beyond local government management and regulatory oversight. The idea of common ownership is rooted in an understanding of water a source of life that should not be owned or control by those who wish to make a profit. Sean Becker explained the connection between the idea of a collective resource and the rejection of global capital control of water,

People were really concerned about the loss of local control over a collectively-owned resource. It wasn’t just that people wanted the government to run the system. It was a genuine belief that water belonged to everyone. It was part of the commons. It is a human right. That was the idea at a fundamental level. And because of that, people don’t trust the free market to

14 The responses by activists in Vancouver reflect a shift in values from the belief in the superiority of humans over the environment to an understanding of the interdependence of humans and nature. In the environmental sociology literature this transformation is commonly referred to as the shift from the dominance of the “human exemptionalist paradigm” (HEP), where humans are considered superior to the environment, and the “new environmental paradigm” (NEP), a theory developed by Catton and Dunlap in the 1970s, which stresses the interdependence of humans and the environment and the need to recognize the ecological impact of social processes (see Catton and Dunlap 1978 and Dunlap and Catton 1994). The HEP-NEP shift also explains the rise of the environmental movements because the new environmental consciousness allows movements to construct environmental issues as social problems (Hannigan 1995).
control water at a core level. Even a number of sort of folks who adhere strongly to the free market principle, when you really get down to in on a core level, there is a fundamental distrust of multinationals controlling our water.

Sean Becker’s response reflects an awareness of the neoliberal implications for nature that was expressed by many activists in Vancouver. By centering their understandings on the concept of the commons, activists in Vancouver challenged the individualism of privatization and profit and politicized the issue of water as a symbol of anti-corporate power and as part of the commons.  

The responses of the anti-water privatization activists in Vancouver reveal important complexities of people’s understandings and emotional perceptions around water. Rooted in specific cultural, historical and geographical understandings, beliefs about water were expressed by anti-water privatization activists with emotion, passion and a strong belief in the importance of protecting the commons. These socio-natural relationships not only shape individual worldviews, but also shape local water politics, as emotional attachments to water motivated activists to contest neoliberal ideology and the commodification of water.

Stockton  

In Stockton, respondents were equally as passionate in describing their feelings about water as their counterparts in Vancouver. Most activists described a strong emotional attachment to water. Many described it as the source of life. Others evoked a religious or spiritual connection to water, describing it as a gift from God.

When Sarah Lopez arrived at work one morning, she found her fellow colleagues discussing the news that the mayor had recently visited the Stockton Waste Water Treatment Plant and had

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15 Bakker’s (2007) research on municipal water privatization points to the strong sense of public ownership that people express when discussing water. She contends that movements that frame anti-water privatization arguments around the concept of the commons are more successful than those that rely on other arguments, including water as a human right, because they are able to counter the notion of water as a commodity and offer alternative models for resource management based on the idea of a shared commons.
announced plans to contract out water treatment and delivery services to a private company. Her first thought was, “this is dangerous for the water in the Delta. We can’t let this happen.” Sarah Lopez, a 48-year-old biologist, works as a federal wildlife protection officer, and is responsible for monitoring water issues in the region. She joined the anti-water privatization movement in Stockton because she believes that water is the most important environmental issue both locally and on a global scale. Sarah Lopez traces her environmental and social justice activism back to her “Berkeley hippy days” in the 1960s, when she was involved in the Berkeley riots and in fighting for “a better world”. When she heard about the city council’s plans to privatize the water treatment plant, she was furious and felt immediately compelled to speak out against water privatization. “Standing up for what I know is right is really important to me. And water is just too important an issue to stay silent about,” she explained, adding, “If I am quiet then I agree with what you say. I got involved because I didn’t want to sit back and just silently say, ‘Okay, sure, fine.’ I wanted to at least tell them they were wrong.” Sarah Lopez believes that water is the most important issue for local politics because it is connected to everything, “it is life”.

For as long as she can remember Sarah Lopez has felt an emotional attachment to water and the natural world around her. For many people in Stockton, opposition to water privatization was directly linked to their identification as environmentalists, which shaped their understandings of the fragility of ecosystems and the importance of protecting the environment for future generations. Sarah Lopez told me she strongly identifies as an environmentalist and believes that protecting the environment, “especially air and water” should be the highest priority for governments, “even more than the economy”. Her commitment to the environment led her to pursue a degree in biology and to work as a conservation officer.

Sarah Lopez connects her environmentalism to the ecology of place. Since childhood, she has
always felt passionate about protecting and conserving water, having grown up in El Paso, Texas, where water shortages are frequent and “nothing grows”. Similar to many other Stockton activists, she described becoming aware of the importance of the natural environment, the connectedness of ecosystems and the importance of water for “everything” because of where she was raised. She explains, “I became aware of how important water is and how we need to protect ecosystems, because I was raised in El Paso, Texas. The most horrible place I can think of. The smell of the refineries, the desert, there is no water. Really no water. And the Rio Grande [river] is just nasty, and the prices of food and everything are astronomical.” Because of her strong sense of identity as an environmentalist and her fears about water pollution and shortages, Sarah Lopez was motivated to join the anti-water privatization movement in Stockton. Like many others interviewed, she described her feelings about water as the reason for her involvement in the movement. She explained,

I think it was water that made the movement so important to people. I mean all the people in the environmental movement in California will tell you when you do polling issues related to water quality and health of fish that people pull out of the delta and whether their kids can go swimming in the nearest water, all of that just ranks way up there. That’s what made it so compelling and so important and why I had become involved. Because water is just too important to risk in the name of some company making a profit.

She felt that the profit motive of private corporations would pose serious risks to water quality in the region.

The understandings of water expressed by anti-water privatization activists in Stockton demonstrate the connection between people’s beliefs about nature and the social worlds which they inhabit and reflect their cultural and social understandings of natural world. Meanings of water are embedded in individuals’ social practices (McNaghten and Urry 1998). The significance of water to people’s daily lives was a consistent theme expressed by anti-water privatization activists in Stockton. Sarah Lopez described her feelings about water and its importance in her daily life, and
what it meant to her personally to be involved in the anti-water privatization movement. She said,

I remember it just really hit me one day when I was taking a shower. It was a hot day and I couldn’t wait to get under the water. I felt the water flow over me and it was such a relief and then I started thinking about how such a simple thing, for so many people around the world, well it is impossible for them to have that sensation of clean water running over them. And then I thought, “What if I can’t afford this? What if my kids can’t afford this?” It was something that was very fundamental. You know, like Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Water is number one after breathing. And I just realized how precious it all is and how important it was to protect our water. Not just for me, but for my children and grandchildren someday. So they can take a shower at the end of a long, hot day and know that it is clean and safe... So many of us took water for granted. I did too until that hot shower.

In Stockton, activists shared similar stories revealing their life-long emotional and deep attachments to water, describing the importance of protecting water as critical to their involvement in the anti-water privatization movement.

Kelly Jones, a former naval office, who currently works as an environmental manager for the City of Stockton, became involved in the movement despite the risk of losing her job as a result of publicly opposing a decision by the city council. She said that she joined the movement because of her strong belief in protecting water from pollution. Kelly Jones, a 45-year-old married mother of three children, grew up on the East coast of the United States, where she told me she was deeply affected by the pollution in the water systems. She described going to school, “when all the rivers on the east coast were on fire” and witnessing the dead fish in the Great Lakes on a family trip to Expo ’68 in Montreal. Her childhood experiences with water pollution led to a life-long commitment to water protection. She believes that water should be the “number one issue” politically because “it is the source of life for all things living.” She explained the importance of water for motivating her involvement in the movement as,

Well, I think that there are certain things that are important enough to you that you are willing to take certain risks. Water is something that is really, really important to me. I moved around a lot as a child and when I got to the Central Valley, I realized how important water was. I thought to myself, my gosh, water is so necessary because of the fruit on the trees, and what we
can grow here. So I think because there is such a connection between everything here and water, the issue is always on everyone’s mind. Here people are really worried about protecting water and about water being taken and diverted down south. I was worried about that for sure. And especially if a private company got their hands on the water.

Her description of the importance of water reflects the link between situated experience and understandings of water, demonstrating that perceptions of risk and the construction of water as a social problem are deeply rooted to attachment to place. Anti-water privatization activists in Stockton relied on knowledge from their daily lives and experiences to provide evidence for why water was a critical resource to protect from the encroachment of capital. Interpretations of the environment and what constitutes environmental risk expressed by activists in Stockton challenge the authority and legitimacy of the state to make decisions regarding the management of natural resources.¹⁶

For activists like Kelly Jones, a strong identification with environmentalism and local water systems was critical for their willingness to speak out against proposed privatization plans, even in the face of economically rational cost-benefit analyses presented by elected representatives serving on the city council. “I know more about the importance of water to the local ecosystem than the people who were driving the decision to sell off our water,” she explained. She told me that the proponents of privatization, including the mayor and the business community presented “heaps of so-called evidence” that the city would save money and increase efficiency. She said,

¹⁶ Perceptions of environmental risk are rooted in processes of reflexivity, where individuals use flows of information to examine and reform social, economic and scientific practices, challenging the legitimacy and authority of science and technology as well as the power of the state to make decisions (Beck 1992, 1999). Giddens (1990; 1991) reformulated this idea of risk and reflection with his concept of “reflexive modernity” which reflects society’s increasing sense of self-awareness and challenge to state power in light of the incoming technological and scientific information. New forms of political action – what Beck calls sub-politicalization – are detached from formalized institutions of power (Beck 1996). Other scholars argue that there is a new relationship between society and science, where scientific claims are no longer accepted as given, but rather negotiated through interaction with social actors (Hajer 2003, Dryzek 2006). Yearley (1997) argues that although environmental groups are increasingly using scientific evidence in their campaigns, the relationship between science and environmentalists remains ambivalent. He argues that environmental organizations often rely on science when it supports their goals, yet are quick to reject scientific arguments in the face of controversial or uncertain evidence, instead falling back on moral arguments in such cases.
Oh they told us over and over again that we were going save money on capital improvements and increase efficiency and that this would be a boon for the City of Stockton. That was the big issue. And they had all these reports and presentations by lawyers and all the rest. And they continued to argue that because the private sector can do things less expensively, we were going to be able to operate more efficiently and generate more income and revenue for the city. I knew they were wrong. We knew that water was too precious to risk. I mean this is something that every citizen needs to use every day of their lives! How can you trust what they were saying?

Despite the official institutional information, Kelly Jones and other activists in Stockton articulated meanings of water that emerged from an experiential understanding, based on socially-embedded and sensory notions of the physical world, rather than from rational, scientific knowledge.\textsuperscript{17} Anti-water privatization activists articulated their concerns about local jobs and water quality and their perceptions of environmental risk. These perceptions were often based on emotional and observational responses rather than on concrete scientific evidence. For example, Kelly Jones worked closely with the employees of the waste water treatment plant in Stockton, but when she heard about the plans to privatize the plant, her concerns extended beyond the fate of the workers. She was also worried about the risks to water quality, and said that she feared that a private company would not invest in the proper maintenance of the plant’s infrastructure because it would, “cut into their profits”. These claims were directly related to her observations travelling through the developing world, where she witnessed people unable to afford clean drinking water, and where the link between water quality and illness was made clear. Kelly Jones worried that similar issues may occur in her own community if a private company gained control of the water system, and is concerned that people in the United States do not understand the fragility of water supplies. She

\textsuperscript{17} Theories on the social construction of nature contend that environmental meanings are mediated through the interplay of our senses with geographical location (Urry 2000, Greider and Garkovich 1994, McNaghten and Urry 1998). For example, in their study of how people in Lancashire County, UK perceive and understand environmental and sustainability issues in their daily lives, McNaghten et al. (1995) found that individuals rely on direct sensory experience and observation, rather than scientific evidence or media reports, to make sense of environmental risks and changes in their communities.
explained,

People here in the United States just do not understand what it takes to make water safe. How important that infrastructure is. In other parts of the world, 10,000 people die a day from dysentery from bad water. Here, people can just turn on the tap. They think, “Oh, no it would never happen here.” People in the United States don’t understand that half of the world spends half of their lives just hauling bad water into their house. Now, they probably don’t care because the majority of those people are women, but nonetheless people don’t understand that just the privilege of being able to turn on a tap – for bad or good water – requires so many people behind the scenes looking into the quality of that water.

In Kelly Jones’ case, her previous travel experiences, including witnessing people’s daily struggles to obtain potable drinking water, shaped her concerns that privatization would limit access to clean drinking water for some people in Stockton. Underpinning the fear of environmental risk expressed by Stockton activists was a deep concern about the impact of private capital investment on the local community. Kelly Jones continued by describing her fear about rising costs of water under a privately run system. She said,

I think people are so oblivious to this sort of unseen utility that they don’t even see the parallels between $4.50 gas prices and the price of water. They just don’t get it. They are not making the connection here in the United States, and I’m afraid that they are going to allow people who get the connection, which are the multinational companies, and when they turn around and figure out that they are paying more for a gallon of water than they are for a gallon of gas, than they are for a gallon of milk, it is going to be too late.

The fears over increasing costs and lack of infrastructure investment to protect the local water supply influenced people’s opposition to water privatization in Stockton.

The diversity of responses to water privatization articulated by respondents in Stockton, including the fears, beliefs, emotions and passions, reveals the emotive and creative ways in which activists interpret political opportunities and construct grievances. Along with the sensory and emotional representations of water, many respondents described water as the source of life, evoking a religious or metaphysical association to water. Judith Smith, a 50-year-old, author and filmmaker,
described the importance of spiritual connections to water as motivating people to participate in the anti-water privatization movement. She said,

One thing about water is that it is visceral. It was really a visceral opposition and it is hard exactly to really pin that down, but a lot of people in the movement saw it as a religious issue. That privatizing water was in direct opposition to God’s will. I was in the sewage treatment plant at one point and one of the workers, who goes to an evangelical church, said to us that his minister was opposed to the privatization because this is the water of baptism. So that is sort of a profound structure. Even people who are fairly sophisticated in these struggles, with many there was a spiritual element that was motivating.

Sacred understandings of water emphasize the realities of nature that for many respondents lie outside of the rational or scientific realm. Many activists referred to the religious importance of water as being critical to their opposition to water privatization. For example, Edward Lugert, a 70-year-old retired department store employee, told me that he believes water is a gift from God. He believes that development is a threat to local ecosystems, and has been involved for many years in trying to protect farmland and wetlands from encroachment by developers. Protecting water – a gift from God – is fundamental to his opposition to development and his involvement in the movement to prevent water privatization. When asked why he joined the anti-water privatization movement in Stockton, he explained,

How can you own something that is a gift from God? I’ve been married for 45 years and have eight kids and have eighteen grandchildren and the good Lord has been good to me... I want to protect my home as God protects us. And protecting water is a huge part of that. I see water as a gift from the good Lord and it is my responsibility to protect that gift. My grandchildren come out and play on my acreage, and run and ride their little electric car in the backyard, and play on the swing on the trees and I know it sounds corny and maybe it even is, but I really like it. And so I need to make sure they are safe. That our water is safe.

Edward Lugert’s understanding of water as a spiritual gift of life challenges the marketization of nature. For many activists in Stockton, the physical world, including air, water and land, was considered a sacred trust, to be shared among citizens and protected from the power and greed of corporations.
The emotional and spiritual understandings of water expressed by respondents in Stockton were often rooted in the importance of locality. Many anti-water privatization activists in Stockton expressed a strong attachment to “place”, and this connection informed their understandings of water and fuelled their opposition to privatization. People frequently spoke of the importance of water to protecting what some described as “the bread-basket of the country”, and many expressed a reverence for water as providing the source of life to the region. The City of Stockton lies on the San Joachim delta, one of the most ecologically sensitive water systems in California (Earthjustice 2008). Severe water shortages and years of drought in the region led many people to view water as sacred, and in dire need of protection. Many activists argued that a profit-driven water treatment plant would threaten the water quality of the delta. Charles Barlow, a 52-year-old lawyer and environmental activist, explained the importance of the local geographical context in shaping people’s understandings of water. He said,

Water-related issues are always a really strong interest to citizens in Stockton, and most people understand that they are right at the edge of the delta... They are aware about the peripheral canal; they are kind of aware of kind of the bigger state-wide water issues. So it was about water, but also about sewage and the impact on the delta. I mean people made the connection between a private company running the city’s huge wastewater treatment ponds, and the fact that the ponds are right out there at the edge of the delta and if anything goes wrong, the spill goes directly into the San Joaquin River. I mean people get that part of it. And then having a multinational corporation like OMI Thames coming in trying to cut corners and cut back maintenance and the whole thing. People got all that.

Similar to their Vancouver counterparts, activists in Stockton evoked a sense of proximity to the water system to describe their concerns about water privatization and the risks to water quality. Charles Barlow felt that the anti-privatization movement in Stockton was stronger than other movements that have occurred in the area because it related to water. He credits the local importance of the delta and water-related issues to mobilizing people to join the movement. He described how he has spent 15 years fighting to protect the delta from pollution and threats of diversion, and how his
desire to safeguard the water system motivated him to oppose privatization and join the coalition as a member of the steering committee. Similar to Charles Barlow, many respondents’ primary concerns about water privatization were expressed in local terms. Perceptions of the increasing proximity of environmental threats were frequently discussed by respondents in Stockton.

Many framed the problem in terms of the impact privatization would have on their day-to-day lives and on the local environment. For example, Brian Spencer, an insurance broker who devoted countless hours over the course of several years fighting, first to prevent water privatization, and subsequently to overturn the private contract, explained, “I think up here water is very sensitive in nature and people are very cautious of water. We live in a delta. We rely on water to grow crops. We are the breadbasket of the country, the world maybe.” Brian Spencer recently moved to Stockton from Southern California, with his wife and five children. He owns a boat and frequently enjoys outings along the river with friends and family and considers the delta to be, “one of the most beautiful places [he has] seen.” Before moving to Stockton, he told me that he had not previously been involved in social protest and had always believed that political action should be confined to the polling booth. Yet when he heard about plans to privatize the water treatment plant, he felt he could not remain on the sidelines because he knew “in his heart” it was the wrong course of action for the City of Stockton. Brian Spencer described the strong protective nature of people in Stockton towards the water in the delta and how those concerns shaped people’s opposition to privatization. “We are very protective of water here,” he said. “We know we only have so much and so we need to protect it from profit-driven motives… Once you hand it over to a corporation, there is no turning back. The delta as we know it could be lost forever, and the implications of that are frightening.” Fear of losing control of a vital and precious resource drove Brian Spencer and others in Stockton to oppose the privatization of the water treatment plant.
The narratives of place described by activists in Stockton reflect a valued and cherished way of life that is increasingly perceived as being under threat. Historical attachments shape people’s relationships to the landscape, and ecological change can create a sense of loss of previous ways of life (McNaghten and Urry 1998). Many activists interviewed referred to memories of times when the delta was less polluted, and the air free of smog. The idealizations reflect the role of the imagined past in shaping their present-day connection to the surrounding physical environment, including water. James Vivian, a 60-year-old carpenter, has lived in Stockton for over 30 years. He has devoted his life to social justice causes, referring to himself as a “committed spiritualist populist activist”. He believes strongly in the connection between environmental, social and spiritual well-being. He told me that he remembers a time when “the river was clean and you could breathe the air. And you could see all the way down the valley to the mountains,” and lamented that that time “is long past”. James Vivian’s connection to the local landscape undergirds his belief in the importance of local community. He described his attachment to place, when he said,

I am involved here in this community and I’m never leaving this community. I intend to die here. This is my absolute home. We’ve put down our roots here. We love the sense of community, the beauty of the delta, the joy of working to build a better place. We are deeply involved in community work. We are utterly involved in populous, democratic movements here and we are not moving. This is our place. Our children are all within a few hours of here. We have hundreds and hundreds of friends here.

His attachment to and love for his community motivated his desire to become involved in preventing water privatization and protecting the local environment.

James Vivian’s response reflects the importance of rooted experience that characterizes the attachment to local landscape expressed by many activists in Stockton. These historical and contextual meanings of place informed the feelings of concern and anger that many respondents felt towards political elites and the decision to privatize the water treatment plant and shaped their belief
in the importance of protecting water as a public trust. Their desire to protect local water resources created a perception of uncertainty and risk connected to water privatization, and contributed to a strong desire to protect publicly-controlled water services.¹⁸

Ken Bernardo, a 52-year-old union representative and former wastewater treatment manager for the City of Stockton, shares the belief that water should remain a publicly-run service with many of his fellow anti-water privatization activists. His desire for water to remain a public trust extends beyond his commitment to unionized jobs and employment security for plant employees. He believes that beyond labour concerns, water is a human right that should remain a public trust. He explained,

The champions of this movement against the privatization of the water and wastewater was driven by people that truly believe, as I believe personally, that water and wastewater are issues that belong in the public trust and should never be handed over to multinational corporations, should never be for profit. For me, it has nothing to do with jobs and job protection. And I am a big believer in the competitive nature of the private sector. But I think it is an innate human right once you develop a society, once you build a country, that the wastewater that is treated into fresh water for drinking remains in governmental control, and that it is a citizen’s right to have potable water and to have the wastewater treated. And I don’t think you play games with that for profit. It is a public trust and needs to stay that way.

Despite a general support for the private sector, Ken Bernardo believes that the unique nature of water as a public trust should exempt it from commodification.

Many of the respondents interviewed echoed Ken Bernardo’s commitment to keeping water as a public trust. The concerns expressed by activists in Stockton demonstrate that people recognize the ecological risks that stem from the commodification of resources, especially water, which they consider necessary for life. Edward Lugert, described his concerns that water privatization would threaten the nature of water as a public trust and the livelihoods that are dependent upon clean, fresh

¹⁸ Despite a lower support for public investment in services by Americans as compared to their European counterparts (Alesina and Glaeser 2004), recent U.S. wide polling demonstrates that a vast majority (84 percent) of Americans support public-investment in water treatment systems and government investment in infrastructure in general (Luntz 2009). Further, 83 percent of Americans support legislation to create a national clean water trust fund to invest in water infrastructure maintenance and upgrades (Kranz 2004).
water. He said,

Well I think everybody saw what it was. It was a water grab. It was a grab to control natural resources... Water is a great example of a public trust. We all have a right to that water. We all need water, we can’t live without water, our homes are useless without water, our farmland is worthless without water, and you’ve got these big groups wanting to control that. I really don’t believe that anyone should make a profit off of clean drinking water and appropriate cleaning of wastewater.

Edward Lugert feels that “water belongs to the community” and worries that without strong community activism and involvement by local citizens in political decision making, they will lose control of water resources.

Responses to the threat of water privatization by activists in Vancouver and Stockton reflect people’s contextually-mediated understandings of resources. Activists in both cases articulated emotional, spiritual, often complex and contextualized attachments to water. The socially and culturally constructed meanings of water helped create a sense in both places that the environment was at risk and ultimately shaped people’s desire to protect local resources through participation in the anti-water privatization coalition in their communities. Proximity to water systems, community embeddedness and cultural and historical values and practices shaped the range of perceptions around water in Vancouver and Stockton, including its sacred and precious nature. These situated experiences and cultural repertoires contributed to a political belief in the importance of water as part of the commons. A strong conviction in the nature of water as a public trust by anti-water privatization activists challenged traditional power structures and the hegemonic discourse around the commodification of water, fuelling the political mobilization to oppose water privatization.

Conclusion

This chapter presented some of the diverse ways in which meanings of water are constructed through complex interactions between social relations, practices and the physical environment.
Analysis of the descriptions of motivations for getting involved in anti-water privatization movements in Vancouver and Stockton demonstrate that understandings of water are intertwined with historical, spatial and political contexts. In both places, people were reverential towards water, describing it as the source of life and expressing emotion, passion and a sense of spirituality when discussing their feelings about water. In each case, activists’ contextual understandings of water, including emotional and spiritual associations, shaped the perception of water as part of the commons, a public resource that should never be commodified.

In Vancouver and Stockton, respondents’ socially constructed interpretations of water influenced discursive practices and political mobilization. In Vancouver, the proximity of the watershed and past struggles to protect it, and fears about loss of sovereignty over water systems fuelled the desire to keep water in the public realm. In Stockton, threats of water shortages, the importance of water to the local agro-economy and the risks of polluting the Delta drove the opposition to private ownership of water. The findings of this analysis reveal the importance of looking beyond the immediate structural context of mobilization to examine how political beliefs and actions are tied to the way individuals interpret and make sense of the world around them. Social actors draw upon broader cultural toolkits to construct political discourse and guide social action (Swidler 1986). Examining these ideological processes is particularly critical when dealing with movements that focus on environmental resources because understandings of nature are intertwined with historical, geographical and sensory meanings of place (McNaghten and Urry 1998, Espeland 1998, Satterfield 2002).

Anti-water privatization activists in both Vancouver and Stockton expressed emotional and spiritual connections with water that were tied to historical and spatial context, and consistently made reference to the need to protect and conserve what they consider to be a precious and
threatened publicly owned resource. Although mediated understandings of water were different across the two contexts – shaped by the specific situated experiences and milieu of each place – activists in both Vancouver and Stockton expressed similar beliefs in the life-sustaining and sacred nature of water resources, demonstrating the importance of water to people from diverse regions.

The findings of my research demonstrate that understandings of nature and environmental risk are complex and varying and permeate the day-to-day lived experiences of individuals. The concern over the privatization of water, including the lack of faith in the accountability and trustworthiness of private corporations articulated by the respondents in Vancouver and Stockton reveals the contested nature of water – between the concept of the commons and commodification – and challenges the classic Weberian notion that individuals act rationally in response to bureaucratic and institutional informational processes.19 By drawing on place-sensitive and emotional understandings of water, activists construct their own sense of environmental risk and political discourse around resources, challenging the power of global capitalism and the dominance of institutional rationality.

The emotional and spiritual attachments to water described by respondents in Vancouver and Stockton reveal an important dimension in the study of environmental and social justice movements. Beyond structural mechanisms such as political opportunities, networks, and resources,

19 Weber (2003 [1905]) argued that social behaviour in modern society – characterized by a growth in bureaucratic institutions and the dominance of the capitalist system – is increasingly shaped by instrumental rationality rather than the kinship values reflective of pre-industrial society. And Habermas (1984) argues that instrumental rationality encroaches on people’s sense of self and community, what he refers to as the ‘colonization’ of the ‘lifeworld’ by a technical, administrative and bureaucratic system. Research on decision-making and understandings of natural resources demonstrates that individuals are motivated by more than rational-based thinking, and instead perceptions and understandings about nature are guided by non-instrumental social-psychological and contextual factors, including emotional attachments and historical meanings of place (McNaghten and Urry 1998, Espeland 1998, Satterfield 2002). Espeland’s (1998) research on the conflict over dam construction in Arizona, in particular, challenges the notion of rational choice and demonstrates that people’s “rationalities” are far from instrumental, but rather are shaped by identity, power and emotion.
environmental social movements are shaped by emotional and visceral attachments to place and the material conditions of ecology. Social movement scholars need to expand their methodological toolkits in order to take into account the complex ways in which cultural processes shape mobilization—beyond frame analysis—to provide a more thorough understanding of how locally-situated cultural, historical and social-psychological processes influence contentious politics. The next chapter demonstrates that the framing strategies of the anti-water privatization movements in Vancouver and Stockton took different forms and led to divergent outcomes, despite the presence of similar ideological beliefs about the importance of water as a life-sustaining public resource.

Despite ideational similarities between the two movements, including comparable understandings of the importance of the public nature of water, the frames constructed by activists in Stockton were unable to create openings for the movement to prevent water privatization, suggesting the need to examine ideological factors separately from frames in order to understand their diverse role in shaping collective action. While ideology might be linked to political motivation and explain participation in collective action, the following chapters reveal that other mechanisms, including strategic frame construction, external political conditions and social networks are critical for explaining how movements develop beyond the initial mobilization stage.

Adding a social-constructionist approach to the study of environmental movements—beyond frame analysis—is important to broadening our understanding of how sociology contributes to current and future debates about the ecological well-being of the planet and environmental politics. Understanding how people organize their relationships to nature through cultural symbols can help explain conflict over resources, including the non-instrumental perceptions of environmental risk and sub-political challenges to dominant
power structures, and shed light on the need for environmental policies and resource management programs to reflect locally-situated meanings and social practices.
Chapter 5: Constructing the Problem: Framing Strategies in Anti-Water Privatization Movements

“There were a lot of people familiar with the whole international scene on water. They knew what was happening in Bolivia, in South Africa, and they shared those stories. We met some of the people whose lives had been affected by the corporate schemes of multinational water companies. That was a huge galvanizing point. I remember at one of the meetings, I stood up and said, ‘You know, if you wanted to kill a lot of people really quickly, I can’t think of a better way than pricing water.’ Just look around the world and see what has happened in other communities. There are just so many people who can’t afford it. So many things went wrong in those places. It’s terrible. So we shouldn’t include water in the equation. Never water.”

-- Sandra Gibson, social justice activist, Vancouver

“What really pushed us over the edge was being shut out by the council. We were opposed to water privatization because of their arrogance. What I saw when I attended city council meetings was the arrogance of the mayor and his cronies saying, ‘We know what we are doing. You are just too stupid to understand. We are doing this, this is right, and we are smarter than you. You elected us, so why don’t you just shut up.’ They always figure they can just do whatever they want to do. The City of Stockton didn’t follow the rules. They just simply said, ‘This is ours and we will do whatever we jolly well feel like.’ I would say it is an old cow-town attitude of the leadership within the city and the county. That is what we focused on. The arrogance and lack of democratic process. That is what it was all about.”

-- Sarah Lopez, biologist and activist, Stockton

In order to succeed in mobilizing the public and achieving successful outcomes, anti-water privatization movements must construct a coherent narrative about the problem of local water privatization, and present a unified, well-articulated argument to political elites. The previous chapter focused on the socially-constructed meanings of water articulated by respondents in Vancouver and Stockton and how these context-dependent understandings of water shaped the pre-movement mobilization of anti-water privatization activists. Yet despite demonstrating similar ideological values, including the importance of water as a public resource, activists in each place utilized different frames to construct the problem and present their arguments. In this chapter, I move beyond the broader examination of systems of belief to
investigate the role of strategically constructed movement frames. The responses by activists in Vancouver and Stockton demonstrate the different ways social movement actors articulated local understandings of water privatization and begin to reveal the divergent movement-building conditions between the two movements that shaped their diverse trajectories and outcomes.

I contend that a key framing strategy for the success of the anti-water privatization movement in Vancouver was the linking of global issues with local concerns – through the presence of *global connectors* – because that linkage facilitated the creation of local solidarity in the face of global corporate and trade risks. In Vancouver, anti-water privatization activists drew upon symbolic anti-globalization and anti-corporate politics to create a sense of local unity and leverage local political institutions in order to support their demand for a publicly-controlled water system. In Stockton, activists did not utilize global frames, and focused instead on local political accountability, and, as a result, the movement was unable to shift the political discourse about the issue beyond local tensions between political elites and anti-water privatization activists. I conclude by discussing the need for social movement scholars to pay more attention to the global nature of local movements, particularly for movements resisting neoliberal globalization, and argue that global frames are a key source of symbolic leverage for creating solidarity between social movement actors and political authorities.

**Social movements and Framing**

Research on contentious politics has demonstrated that the presence of political opportunities and networks alone is not enough to explain either the emergence or outcomes of social movements. Mobilizing constituents and creating opportunities for grievances to be heard is also dependent on the way in which social movement actors and organizations construct and present the issue of concern. Political opportunities are interpreted and articulated in different
ways across movements and contexts, affecting the trajectories and outcomes of episodes of contention, including the chances of success for creating new opportunities for claims to be heard and acted upon (Diani 1996, Johnston and Noakes 2005). Individuals and organizations use cultural codes, and core norms, beliefs and values to interpret and respond to external resources and opportunities and mobilize people into action (Snow et al. 1986, Benford 1997, Benford and Snow 2000, Johnson and Noakes 2005).

Of critical importance here is the cultural dimension of contentious politics, whereby social movement activists utilize strategically constructed arguments or frames – the result of negotiated, shared understandings between individuals and organizations – to make their claims (Benford and Snow 2000, Johnston and Noakes 2005). Framing is the process by which social actors give meaning to experiences and situations, and draw on symbolic representations to make sense of the world and organize their behaviour (Goffman 1974). Frame analysis focuses on the processes of interpretation – how opportunities are perceived, acted upon, and negotiated by social movement actors – that mediate between structural mechanisms and mobilization (Snow et al. 1986, McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996).

**Globalization and Frames**

While existing research on framing points to the importance of using collective action frames to link the values and goals of previously separate, but ideologically similar groups and thus expand the pool of movement recruits, there is little research on how local movements are shaped by the global dimension of social and environmental problems. In an increasingly globalized world, where transnational institutions have growing influence over the distribution of resources and environmental risk, many scholars argue that social problems, in particular those that are ecological in nature, are disembedded from local context and that environmental and
social problems are being reframed in globalized terms (Giddens 1991, Beck 1992; 1999, Gould et al. 2008). The growing influence of transnational forces on local decision-making has shifted the way local movements organize, including how they frame social and environmental problems (Conway 2004).

While there is considerable research on transnational social movements that points to the importance of global frames for uniting movements across borders and for targeting international institutions, there is little research that examines how globalization is incorporated into local movement frames in order to mobilize constituents and influence decision making. The social and environmental consequences of neoliberal globalization are the subject of intense debate at the local level, reflected in the discursive struggles between those who ideologically support the expansion of the global economy and the opposition movements that oppose the increased intrusion of global capital into local social, environmental and cultural domains (Shiva 2002, Evans 2008). The outcomes of these frame battles are significant for whether or not neoliberal globalization will continue to encroach on local communities.

Decisions about local water resources lie at the intersection of the local and the global. On the one hand, the issue is intensely local in that it is dependent on regional-level decision-making and local ecological systems. At the same time, local water policies are determined by global processes such as multinational corporate policies and international trade and investment treaties. How are global processes – the power of transnational capital and international trade agreements – articulated and resisted at the local level by anti-water privatization activists? Recent theories of protest and globalization highlight the importance of using social movement data to examine the relationship between global processes and local forms of collective action,
including how these processes influence the way local movements construct frames of contention (Tarrow 2005b, Diani 2005).

*Vancouver and Stockton: Comparing Social Movement Frames*

In the remainder of the chapter, I contrast the frames of the anti-water privatization movements in Stockton and Vancouver, and discuss how these differences are shaped by broader organizational and political context. How are the emotive and visceral understandings of water constituted into well-defined and clearly articulated frames that act to present the problem and offer viable solutions? Despite sharing similar concerns about water privatization and expressing a shared sense of water as a sacred trust that should remain public, the anti-water privatization movements in Vancouver and Stockton relied on divergent framing strategies. I argue that the movement in Vancouver constructed a clearly articulated argument that resonated with political elites and facilitated opportunities for movement claims to be considered. In Stockton, on the other hand, the framing strategy utilized by movement actors was neither clearly articulated nor consensual, and thus failed to create the necessary opportunities for their claims to be heard. I argue that the reason for this divergence between the two movements lies in the adoption of global framing strategies by Vancouver activists that created a sense of local solidarity in the face of transnational institutional threats. Local movements that are implicated in global flows of capital and institutional power are more likely to succeed when they incorporate global narratives into their framing repertoires.

*Vancouver: Connecting the Global to the Local*

In Vancouver, concerns about the commodification of water and a belief in the importance of protecting the commons and safeguarding local democratic processes led activists
to frame their concerns about proposed water privatization on the risks to local control of water systems from multinational corporate policies and international trade agreements. Vancouver respondents frequently described the connection between the local push for outsourcing water services and the consequences of water privatization in communities in other parts of the world.

How are global issues incorporated into local-level movement meaning work? In Vancouver, the presence of key movement leaders with connections to and personal experience with transnational movements and institutions shaped the on-the-ground framing strategies of the campaign. In Vancouver, many of the activists involved in the anti-water privatization struggle had previously been involved with other movements whose focus was on global issues, including the 1999 anti-WTO protest in Seattle and the global campaign to stop the MAI. These individuals acted as *global connectors*, adapting pre-existing institutional frames to new sites of collective action.

Sean Becker was one of the global connectors in the Vancouver movement. As executive director of a local non-profit community organization that focuses on youth education around issues of global social and environmental justice, he was involved in the international anti-globalization movement, and travelled to Seattle in 1999 to participate in the anti-WTO protests. He has regularly attended international conferences and meetings on issues of globalization, trade and social justice. Through his anti-globalization activism, Sean Becker is connected to global networks of organizations and individuals. His work educating and organizing youth around issues of globalization facilitated the diffusion of frames from the anti-globalization movement to the local anti-water privatization movement. Sean Becker was motivated and

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1 Leaders are critical to social movements. They play a vital role in both mobilization and outcomes by recognizing opportunities and framing problems and solutions in ways that will resonate with both constituents and authorities (Bob 2002, Morris and Staggenborg 2004, Nepstad and Bob 2006)
excited to join the movement because he saw clear connections between his previous anti-
globalization work and the problems of water privatization at the local level. He explained,

For me, it was a real, local concrete example about the things that we were talking about at an international level. We pointed out that what was happening here was a manifestation of what we had identified as the problem on a global scale. And we said, “See, this is what it looks like.” And it was that immediacy that made it exciting for people to be involved because sometimes it can be a hard connection to make locally when we are talking about globalization and international issues.

Similar to Sean Becker, many leaders in the movement in Vancouver were embedded in global movements, both structurally through organizational and network associations and socially-psychologically through pre-existing anti-globalization frames. At the same time many of these leaders had close ties with local movement organizations and activists. Their dual global-local identities made them key leaders in the anti-water privatization movement because of their ability to draw on pre-existing frames to make sense of what was happening on the ground and use those frames to engage a broad-range of supporters.

Global connecters literally translated global issues down to the local level, adapting existing anti-globalization frames into concrete and easily understood arguments that resonated across social movement sectors. Fiona Rogers, whose previous activist and educational experiences focused on the effects of globalization on communities in other parts of the world, described the importance of being involved in a movement in her own community, and being able to apply her understandings of the global nature of the problem to a local manifestation. She said,

I have done a lot of different activism that has been more on global issues, in Latin America and other places, and I felt that the water privatization issue was the first time I really, really dedicated myself to a super local issue. And so it was a good experience for me also around really understanding the importance of the municipal level and the degree to which we can connect some of the global and national stuff to the municipal level. Because a lot of these things we talk about in terms of global trade agreements actually boil down to the municipal level.
For activists like Fiona Rogers, engagement in the anti-water privatization movement stemmed directly from their involvement in global movements for social and environmental justice and their ability to recognize the local manifestations of global problems.

While the characteristics of leaders matter to social movement framing strategies and outcomes, other factors beyond leadership are also important. In Vancouver, while the involvement of global connectors was critical for how the movement constructed its arguments, framing processes were also shaped by other structural factors, including the organizational characteristics of the groups involved. Two of the key organizations involved in the anti-water privatization battle – the British Columbia Public Sector Employees Union (BCPSEU) and the Citizens Action League (CAL) – had organizational structures that linked them to national and international networks of activists working on issues of water privatization. The connections with national and international organizations and resources shaped the contextual focus of the movement in Vancouver, bringing a global perspective to the local issue. “My international outreach work on water was really important in shaping the role I played in the local movement in Vancouver,” explained Mike O’Brian, water campaigner for the Citizens Action League, a national organization with local chapters in the Vancouver region. CAL is part of an international network of water activists who regularly share resources and exchange information. These global water activists, including Mike O’Brian, met regularly at international events, including the World Water Forum, an international conference on global water issues held every

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2 Morris and Staggenborg (2004) argue that the role of leadership has been undertheorized in social movement research, claiming that in many cases agency is downplayed in favour of overly structural explanations, while in other cases agency is emphasized at the expense of structure. The findings of my research demonstrate that the role of leadership in framing work derives from both the experiences and personality of leaders as well as mobilizing structures. In Vancouver, the use of global frames was facilitated by the leadership role of activists as well as the network and organizational structures of the individuals and organizations involved in the anti-privatization movement.
three years. He told me that attending these meetings allowed him to gain a solid understanding of the connections between neoliberal globalization and the commodification of water. The organizational structure of CAL, with its integration into a global network as well as its strong presence at the community level, facilitated the diffusion of global frames to the local movement in Vancouver. Mike O’Brian explicitly described his role as a global connector, and the importance of global-local linkages,

My position in the [Citizens Action League] allowed me to play a role linking my international work with what was going on locally in Vancouver. Working on global water issues and the relationships I made with people from around the world doing similar work allowed me to... make that that connection to local water privatization and all the things wrong with water privatization. Being connected to a global movement really made me and others who were involved realize that there was a new pitch for water. That the same thing was happening all over the world in different communities, with the same players – the same companies making that pitch. And we instantly realized that we had to make international connections and we have to get money and resources and analysis to local groups. So it became kind of a dichotomous movement where you need to make international connections, but those connections had to be fundamentally felt locally.

The organization structure of the Citizens Action League was critical to shaping framing dynamics in Vancouver by providing key informational resources that connected the local movement to global processes and events.

Using the overarching frame of global water rights, activists in Vancouver linked their struggle at the local level to other global communities experiencing water privatization. Framing water in global terms simultaneously connected people from the local community to people from around the world experiencing similar struggles and drew attention to the risks associated with privatization by providing narrative accounts of the negative consequences of water privatization. At community meetings and at the public meetings organized by the GVRD Water Board, members of the Citizens Action League distributed and asked people to sign the “Cochabamba Declaration”, a document created at an international symposium on water
privatization that took place in Cochabamba, Bolivia – the site of one of the most publicized cases of mass uprising in the face of water privatization – that had occurred the previous year. The declaration referred to water as a sacred resource and a human right and calls for an international treaty to protect water from commodification.

Many respondents in Vancouver spoke about the sense of solidarity they felt with other communities around the world who were engaged in similar struggles. They articulated frames about global struggles and demonstrated a strong awareness of global initiatives for keeping municipal water systems publicly controlled. These local-global connections were facilitated by the presence of a key activist from Bolivia, who led the anti-water privatization movement in Cochabamba the previous year. The Citizens Action League flew in Oscar Olivera, one of the main leaders in the struggle against resource commodification in Bolivia, to speak to activists in Vancouver about the experiences of people in Cochabamba and the dangers of water privatization.

“Hearing Oscar speak was very moving”, said Eric Robinson, labour organizer and water researcher. While he has never travelled to Bolivia or any other community outside of Canada where water privatization had occurred, the opportunity to hear the stories from Cochabamba first hand, and the connection he felt to a global community, motivated him to become involved in the local anti-water privatization movement. Eric Robinson told me that global water privatization narratives were, in his opinion, critical to mobilizing people in Vancouver to join

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3 In 1999, in order to deal with inequalities in access to water services and a lack of infrastructure, the federal government in Bolivia signed a 40-year contract with Aguas del Tunari, a subsidiary of the U.S. company Bechtel, to deliver water services in the city of Cochabamba, the third largest city in Bolivia. After privatization, water rates dramatically increased to levels which many local citizens could not afford, resulting in their water supply being severed (Barlow and Clark 2002). In response, a network of activists and organizations staged a series of public protests that culminated in a general strike, shutting down the local economy for three days. As a result of massive public pressure, the Bolivian government cancelled the contract with Aguas del Tunari, returning responsibility for the management and delivery of water services in Cochabamba to the public sector (Olivera and Lewis 2004).
the movement because they fostered a sense of solidarity with international communities. He explained,

I remember during the Seymour campaign there was a group of people who... brought in a speaker from Cochabamba. He was a great speaker. [He] talked about how his community was dealing with this international corporation who had taken over their water. He said that people who had their own wells had to put meters on them so that they could pay for the water. From their own wells! Wow, it really had a huge impact on people here. You could just feel people getting worked up and ready to fight. It was really powerful. Because these things are all connected... The same companies that are involved in water in Cochabamba and in France or wherever, they are the same companies that were involved here. So we really felt connected.

The connection to struggles in other communities around the world was a potent mobilizing force for activists because it gave people a sense that they were involved in an epic struggle.

Organizations in Vancouver explicitly sought to connect the local movement to similar struggles internationally, in order to motivate activists and mobilize a more diverse range of actors in the fight against water privatization. “We learned a great deal from other jurisdictions about the companies that were being purported as being the proponents for our water system here”, explained Peter Clark, an environmentalist, and director of City Green, a local environmental organization in Vancouver. He continued by explaining that, “sharing stories with other communities allowed us to look and see what they were doing elsewhere and get the true story from local jurisdictions.” Global narratives not only help create a sense of solidarity for local activists with people from around the world experiencing similar pressures to privatize publically owned utilities and resources, but also provided concrete evidence of the deleterious consequences of water privatization that can be used as leverage by local movements.

Peter Clark spent more than ten years working in Africa and witnessed firsthand the struggles of people who had no access to clean drinking water or could not afford to pay for critical resources. During the anti-water privatization movement, he worked with City Green and
other community leaders to raise awareness of the impacts of privatization, organizing public speaker lectures and speaking out at the GVRD public consultation sessions. He told me that he joined the fight against water privatization in part because he feels a strong connection with people in different parts of the world who are experiencing similar struggles. He explained that, unlike any other issue, water generates solidarity between global communities because “no matter where you live, it is easily understood as a basic necessity.”

The global narratives utilized by the movement in Vancouver facilitated movement mobilization by highlighting the risks of water privatization and offering a perspective on the corporate practices of multinational water companies. Peter Clark described how the strategy of bringing to light stories from other communities facilitated movement mobilization. He said,

Because there are so many horror stories from other places, we thought, okay, this is a place where we can take this on and basically really jam the issue. And we had done quite a bit of research on the companies that were the potential bidders of it and we brought up people from Bolivia to talk about what had happened in Cochabamba in terms of the privatization of their water. And that really helped us build the sense of a movement here and we really went for it.

Peter Clark explained how the strategic use of global narratives strengthened the movement’s ability to mobilize by demonstrating that the issue was part of a larger global struggle and creating a sense of international movement solidarity.

Global frames target a wide range of constituents because they resonate with people who focus on social justice and anti-globalization issues. David Smith, economist and social justice advocate, explained how the anti-privatization movement in Vancouver was linked, through a sense of global solidarity, to the anti-globalization movement that had a large and active membership in the region.² He said, “the connection with a global movement was definitely

² Research on social movement linkages demonstrates the influence of one social movement on another, either through cross-movement spillover – where members of one movement play highly visible roles in another (Meyer and Whittier 1994) – social movement “spin off” – where an existing movement spawns a new movement (McAdam
huge. There was a really strong anti-globalization movement in Vancouver – in BC – at the time, with the Battle in Seattle and the Stop the MAI campaign. So those people really became mobilized in the water fight, especially when those connections were made with what was happening globally.” For activists like David Smith, the broader links between water privatization and economic globalization were critical for motivating them to participate in the movement at the local level.

David Smith and his wife were deeply involved in the anti-globalization movement in Vancouver throughout the 1990s. They had travelled extensively in Latin America, working with local groups to fight neoliberal policies being promoted by international financial institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. He explained that although people were concerned about impact of water privatization locally, they understood the connection between the consolidation of global corporate power and transnational social movement alliances. He said,

So I think there was a big change where people who, although they were mostly concerned about impacts here, also had a lot of empathy and concern and solidarity with what was happening in Latin America or Asia and to a lesser extent Africa... People were really focused on the fact there were large global corporations and trade agreements that were facilitating their ability to just move their goods and investments around often with detrimental impacts on the local populations. So, just as globalization has created alliances among corporations, you are starting to see a lot of social movement players around the world starting to talk together and gleam more together.

Beyond narratives, David Smith’s response reveals the importance of local-global alliances of activists and organizations in response to the consolidation of global capital and transnational financial institutions.
In Vancouver, the frames utilized by activists situated the problem of local water privatization in the context of the broader political economy of advanced capitalist states, including the social and ecological inequalities produced by the constant need to increase production and consumption. The use of anti-corporate frames, with a specific focus on the multinational corporate agenda and the threat of expanding neoliberalism, created greater solidarity between domestic and transnational social and environmental justice movements, linking the local community with individuals and movements in other parts of the world. Transnational corporate power has increasingly become the target of local community groups fighting for justice in the face of the global capitalism. Fiona Rogers, community organizer and educator, described how focusing attention to the track record of multinational corporations involved in water privatization shifted the contextualization of the issue to problems of neoliberal global capitalism, which helped galvanize the movement. She said,

I mean there is no question that when the issue emerged here, the fact that it was happening in other places and with the same multinationals meant we could reference those examples. Talking about the corporate agenda of these companies really helped people to understand water privatization as something that isn’t just happening in Vancouver, but is something that it is part of a larger kind of neoliberal ideological shift. And the fact that they were short listing the same companies that had created so many problems in Bolivia and South Africa and elsewhere – even places in the U.S. – was something that really resonated with the groups here and added fuel to the fire.

The use of global frames inspired activists involved with the anti-water privatization

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5 This critique of the global capitalist economy reflects what Schnaiberg and Gould (2000) label the “treadmill of production” (see also Gould, Pellow and Schnaiberg 2008). They argue that the root causes of environmental degradation are found in the current economic system that dominates globally and maintain that as long as industrial and technology-intensive development and unrestrained growth prevail, the conflict between humans and the environment will endure. Market-based, capitalist economies are an enormous threat to the environment, these scholars claim, because of their need for continuous economic expansion and the corresponding growth in consumption (Schnaiberg and Gould 2000, Gould, Pellow and Schnaiberg 2008).

6 Pellow’s research on transnational movements resisting the flow of global toxics demonstrates that domestic environmental justice movements are increasingly focusing on the local effects of transnational corporate and institutional power (2007). The linkages between global and local movements and frames has resulted in many successful outcomes in communities around the world, including legislation to ban toxic waste and restrict or shut down waste incinerators (Pellow 2007).
campaign by increasing the importance and relevance of the local struggle in the broader context of neoliberal globalization and growing multinational corporate power.

The anti-corporate framing strategy in Vancouver reflects the growing resistance to transnational institutionalized power structures that is shaping local movements opposed to the shift toward neoliberal globalization.\(^7\) Heather Harrison, researcher and organizer with the BCPSEU, has worked for many years as a community activist and educator, trying to raise awareness of issues of corporate globalization. In recent years, she told me that she has noticed a greater awareness of international justice and solidarity amongst social movement activists in Vancouver. She described the growing understanding of the link between international corporate policies and social and environmental injustice and how it is shaping contentious politics. She said,

I think that those corporate horror stories are really important for people who are concerned about... international justice and solidarity. But sharing those stories is also part of a longer-term project of creating global awareness... I think there is a change, especially with the activists I have worked with and how they think about things. Now we consider the global context. I think there is a slow change happening in the world where I hope there is going to be increased awareness about the fact that our corporate policies have had a direct impact on people.

Heather Harrison’s response reveals an understanding on the part of social movement actors of the connection between global corporate policies and the deleterious social and ecological consequences they demonstrate in communities around the world.

The responses from anti-water privatization activists in Vancouver demonstrate that global events and institutions, and the intersections between politics and the global economy,

\(^7\) Scholars have referred to the capacity of actors to challenge institutionalized power structures as counter-hegemony (Evans 2008) or counter-power (Castells 2007).
have growing influence over local movements and the construction of collective action frames.\(^8\) Global frames served not only to galvanize the movement in Vancouver, but also brought to light the problem of the weakening capacity of local governments to regulate and enforce social policies that protect both individuals and the environment from the power of global capital and institutions.

Beyond anti-globalization and anti-corporate frames, the movement in Vancouver focused attention on the risks from international financial and trade institutions. Respondents in Vancouver spoke of their concerns about the consequences of water privatization on local control of resources, in particular, on the ability for local governments to regulate water services in light of obligations under international trade agreements. The perceptions of risk expressed by activists in Vancouver centered on the financial and regulatory clauses contained in international trade agreements, including NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement), that are used by foreign corporations to guarantee financial security from national governments.\(^9\)

Both the BCPSEU and the Citizens Action League utilized trade risk themes to frame the problem of water privatization. Documents obtained from the two organizations, which were

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\(^8\) Recent research on transnational protest and global activism demonstrates that processes of globalization can create transnational frames that shape social movement mobilization by connecting the local to the global (Tarrow 2005b, Diani 2005, Olesen 2005, Della Porta et al. 2006). For example, in his research on social movements and globalization, Olesen (2005) argues that social movements are increasingly constructing transnational frames, which “link grievances at the local and national level (with) structural conditions at the global level in such a way as to facilitate and promote mobilization.” (2005: 55) And Evans (2008) argues that without support from transnational networks, local movements that resist neo-liberal globalization are “out-matched” by global corporate power and institutions that promote water privatization such as the World Water Forum. Castells (2007) argues that the rise of information technology has created new spaces that connect localized social movement communities to each other globally through horizontal communication networks. By intervening in new technological and communication spaces, these horizontal networks offer new forms of resistance to global institutionalized power relations.

\(^9\) NAFTA’s “Chapter 11” investor clause is a dispute mechanism that allows investors in any of the three signatory countries – Canada, the United States and Mexico – to sue the federal government of one of the other two signatory countries to compensate for lost profits when legislation by any level of government is implemented that would impinge on the investor’s future profit-making ability. Chapter 11 provisions have already been utilized by Sun Belt Water Inc., a California based company, to sue the federal government of Canada for lost profits resulting from legislation in British Columbia banning bulk water exports (Gleick 2002).
In public consultation meetings in the Vancouver region during the spring of 2001 activists from labour, social justice and environmental organizations frequently utilized messaging about trade agreements and the threat to local sovereignty posed by outsourcing municipal services to foreign corporations. Karen Evans, an independent researcher and local organic farmer, who has authored several publications on water and trade, attended all of the public consultation sessions around water privatization in order to speak about the risks to local control under NAFTA. During the interview, she described herself as “one of the first Canadians to raise the issue of water seclusion in trade agreements” and expressed her deep concern about losing public control of water resources. Although she explained that, in the past, the issue of water and trade has generally not been raised in connection with privatization, she was amazed how many people “made that link” at the public meetings she attended. She described the sense of fear that permeated public discourse at the consultation sessions. She explained,

So many people raised this issue because I believe the Canadian public was scared. I think they have a very nebulous idea that there is some problem with trade agreements, and they fear walking down that road and then all of a sudden being sandbagged at the end. And of course it comes to sovereignty. I mean if there is any area where we need sovereignty, food
and water are it. So I think the public was deeply concerned about NAFTA, which is so complicated and hard to understand, and the fact that local politicians simply did not get the risks associated with it.

Karen Evans linked the fear of water privatization to national-level issues around concerns over trade agreements and the erosion of Canadian sovereignty.\(^\text{10}\)

Beyond financial concerns, many respondents in Vancouver made reference to the threats to ecological systems imposed by investor provisions under NAFTA and other international trade agreements. Their responses reflect an understanding of the altered relationship between capital, the state and the environment in the world risk society, where global flows of capital result in unprecedented levels of resource depletion, waste production and the corresponding social, economic and environmental risks (Beck 1999). Activists in Vancouver described broader concerns about climate change and resource depletion. Many worried that the privatization local water services would represent the slippery slope, leading to complete loss of water sovereignty in Canada. Peter Clark, political activist and environmentalist, expressed his concern about the impact of trade agreements on the integrity of water systems. Beyond his fears about the loss of local control, he is concerned about the ecological repercussions of being beholden to trade agreements. He said,

I come very much from an environmental perspective on this. Water is a resource that we need to protect and once we open up water to trade, Canada will just become the faucet to

\(^{10}\) Canada has a long history of concerns about sovereignty especially in reference to increased economic integration with the United States (Bolt 1999, Adams 2003, Finlay 2004). While difference between the framing strategies of the movements in Vancouver and Stockton are perhaps partially be explained by overarching value differences between Canadians and Americans (for example, Michael Adams argues in his classic book, *Fire and Ice* (2003), that fundamental value differences distinguish Canadians from their American counterparts – including perceptions of the role of government and religion – leading him to conclude that Canada and the United States are socio-culturally distinct), the responses from activists in Vancouver reveal understandings beyond simplistic anti-American, anti-corporate biases, and reflect a sophisticated understanding of the power of global capital to encroach on local sovereignty and the risks posed by the Canada’s legal obligations under international trade and investment treaties on municipal decision making and regulatory power. I argue that these understandings are linked less to Canadians’ historical concerns about sovereignty than to the presence of global connectors, who utilized transnational ties, resources and flows of information to locate the problem of local water privatization in the broader context of neoliberal globalization.
the north and we will see a huge flow of water, which will be very detrimental to our environment here, especially with the impact of climate change. The implications of losing control over water for our river systems and our aquatic systems, including our ocean receiving waters, will be devastating and will change the ecology of place... And we know under NAFTA that once you trade a commodity you have to continue to supply that portion in perpetuity. And the real trouble with that is we don’t know what climate change is going to bring in terms of shifting weather patterns that will affect the flow of water.

Peter Clark’s response demonstrates the multiple risk frames referenced by activists in Vancouver, whose fears about international trade regimes were not limited to economic interests, but also encompassed concerns about ecological repercussions and the ability to develop local solutions to climate change.

The focus on the financial and ecological risks from international trade agreements by activists in Vancouver reflects the changing ways in which social movements are resisting neoliberal globalization by constructing new frames and mobilizing informational resources to resist and confront the traditional authority and legitimacy of the state. One way that movements challenge the power of the state is through legal channels. Social movement organizations are increasingly utilizing litigation to mobilize individuals, provide strategic

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11 The global risk frames utilized by the movement in Vancouver demonstrate the collective understanding among respondents in Vancouver of the threat to domestic political power in the face of global flows of capital and international financial regulatory institutions. Peter Evans (2008) argues that neoliberal globalization has transferred power to institutions above the state level, including multinational corporations and international financial and trade institutions, which undermine the capacity of state structures to implement social policies and regulate private capital. He further contends that the inability to regulate corporate behaviour weakens democracy systems, arguing that the “inability to impose collective discipline on elites is exactly the weakness that Skocpol argues undermined eighteenth and nineteenth century national orders dominated by agrarian landholders, allowing them to eventually be toppled either by more dynamic industrial capitalism or by revolutions.” (Evans 2008: 280) In light of the power shift from domestic to transnational political institutions, individuals and movements are organizing to resist the deleterious consequences of neoliberal globalization.

These new counter-movements, exemplified by the anti-water privatization movement in Vancouver, reflect a shift to the world risk society – the growing democratization of technology and the sub-political organization of environmental politics – identified by scholars including Ulrich Beck (1993, 1999) and Anthony Giddens (1990). In the world risk society, the traditional authority of political and scientific institutions is transferred to new forms of social organization, including social movements and community organizations, who challenge the power of the state, which is increasingly seen as part of the problem rather than the solution. Problems are no longer contained within geographical borders and thus are disembedded from the local. The globalization of risk suggests that the context for social and political action has also shifted from the nation state to the international institutional context and thus questions about nature, environment and risk need to be reformulated and reconsidered in a transnational setting (Beck 1999).
resources and frame arguments (Epp 1998, McCaan 2004). Beyond individual understandings of globalization and its risks, the framing politics of the anti-water privatization movement in Vancouver were also shaped by legal expertise, albeit without resorting to litigation. In addition to the documents and fact sheets distributed to the public, the BCPSEU commissioned a legal document from an expert in international trade law, which was presented to elected officials and bureaucrats at the GVRD. The opinion was authored by Clark Green, a legal expert in international trade law and partner in a prestigious Toronto law firm. He explained the dangers of Chapter 11, the investment clause under NAFTA, which, in his opinion, could be used in the case of water privatization to weaken the power of local governments to regulate water services.

He said that the significance of trade and investment treaties in this case was,

> Well, Canada is a party to a number of these treaties and for the purposes of the Seymour plant, the most significant was NAFTA, Chapter 11, which protects investment. And dispute procedures are set out in the investment chapter and they entitle foreign investors to file a claim for compensation for damages before international investment tribunals. In a broad, but ill-defined variety of circumstances in which governments do things that somehow interfere with the investment or the profits that the private investor was hoping to make from the investment. So ultimately Chapter 11 could seriously impair the ability of governments to make decisions around resources.

Clark Green made clear that the municipal and federal governments could have been financially liable for lost corporate profits in the case of a change in contract and drew attention to the fact that decisions about liability would not be decided in a Canadian court of law, but rather by a closed-door NAFTA tribunal, with no public consultation.

Clark Green explained that few people in Canada – including municipal government officials – have an expert understanding of how trade and investment treaties function and their

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12 This is in contrast to the legal tactics utilized by activists in Stockton, who mounted a legal challenge to water privatization as a means of defeating the opposition. In Vancouver, on the other hand, anti-water privatization activists used legal expertise in the form of a commissioned legal opinion to warn authorities about the potential risks from the decision to privatize water services. The legal opinion, as opposed to the confrontational legal challenge utilized in Stockton, was useful in opening up political opportunities for movement claims to be legitimized.
ramifications for local control of public services and resources. The legal opinion was strategically utilized in the Vancouver campaign to draw attention to the potential loss of local control and accountability by local governments over decisions about water resources. Highlighting the legal risks to the regional government under NAFTA added expert credibility to the movement’s claims and worked to create opportunities favourable to its goals. “The NAFTA issue was the straw that broke the camel’s back”, Fiona Rogers told me, explaining that “the GVRD basically ended up backtracking because they realized that once they went that route, they were setting a real precedent for the future control of water”.

Using global risk frames to highlight the potential threats to local control under international trade structures was an effective mobilizing tool by the Vancouver movement because it linked nebulous and complex international regulatory institutions to the decisions by local politicians who live and work in the same communities as their activist counterparts, creating a clear and accessible target. As Peter Clark explained, “the message ‘focus on the municipal’ is really powerful because they [elected officials] know that you know where they live.” At the first public consultation meeting, Peter Clark walked to the front of the room and took the microphone from the chair of the water committee. He described how the movement targeted local politicians and their electoral vulnerability in their efforts to prevent water privatization,

Basically I just walked to the front of the room and took the microphone from the chair of the water committee and said, “This is our meeting and we are going to tell you what we want.” Then I said, “Is there anyone here,” and there were well over 500 people in the room, I said, “If there is anyone here who is in favour of privatizing our water, please stand.” And nobody stood. And then I said, “Who here is opposed to it?” And everyone stood. And I said to the chair, “There is your consultation. You wanted consultation, you’ve got it. We don’t want it privatized and if you privatize it, we are going to go after every single politician who is involved in this decision.

While activists in Vancouver drew attention to the global nature of the problem of water
privatization, they also recognized the importance of local political process, including how decisions by municipal politicians can either exacerbate or limit the risks from transnational institutions.

By focusing on the loss of municipal control over resources and the fate of local elected officials in future elections, the movement was able to create openings for their claims to be considered. Research on framing demonstrates the critical link between movement frames and the capacity for movement actors to create opportunities for positive outcomes (Diani 1996, Cress and Snow 2000). Local politicians and elite decision makers were concerned about the legal implications of international trade agreements – that are negotiated and signed without the input from municipalities – for communities who contract out services to the private sector. Many of the political decision-makers in Vancouver discussed their concerns about the unknown implications of trade and investment treaties for local communities. Richard Martin, a senior GVRD bureaucrat cited uncertainty about the impact of international trade treaties, including NAFTA, as critical to the decision by the GVRD Water Board to reverse plans to privatize water services in the region. Taking into consideration the massive public opposition, the legal vulnerability from global trade regimes and the potential repercussions for elected officials, he explained that he felt it was not worth the risk to continue to pursue privatization as a model and urged the water committee to reconsider their decision. He explained,

[W]e were legally vulnerable under NAFTA, and... we really hadn’t looked into that enough. So we came back after two meetings and I sat down with the chair of the water committee, who is a very big proponent of [privatization] and felt this was a really good idea, and I said to him, “It looks like we are going to be into a protracted political battle and a protracted legal battle... This is clearly not just a local issue. This is... an international issue to do with international trade treaties. My advice, no matter what you think of [privatization], is that there is not enough potential benefit in this to keep on going in the face of this kind of legal and political opposition.” And to my surprise he readily agreed. He too could see that this was just going to be the dog’s breakfast in terms of the political process.
The legal argument by Vancouver activists reframed the issue in the minds of local politicians, shifting the focus from water privatization as an innovative idea, to the need for local governments to protect themselves in the face of powerful trade and investment treaties.

Despite initially feeling unreceptive to the anti-water privatization activists and their concerns, Richard Martin said that the movement’s claims about the vulnerability of local governments in light of international trade treaties made him “take a close second look” at the decision to privatize. “Municipalities across Canada need to be in a better position to make decisions about resources, whether it is water or something else. They’ve got to know if they are safe or whether they should they be hiring a battery of lawyers to protect themselves,” he explained. Richard Martin felt that by focusing on the risks from neoliberal corporate ideology and international trade agreements, the movement was conveying the message that they trusted public officials to oversee and regulate water, creating a sense of solidarity between local elites and activists.

Global frames – and the global connectors through which meanings were crystallized – were not only critical for movement mobilization, but also shaped movement outcomes in Vancouver. The desire to protect local democracy and decision-making power in the face of the threats from multinational corporate power, international trade agreements and the encroachment of global capital, created opportunities for a successful movement outcome. Global frames were successful in creating favourable conditions for the movement because they facilitated the coming together of elected officials and municipal bureaucrats with social movement actors, rather than pitting one against the other in a movement-countermovement interplay, as is often the case with social movements (see Meyer and Staggenborg 1996). Research examining the link between framing and the political process suggests that movements that frame their grievances in
such a way as to resonate with the political opportunity context in question increases the likelihood that their outcomes will be successful (Diani 1996, Schneider 2005). In Vancouver, global risks frames generated a sense of local solidarity, which facilitated the movement’s desired outcome. Rather than getting caught up in a bitter and confrontational feud with the elected representatives, movement activists sought out allies and framed arguments in ways that would resonate with elites and create a sense of local unity in the face of threats from global hegemonic institutions.

Responses from activists in Vancouver demonstrate how global issues and international movement linkages create leaders who facilitate the flow of information and transform the nature of collective action at the local level. Transnational issues disrupt local level politics and shape responses to political opportunities, revealing the interdependence of local-level social and political structures with global networks and flows of information. In Vancouver, global frames provided the inspiration and motivation to mobilize a wide range of constituents by connecting anti-globalization issues – including multinational corporate policies and the entrenchment of neoliberal policies – to a concrete local struggle and creating a sense of transnational unity with other communities through the use of global narratives. Global frames also acted as leverage to reframe the issue from a domestic political confrontation between local authorities and activists to an issue of global power and risk, creating a local solidarity that opened up favourable opportunities for a positive movement outcome.

While activists in Vancouver articulated the root of the problem of water privatization in terms of global threats to local power structures, in Stockton, movement frames reinforced the traditional movement-countermovement divide between activists and authorities, which

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13 Habermas theorizes that solidarity coalesces at the local level with individuals’ desire to preserve and protect the integrity of community and the shared life context of one’s fellow citizens. And Rorty (1989) argues that solidarity is most robust when manifest at the local level because shared context facilitates a sense of collective fate.
constrained the ability of social movement actors to prevent the privatization of local water treatment and delivery services.

Stockton: Let the People Vote!

While the movement in Vancouver utilized global framing strategies to mobilize, create openings for claims to be considered and foster local solidarity, in Stockton, the focus of the anti-water privatization movement remained squarely centered on local political issues. The use of local democracy frames reflects the diverse movement building conditions – including political and organizational culture – in Stockton as compared to Vancouver. Most respondents interviewed described the ‘lack of democratic accountability’ of the local government as the main reason for becoming involved in the movement, and consistently drew on frames involving ‘voter rights’ in reference to the control and regulation of water resources and provision of services. The Stockton anti-water privatization campaign focused on raising awareness of procedural issues and problems at city council and encouraging people to sign a petition that would allow for a public vote on privatization contracts.

“We labelled it democratic injustice,” explained Dorothy Thomas, one of the key leaders of the coalition that formed in response to proposed plans to outsource the city’s water services. She described how the anti-water privatization coalition in Stockton urged people to rally around the push for a ballot initiative on the privatization of services. Dorothy Thomas considers open dialogue to be the cornerstone of democracy. She is a 74-year-old activist, who has been involved with voter advocacy issues in California for the past 30 years. As past chair of the local chapter of the Association of Democratic Voters, a national organization focusing on safeguarding systems of government and on influencing policy through advocacy, Dorothy Thomas joined the movement in Stockton to, “stand up for the democratic rights of the citizens
of Stockton”. She described the lack of openness on the part of the municipal government in Stockton as driving her participation in the movement to stop water privatization,

I primarily got involved because it was a closed process. My work with the [Association of Democratic Voters] has always been to study the issues and weigh the pros and cons and come to a decision, and I really believe in democratic discussion. It needs to be a dialogue between both sides, and that this was not happening. It [water privatization] was being railroaded into existence for us by government. That was the primary reason why I got involved. I saw what was happening politically through our illustrious ex-mayor and it was those things that grated on my nerves and irritated me.

Dorothy Thomas felt that municipal politicians were rapidly implementing plans for privatization without appropriate democratic public consultation. She resented the treatment of anti-water privatization activists by the mayor and council, arguing that, “we were not stupid or ignorant or as inexperienced as they alluded to.” She believes that citizens should be included in political decision-making processes, particularly when it comes to issues that are “critical to life” such as air and water. In her opinion, the best way to allow people a voice is to provide them with an opportunity to vote on issues.

Many respondents in Stockton echoed Dorothy Thomas’ concerns about the lack of transparency on the part of the local government. Activists shared understandings of water as a communally-owned resource shaped their claim that authorities should allow citizens the right to have a say in the delivery of local water services. John Sandler, a former maintenance engineer at the Stockton Municipal Utilities Department, who lost his job after the water treatment plant was privatized, argued that the biggest threat from privatization was the relinquishing of local democratic control of what he calls a “vital resource”. He too was disillusioned with the lack of public consultation around water privatization and eagerly joined the anti-water privatization coalition to help collect signatures for a ballot initiative that would allow citizens to vote on privatization. He also helped organize demonstrations at City Hall where activists targeted local
politicians, shouting the slogan “Let the people vote!”. According to John Sandler, the problem with privatization was that the government was prepared to hand over the responsibility to protect resources to a private company, arguing that “before, when there was a problem, a citizen could take it all the way to the City Council and they were accountable to the people. Now, if they have a concern, they are connected to a call center halfway around the world. How is that for accountability?” During the interview, John Sandler articulated his strong belief in the public nature of water and the need for voter approval on water service contracts. He said,

Well the main arguments were that this is ours, it belongs to us and we should have a say-so in what we are going to do with it. And if privatization is so good, present all the information to us and let us make the decision, through a democratic vote, not a panel of seven council members. It’s a $600 million facility there and it belongs to us and so we were against the fact that only a few people were leading the charge to sell off our utility.

John Sandler argued that the scale and scope of the decision meant it should be decided by a democratic referendum rather than by a small group of elites.

Respondents in Stockton did not view the state as benign. Their articulations about the democratic process demonstrate that the relationship between citizens and political institutions was fraught with conflict.14 Dave Alexis, a 56-year-old political activist and former elected representative, identified discontent with government as a critical factor for movement mobilization in Stockton. A small business owner and member of the local Chamber of Commerce, he has voted Republican all his life, and self-identifies as a conservative. Yet Dave Alexis opposed the decision by the conservative mayor and council to outsource water services because he believed that water should remain in public control, and that decisions about resources should require input from the citizenry. When he realized that a majority of city respondents...

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14 McNaghten and Urry (1995) contend that in a world dominated by environmental risk, individuals no longer view the state as part of the solution, but rather as contributing to the problem. They argue that as a result, people increasingly put their trust in their own sense of personal agency and sensory perceptions rather than rely on official institutional information.
council members wanted to fast track the vote on privatization, he was furious and felt that the municipal government was violating its responsibility to allow deliberation by the public. During a meeting he requested with the mayor, he asked him to delay the vote in order to further study the benefits of outsourcing. The mayor refused. Dave Alexis explained that because of the actions of the mayor and council, the issue of concern for the anti-water privatization movement became increasingly focused on the lack of democratic process, rather than on the negative consequences of privatization. He said, 

I think the main reason why people were so upset, including myself, didn’t even get to the issue of privatization or why it was wrong. It was the lack of process that infuriated the public and created the backlash... They [the mayor and council] were totally derelict in their responsibility to the public. The public was not allowed to interact in any way. They simply refused to let people have a say and I quote the former mayor, who said, “This is a real sophisticated issue and the citizens can’t understand it.” Framing-wise I think the fact that some elected officials just think people are stupid was a huge factor. It created the perfect storm.

He felt that elected officials were acting rash and irresponsible and that more input from the public would have demonstrated the immense opposition to water privatization and why it was a risk.

Dave Alexis told me that municipal politics in Stockton had long been characterized by a division between conservative and liberal ideology. The historical context of political conflict fuelled the anti-privatization sentiment of the movement in Stockton because the decision was linked to a broader sense of discontent and mistrust of the local government. He described the, “general sentiment of anti-City Council, anti-politics in Stockton” and told me that past criticism and negative views of the mayor and council by key movement leaders had facilitated mobilization against privatization plans. He described the City Council at the time, 

Their record kind of speaks for itself, but definitely things that happened before hugely impacted the movement and, like I said, created the perfect storm. It wasn’t only water privatization, there were other things going on with the development community, and so
everything was way out of whack. There was the arena at the ballpark, which went way over budget. There was more waste during that tenure than we probably had seen in the preceding 15 years to the magnitude of $50-$100 million in waste.

Issues beyond water privatization and its consequences created an atmosphere of mistrust amongst movement actors and shaped their views of elected officials as corrupt and irresponsible.

Activists’ understandings of the political process were instrumental in shaping key movement framing strategies. For respondents in Stockton, risks of water privatization were discussed in connection with the divisive political culture that characterized the political realm historically in Stockton. Individuals drew on existing political cultural codes, including traditional left-right schisms, to interpret the problem and construct arguments. James Vivian, author and social justice advocate, was deeply dissatisfied with the City Council members at the time of the privatization battle. His unease extended beyond the issue of water privatization to encompass concerns about greed and political corruption. He explained that the movement’s main arguments were related to fears about a lack of democratic process in local politics. He felt the movement targeted its grievances to political corruption rather than concerns about corporate control of resources. He said,

It wasn’t an anti-corporation argument... It became less an argument about privatization than one about democracy and high-handedness. So it really became about the arrogance of [the mayor] and the abuse of the democratic process. What they did was legal, but devious and furiously undemocratic... We had the most crooked city council I had ever seen in my life. They are all beholden to the developers, and it’s terrible.

A history of perceived corruption by city council shaped the choice of frames utilized by anti-water privatization activists in Stockton and downplayed other potential frames that could have been used to oppose privatization, including anti-corporate or globalization arguments.

Anti-water privatization activists linked their grievances to broader concerns with
neoliberal ideology and the Republican legacy of the previous two decades that created deep divisions between liberals and conservatives in Stockton. Paul Conners is a 45-year-old urban planner who has lived in Stockton most of his life. He is an environmentalist and social justice activist who became involved in the anti-water privatization movement because he did not want to see local water services controlled by a private corporation. Yet his participation in the movement was connected not only to his concerns about corporate control of resources, but also to a deep mistrust of local government. He described how a sense of political cynicism shaped a framing strategy centered on local political corruption and accountability rather than on the corporate policies that threaten water.

But there was still that immense distrust of government in general that kind of lit a lot of the fires here... Most California cities don’t have [a] history of political corruption, but Stockton has been a place where, for a lot of different demographic reasons, politicians have been kind of able to take advantage of the local citizenry. So we have a built-in scepticism and overt cynicism about anything related to government getting involved in issues. I think the reason people reacted so viscerally to oppose privatization is not just that they thought it was just a bad idea, that financially it was going to end up screwing the local people, it was also that they didn’t trust the city council. Most people did not trust the mayor at the time, who was perceived as being another cookie-cutter Bush republican type who just wanted to start doing these things kind of on the Republican agenda.

Activists in Stockton focused on privatization as a misstep by a corrupt municipal government, an argument that clearly delineated the opposition and weakened the strength of the movement.

Respondents in Stockton located the problem of water privatization as grounded in local political processes that constrain participatory democracy. Unlike their Vancouver counterparts, activists in Stockton did not reference global frames, nor were they connected to a transnational water movement, despite the fact that the companies shortlisted for the contract were all multinational corporations. Most respondents agreed that local political context, including dissatisfaction with the mayor and council and a feeling of scepticism around government
competence, was the central focus of the movement. Very few respondents in Stockton discussed
global processes as being important to the movement’s framing strategies. As Joan Davidson, a
leader in the anti-water privatization coalition explained, “We did what we needed to do here.
Some people say that we should be connected to something more global, but you know,
sometimes it is hard enough to formulate a goal and to marshal the kind of interest locally, we
need to reference what makes sense to people here.”

Despite the fact that this view was articulated by the majority of respondents in Stockton,
the decision to focus on local political frames was not consensual amongst movement
participants. The overlooking of global linkages caused divisions between activists in Stockton,
with some people arguing that a focus on globalization would have increased movement
mobilization and facilitated opportunities for grievances to be heard. Kyle Winters, a former city
bureaucrat, who resigned his position during the battle over privatization, said that he believed
that the movement should have been linked to a global movement because it would have allowed
for a strategic counter-framing strategy. His experience as a political consultant led him to
question the efficacy of the anti-government stance by activists in Stockton, which he felt
alienated potential political allies who might otherwise have sided with the movement. Kyle
Winters said that he felt that the anti-water privatization movement should have focused on the
consequences of privatization on local control of water in light of the track record of the
multinational water companies who were bidding for the local contract. During the interview, he
described how the proponents of privatization, including the mayor and the business community,
utilized global frames to convince the public that the outsourcing decision was in the best
interests of the community. “They told us that global companies had the expertise and the
financial capital to invest in our water system and make it more efficient,” he explained, arguing
that anti-water privatization movement should have focused on global level concerns in order to
counter and neutralize the arguments of the mayor and council that transnational corporate
investment would save the city money and transfer risk from the taxpayer to a private company
with global expertise. He said,

The opposition movement in Stockton was unconnected to anything global. But the
movement in favour of it was connected to everything global. The financial investment
was global, the companies competing were all foreign, and they had a huge influence over
the mayor and the rest of the city councillors. The movement should have realized this,
rather than wasting their time demonizing the mayor and his cronies. They should have
pointed out those connections. If they had done that, if they had countered the city fact by
fact and showed them the dismal track record of these corporations globally... they would
have realized that regulation matters and that these companies have a track record of
getting around regulations and rules, with little or no consequences, and the people and the
quality of the water paid the price. They would have said to themselves as politicians, as a
government, “Why would we privatize?”

Many respondents in Stockton, including Kyle Winters felt that the movement’s decision to
downplay or disregard global frames, including the use of narrative examples of the deleterious
consequences of water privatization from other communities internationally, constrained their
ability to neutralize claims by the municipal government about the expertise and economic
efficiency of multinational water companies.

While many activists argued that downplaying global concerns constrained political
opportunities, others expressed their frustration that neglecting the global dimension negatively
affected the movement’s ability to mobilize. Jeremy Beck, a local writer and teacher, told me
that he was disappointed with the lack of young people involved in the movement in Stockton.
He felt that mobilizing youth would have been relatively easy, because of the university
population. Jeremy Beck recognizes the effect of neoliberal globalization on local communities,
and discussed his concerns about the outsourcing of jobs and the “race to the bottom” in terms of
social and environmental policies that he sees as the consequences of globalization. He explained
that had the movement tied its opposition to water privatization to larger critiques of global capitalism, they could have increased their mobilization potential, particularly amongst youth with ties to the anti-globalization movement. He said,

I often wonder if things in Stockton would have been different had more young people been involved... I think it would have helped if they had made reference to the anti-globalization movement and the connections to the bigger picture. Instead, there was little that resonated with them [youth activists], little that would help mobilize this group of people. It could have been sexier if it had been connected to a massive global movement the way it was with Vietnam. Then you could do community organizing and make people feel part of a global revolution. That could affect change.

The attention to local political frames not only constrained political opportunities, but also limited the mobilization potential of the movement. Jeremy Beck explained to me that there were several youth activists initially involved in the anti-water privatization movement, including one young woman who had recently attended the World Water Forum with a group of global water activists to protest the commodification of water by multinational water firms. He told me that these activists wanted to connect the local movement to broader anti-globalization movements in order to raise awareness of the global risks to local water privatization and mobilize a larger number of people in Stockton to become involved in the movement. According to Jeremy Beck, these youth activists were discouraged from focusing on the global nature of the struggle by other members of the anti-water privatization movement and as a result, their participation in the movement waned. By minimizing the importance of global issues, the movement prevented a broader range of actors from participating in the struggle against water privatization, including those involved in anti-globalization work.¹⁵

¹⁵The involvement of leaders from professional and highly institutionalized organizations in Stockton might explain the lack of participation by grassroots youth activists. Many social movement scholars argue that the increased professionalization and bureaucratization of social movement organizations has constrained the capacity of movements to engage in grassroots political organizing (Piven and Cloward 1977, Staggenborg 1988, Fisher 2007). Dana Fisher (2007) argues that this is an entrenched characteristic of the political left, who increasingly “outsource” organizing to professional organizations and thus exclude young activists from participating meaningfully in
The focus on localized political frames left questions of neoliberal globalization and the power of transnational capital to undermine local control of resources unexamined by respondents in Stockton and shifted the focus from the problem of privatization to the conflict between citizens and elected officials. Unlike the anti-water privatization movement in Vancouver, where activists expressed a strong sense of distrust in the private sector and in international institutions that regulate trade and services, while at the same time explicitly supporting the ability of local governments to oversee public services such as water treatment and delivery, the movement in Stockton demonstrated a high level of distrust in government, regarding it as part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. There was little faith amongst respondents in Stockton in the capacity of political institutions to regulate and deliver services effectively.

One of the reasons why the movement in Stockton located the problem in the anti-democratic nature of the municipal government is related to situated experiences of key movement leaders. Many of the activists involved were connected to organizations that focused on electoral politics and voter initiatives at the domestic level. In California, social movements often utilize direct democracy measure, including voter driven ballot initiatives as a strategy for policy change (Matsusaka 2004, Gerber and Phillips 2005). Citizens groups use the initiative process to bypass traditional representative institutions, including city councils and the state legislature, to propose and vote on new legislation. Many of the respondents in Stockton described being involved in voter initiatives in the past and discussed the importance of direct democracy to policy change. One of the main organizations involved in the anti-water privatization battle, the Association of Democratic Voters, devotes most of its time and energy to progressive political movements. As a result of outsourcing activism, movement messages become controlled by an elite group of actors and fail to resonate broadly at the grassroots level.
voter advocacy and legal challenges to political decisions. The involvement of movement leaders linked to domestic organizations who regularly rely on the ballot initiative processes, focused attention on local political institutions and processes and detracted from concerns about global threats. The organizational history and culture of key movement leaders also meant that there were few people on the ground who could act as bridge builders to transnational movements or frames.

Phyllis Kennedy, a community organizer with the Citizens Environmental Alliance (CEA), a national organization that focuses on the link between corporate power and environmental protection, described how she attempted to unite the anti-water privatization movement in Stockton around a common theme of global corporate power. She and other California-based campaigners with CEA visited Stockton when they heard about the proposed outsourcing of local water treatment and delivery services because they considered what was happening there as part of a strategy by multinational corporations to gain control of water systems in the United States. Phyllis Kennedy is part of a global network of water activists and regularly attends international meetings related to global water issues. She explained that the organizers from CEA tried to shift the focus from local electoral politics to global institutions in the Stockton case with the hopes of bringing to light the risks to local control of resources from multinational corporate power. She said,

We wanted to use the bad track record [of multinational water firms] in other parts of the world and in the US to try to help local community groups that are fighting water privatization. If you can do that then I think that the activists, the people who actually get involved in waging the local battles, become very educated about water issues and begin to see what is happening elsewhere. And that can create a supportive solidarity movement for these international battles and that is important to creating a powerful countermovement to globalization. I don’t even know if the local groups that got involved in Stockton even realized those global connections. You know, in our view, these were really nice people and very hard working, but they just weren’t used to dealing with these big national or international or multinational corporations and so they often... well they were just too nice
and they were unable to convince the political leaders of the dangers of privatization. I’ll leave it at that.

Activists from outside of Stockton expressed frustration at the unwillingness on the part of local movement actors to embrace global framing strategies. Part of the reason for this resistance is that few people involved in the movement were connected to movements operating outside of the local context, including the global movement for water rights or anti-globalization movements. Although many respondents in Stockton were aware of the global issues, most downplayed their importance to local events, with some even expressing resentment at the CEA’s attempt to alter their framing strategies. Dorothy Thomas articulated this sentiment,

You know I really think the local coalition was the significant leader. [The Citizens Environmental Alliance] came in and tried to help us. They were helpful in many ways, especially in helping us to become more of an organization. To them we were kind of, I guess, a rag-tag group of people trying to prevent this from happening... But them being outsiders, they were very unfamiliar with the situation in Stockton, not knowing what the climate was. They had some ideas that just didn’t go over with the group and so we kind of evolved from that and we took the reins in our own hands.

Many respondents in Stockton felt that actors from organizations outside of the local region did not understand the local context enough to provide useful guidance and thus were reluctant to trust outsiders who encouraged them to incorporate global issues into their framing work.

Without the presence of locally-based global connectors, movement actors from exogenous organizations, including those that focus on the transnational nature of water privatization, failed to gain the trust and reciprocity needed to influence the framing politics of the movement. Activists in Stockton resisted the influence of external actors. Their sense of localized agency was strong. They saw themselves as good, moral citizens who were capable of making decisions and guiding policy that would affect the community.
Relying on the overarching frame of anti-democracy, respondents in Stockton articulated the problem as being rooted in local political institutions and the culture of the political process. As a result, the movement reinforced the division between citizens and elected officials, which, at the same time, prevented them from articulating a clear solution to the problem of dealing with infrastructure upgrades and proper maintenance of water resources and service delivery. The movement frames in Stockton excluded issues that could potentially have mobilized a wider pool of movement recruits, including the dangers of privatization and the risks to local control from global power structures. The anti-government frame also served to alienate the political representatives who held the decision-making power, pitting activists against state actors and preventing potential political allies. As a result, the initial organized movement to block water privatization in Stockton failed. Tom Bailey, a local businessman, friend of the former mayor, and one of the proponents of privatization, explained how the anti-government focus worked against the movement’s interests,

I think they vilified the mayor, and basically drew a line in the sand, and from that point they couldn’t retreat. I knew some of the people involved and I told them to look at it from a pragmatic private sector mentality, and my counsel to them was to quit vilifying because you are dealing with a populous mayor and the more you vilify him, the more he gets press time in the newspaper because he owns it. And they didn’t listen to me. It was an uphill battle for them. They might have a better movement to protect the utility if they had countered the mayor’s arguments and not just gone after him on a personal level. I really think that would have made a difference.

Some respondents in Stockton argued that the political frames cost the movement broader support from authorities. Tom Bailey’s comments reflect the relationship between frames and political opportunity structures and the importance of strategically constructing arguments that resonate with political institutions and elites for shaping movement success (Diani 1996, Cress and Snow 2000). Respondents in Stockton translated their visceral concerns about water and their belief in public control into frames focused on voter rights and political accountability. By
disengaging from arguments about privatization and globalization, they were unable to either move the issue beyond the conflict between activists and political elites or articulate a clear solution to the problem. As a result, the Stockton city council sidelined public input on water privatization and outsourcing of local water services.

Comparing the interview responses of anti-water privatization activists in Vancouver and Stockton reveals the critical importance of local political and organizational context to the construction of collective action frames. Despite shared understandings of water as part of the commons, the movements in Vancouver and Stockton translated this idea into divergent frames. Activists in Vancouver translated their strong attachments to the public nature of water into global risk frames that clearly articulated the problem and resonated with political elites. The movement, through the presence of global connectors, located the problem of water privatization in global power structures and risks to local control over resources, targeting their grievance at the global corporate agenda of multinational water companies and the power of international trade institutions. They argued that the only way to protect the democratic power of municipal governments and their ability to regulate and protect water is to ensure that resources remain in public hands. The frames utilized by the movement in Vancouver were instrumental in creating a sense of local solidarity in the face of global power, connecting the local community to international communities experiencing similar struggles and uniting activists with political elites by demonstrating the common fate shared by all local citizens.

In Stockton, the concept of the water as part of the “commons” was articulated in a framing strategy that centered largely on the issues of deliberative democracy and voter rights. Political frames emerged out of a historical, local and state context of utilizing popular referendum ballot initiatives for policy making as well as deep-seeded discontent and mistrust of
local elected political leaders. Despite the presence of representatives from national-level organizations with ties to a global water movement, these actors were unable to influence local movement frames because they lacked ties to key leaders and were largely seen as outsiders. As a result, the movement resisted incorporating global frames into their repertoire of contention, and instead identified the actions of the mayor and pro-privatization council members as the root of the problem. The strategic choice to focus on the abrogation of democratic processes shifted attention away from global threats to local control of resources, and alienated political elites, preventing the movement from neutralizing pro-privatization arguments and closing off potential avenues for public input on water privatization. Hence, the anti-water privatization movement in Stockton failed to prevent the outsourcing of water services.16

Conclusion

The divergent frames utilized by the movements in Vancouver and Stockton demonstrate the importance of historical, cultural and political context for influencing meaning construction. Although respondents in Vancouver and Stockton expressed their understandings of the importance of water as a public resource with equal conviction, the commons discourse was

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16 While the emphasis on democratic processes at the expense of other frames – including the risks from international institutions to local accountability – contributed to the initial failure of the movement in Stockton to block water privatization, the importance of democratic institutions for protecting the commons should not be minimized. In many ways the frames utilized by the movement in Stockton should be seen as more than a failed narrative. By focusing on broader issues of democracy and public accountability, the discursive claims of the movement in Stockton reflect the kinds of arguments that are necessary for countering the erosion of democracy under neoliberalism. Many scholars argue that neoliberal globalization is a threat to democracy because it transfers power from political institutions that are accountable to the electorate to international corporations and institutions that are undemocratic in nature (Kalb et al. 2000, Brown 2003, Giroux 2004). These scholars argue that countermovements must therefore frame their arguments in terms of protecting democracy. Other scholars contend that ultimately what is needed to protect public services and accountability and ensure social and ecological justice in the face of growing neoliberalism is more participatory and deliberative democracy (Munck 2002, Kamat 2004, Dryzek 2006). Tilly (2004) also points to the importance of democratic process for shaping the possibilities for social change. He contends that for movements to sustain themselves over the long term and ensure the political institutionalization of their goals, they must continue to target and have access to democratic institutions (Tilly 2004).
articulated into divergent framing strategies in each case – despite facing a similar threat of water system privatization. What factors explain the divergent claims-making processes of the two movements in response to similar forces? I argue that beyond socio-natural relationships, contextual foundation is critical for shaping movement frames, including organizational ideology and structural processes such as network ties. Frames are dependent on organizational culture and structure as well as the cultural codes and social ties of individuals involved in a given movement. The ideology and collective identity of individuals and organizations shape movement claims that can either constrain or open up opportunities for success.¹⁷

The meaning work of the anti-water privatization movements in Vancouver and Stockton was linked to pre-existing cultural, organizational and political contexts. In each place, activists drew upon pre-existing cultural codes, values, and norms which shaped how the problem was understood and presented to political elites. In Vancouver, the broader cultural and organizational context converged around issues of social justice and globalization. Key movement leaders and organizations, whom I call global connectors, were connected structurally – through network ties and previous involvement in the anti-globalization movement – and cognitively – through pre-existing understandings of the consequences of globalization – to transnational water activists and institutions who shaped the construction of global risk frames.

¹⁷ Many social movement scholars argue that frame processes are linked to organizational culture of the social movement organizations involved in particular episodes of contention, which shapes how opportunities and problems are filtered and interpreted (Snow and Benford 1988, McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996, Cress and Snow 2000, Reese and Newcombe 2003). For example, Reese and Newcombe’s (2003) research on three different welfare rights groups in the United States demonstrates that an organization’s distinct cultural code mediates responses to the external political opportunities and shapes collective action frames. The groups in question framed their campaigns and strategies differently in the context of similar opportunities, and these differences in frames determined their outcomes; those with more inflexible ideological stances were less successful in achieving political recognition than groups who were willing to modify their claims to fit the political opportunities available to them. And Cress and Snow’s (2000) research on the outcomes of homelessness movements in nine U.S. cities found that the framing strategies of social movement organizations were important to movement outcomes, but that the type of frames developed was linked to organizational viability. Organizations that were more ideologically flexible were better at adapting frames to political opportunities and thus securing positive outcomes.
The movement’s focus on the power of capital and trade institutions to alter and threaten local decision making capacity resonated with political elites, drawing attention to their legal vulnerability under NAFTA.

In contrast, the emphasis on democracy and voter rights in Stockton was tied to the litigious movement history of California – characterized by the use of voter-driven initiatives – and the political ideology of key movement leaders and organizations that emphasized the traditional left-right political divide. Most of the coalition leaders interviewed in Stockton were connected to organizations that were ideologically opposed to the local municipal government, and had very few ties to external organizations and individuals, including groups engaged in global water issues. By focusing on political accountability rather than the negative consequences of outsourcing water services to a multinational corporation, the movement emphasized the division between activists and political authorities, and constrained their ability to counter the pro-privatization frames of the local government.

The findings demonstrate the critical importance of situated knowledge and experiences in the production of knowledge claims, and highlight the need for a model of framing that pays greater attention to the link between signifying work and the broader cultural context in which social movements are embedded, as called for by prominent social movement scholars (see Goodwin and Jasper 1999, Benford 1997, Johnston and Noakes 2005). Framing is dependent on more than just the structural opportunities available to social movements. Actors and organizations in different contexts will respond differently to similar opportunities or threats because of variation in situated experiences, cultural codes, and organization ideology.

The findings also demonstrate the link between socio-cultural and organizational context and the development of clear and well-articulated frames that expose a tangible problem and
offer viable solutions.\textsuperscript{18} Research on framing and collective action suggests the importance of clearly presented and tangible diagnostic frames – those that articulate the problem – and prognostic frames – those that offer solutions to the problem (Benford and Snow 2000, Cress and Snow 2000).\textsuperscript{19} Frame processes are fraught with negotiation and conflict as movements attempt to synthesize and represent competing visions of reality. Movements that mediate differences and construct arguments that are concordant with political elites are more successful in presenting well-articulated, unified arguments that resonate widely and create favourable opportunities (Gamson 1990, Benford 1997, Diani 1996, Cress and Snow 2000).

In Vancouver, organizational ties and previous experiences with anti-globalization issues linked activists at the local level to a network of global activists and to broader frames of transnational environmental and social justice. The strategic use of anti-globalization discourse created a sense of solidarity in the face of global foes, and moved the struggle away from the activist/elite dichotomy reflective of many social movements. By constructing frames around global issues, the movement in Vancouver was able to present a clearly defined diagnostic frame – the international risk to local control of water – which in turn led to a solution-oriented prognostic frame – keep water in public hands – that resonated with political elites and neutralized pro-privatization arguments.

\textsuperscript{18} Research on frames highlights the importance of the political context in which movements emerge and develop and where the negotiation and transformation of collective action frames occurs. Mario Diani’s (1996) research on regional populism in Italy, for example, investigates the connection between political opportunity structures and frame construction. By examining how frames are linked to political opportunity structures, Diani demonstrates how social movements that frame their grievances in such a way as to resonate with the opportunity structures in question are more effective in their outcomes (1996). He argues that different political opportunity structures are favourable to distinct frames, and that groups who frame their goals and strategies in a way that is most consistent with the opportunity structure available to them, increase the likelihood that their outcomes will be successful (Diani 1996).

\textsuperscript{19} Cress and Snow (2000) argue that differences in diagnostic and prognostic frames are as critical to explaining variation in movement outcomes as differences across political opportunities, resources and networks. The presence of well-articulated diagnostic frames helps movements define the problem in such a way as to identify key targets and construct clear prognostic frames that point to specific remedies to the problem. Well-defined and strategic diagnostic and prognostic frames then shape the attainment of movement goals (Cress and Snow 2000).
In Stockton, on the other hand, the movement failed to negotiate and present clearly defined and well-articulated diagnostic and prognostic frames, instead focusing on complex and divisive issues of political corruption, democracy and voter rights. The organizational culture and historic movement focus on local political disputes shifted attention away from the global problem of water privatization, emphasizing the schism between movement actors and political authorities, and thus failing to neutralize pro-privatization frames. As a result, the legitimacy of the movement’s claims was rejected by decision-makers, constraining their ability to influence the city council’s decision on privatization.\(^{20}\)

Differences in the integration of transnational concerns into claims-making processes across the two movements highlights the importance of global frames and global connectors to local movements implicated in transnational flows of capital, institutions and trade regulations.\(^{21}\) The findings also suggest that the use of frames that take into account the changing nature of social and environmental risk and institutional power – from local or nation-specific contexts to the transnational realm – are more likely to be favourable in opening up political opportunities than those that focus uniquely on local issues and grievances.\(^{22}\) Because anti-water privatization

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\(^{20}\) Gamson’s (1990) study of 53 social movement organizations across the United States examined the success or failure of these movements in terms of goal attainment. He found that movement outcomes were more likely to be positive when the arguments by the organization leading the challenge were considered legitimate by authorities and representative of a broad spectrum of society.

\(^{21}\) Fiss and Hirsch (2005) argue that frames that incorporate global issues are on the rise amongst social movements in the United States with increased internationalism of the economy, but that the extent that global frames are adopted by domestic movements depends on the interests of the social movement actors.

\(^{22}\) Keck and Sikkink (1998) refer to the use of global frames by transnational movements as symbolic globalization, arguing that transnational advocacy networks draw upon symbolic politics of globalization to create new political opportunities. Other research on social justice movements focuses on local movements’ use of symbolic leverage to widen their support. For example, Chun’s research comparing low-wage service sector workers’ movements in the United States and South Korea demonstrates how labour movements use frames as symbolic resources to leverage support for their cause. Chun’s research with union activists reveals that the framing strategies utilized by the workers connect regional labour disputes to broader frames of global social justice, resulting in the formation of networks and the symbolic leverage needed to achieve their goals (Chun 2009).
movements are connected to wider global processes, including multinational corporate policies and transnational financial institutions, local activists who incorporate global frames into their repertoires of contention can potentially mobilize a wider pool of supporters and present arguments that resonate with political authorities. By targeting global economic structures and institutions, activists create opportunities for shaping policies on local resources and services.

In Vancouver, the use of global narratives facilitated mobilization and opened up new opportunities at the political level for grievances to be heard. By framing water privatization in a global context – including the track record of multinational water corporations and the risks to local accountability from international trade agreements – the movement was able to both mobilize large numbers of people as well as raise awareness of potential risks of privatization with the decision-making body. The focus on global problems drew blame away from the local politicians and provided them with an ‘escape route’ to reverse their decision without reflecting negatively on themselves. At the same time, in Stockton, movement frames remained focused on local issues centered on voter rights and the democratic accountability of the municipal government. Drawing attention to domestic political grievances exposed the schism between activists and authorities and worked to alienate decision-makers.

While global frames are important for local movements implicated in global processes, local context also matters for the strength and durability of these movements because individuals are motivated by issues that have direct resonance in their daily lives. The resonance of global frames for local movements is contingent upon the presence of locally-embedded activists whose
networks, collective identities and shared understandings are connected to wider global struggles, and who are able to bring global issues down to the local level.23

Linking the problem of water privatization to global risk frames is strategically important for local anti-water privatization movements because they move the struggle beyond the conflict between local activists and political elites and into the international arena, revealing the serious threats from institutions beyond the control of locally elected officials. Drawing attention to global risks creates local leverage to legitimize movement claims and bring together social movement actors with decision-makers. Frames that connect the local to the global are more readily received by domestic political power structures because they illuminate the threat to local control and accountability as well as create the sense of solidarity between local citizens and their governments in the face of global risks and power structures. By introducing and emphasizing a new angle – global risks and transnational power structures – local social movement actors can create new opportunities at the institutional level and increase their ability to shape policies around resources and services.

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23 In his research on transnational activism, Tarrow (2005b) argues that transnational activists are not disconnected from domestic structures and processes, but rather are “rooted cosmopolitans” who are active in local civil society (Tarrow 2005b).
Chapter 6: Anti-Water Privatization Movements and the Political Process: Seizing Local and Global Opportunities

“There are so many reasons why water issues need to be part of a global movement and a local movement. The water issue is not playing out the same in every place, and everyone has got their different realities, but I think as water becomes more scarce, it’s going to become a massive issue on a globalization level. The whole question of sustainability becomes a global question around how are we managing water resources and who actually is in need. And we’ve signed these silly trade agreements, but even beyond that, in addition to not signing onto things like NAFTA, I think we actually should be proactive about setting in place policies and things that support the notion that actually our water is ours to protect, and keep under democratic control. We definitely pointed to that global connection and the fact that as demand increases, there will be more and more pressure for someone to make a profit from selling water. People were really fired up about that, and they knew how to disrupt those meetings and really make it an unfriendly environment for the GVRD crew.”

- Fiona Rogers, community activist, Vancouver

“Why did they fail? That’s a good question. Well I know there was some strategic decisions made in Stockton where there was some options on campaign strategy which would probably made a difference in terms of overturning the vote on privatization. I know that specifically there was a big controversy whether or not to hire petition gatherers. Some people felt that they needed to do everything grassroots, with volunteers. They thought it would make them seem better than the mayor, who was really underhanded in his tricks. But in the end they didn’t get enough signatures for the referendum. This was after the city council had voted in favour of privatization. They went out and gathered the petition drive to have that decision actually voted on by the entire voting base of Stockton, and they fell short because they decided not to hire petition gatherers. I think it might have made a difference between getting enough signatures or not and they did not. Prior to that, why did the council vote in favour? You know, in short, the crude answer is they didn’t build enough power. They simply didn’t demonstrate enough opposition to the contract.”

- Craig Butler, community organizer, Stockton

One of the most prominent questions studied by social movement scholars in the past thirty years is: How does political context affect mobilization? The previous chapter discussed the divergent frames utilized by the movements in Vancouver and Stockton, despite facing similar threats and shared values around the importance of water as a public resource. This
chapter focuses on the role of political opportunity structures in shaping the diverse trajectories of the two movements and demonstrates that beyond cognitive strategies such as frames, movement building is dependent on the conditions of the broader political context. Despite facing a similar overarching context – the proposed privatization of local water treatment and delivery systems – the movements in Vancouver and Stockton emerged and responded differently. In order to explain the divergence between the movements, I describe differences in political-institutional structures and context across three levels: the degree of institutional openness, the effect of pre-existing movements on political structures, and the seizing of opportunities and targets by movement activists.

In Vancouver, greater institutional access, enabled in part by the decentralized decision making structure of the Greater Vancouver Regional District, provided openings for movement actors to contest the proposal for privatization and created cleavages between political elites. Further, pre-existing movements in Vancouver, particularly those focused on watershed issues, opened up political spaces for public deliberation and fostered early political alliances. The intertwining of global and local opportunities, on the part of activists in Vancouver, created new political openings that allowed anti-water privatization activists to influence policy around the outsourcing of water resources and services. In Stockton, on the other hand, the closed nature of local political structures constrained the movement’s ability to access elites and influence policies around water services. In addition, a lack of experience targeting local political structures on the part of movement activists, combined with the downplaying of international threats further constrained the movement’s ability to shape political decision-making. Yet while the movement in Stockton failed to block the privatization of their water treatment plant, legal challenges ultimately overturned the private contract and returned control of water services to the
public sector, demonstrating that greater attention should be paid to the role of legal opportunities in shaping social movement outcomes.

In this chapter, I discuss the role of political context in shaping the divergent outcomes of the anti-privatization movements in Vancouver and Stockton. The findings challenge current conceptions of political process by demonstrating the importance of the interplay between political opportunities and the actions of social movement actors, as well as the role of multi-level opportunity structures, at the local level and – beyond the nation state – at the global-level and how they influence the dynamics of domestic movements.

**Political Opportunities: The External Conditions of Mobilization**

Understanding political opportunity structures, including access to institutions and elites is critically important for explaining how and why movements emerge in response to particular external conditions. Changes in political opportunities or constraints provide incentives – most often in the form of grievances – for new episodes of collective action and shape the mobilization and development of social movements (della Porta 1995, Tarrow 1998, McAdam et al. 2001). Factors – including the degree of openness of the polity, the presence of political allies, divisions within elites, and the degree of tolerance for protest – influence the strategies of activists, advantaging some over others (McAdam 1996, Tarrow 1998). From the political opportunity perspective, the choices and tactics of movement actors – including alliances and framing strategies – cannot be understood without examining the political context in which these choices are made (Tarrow 1998, Meyer 2004).¹

¹ There has been considerable debate surrounding the concept of political opportunity, including how it is defined (Gamson and Meyer 1996, McAdam 1996), how it is distinguished from other mechanisms of contention (McAdam 1996, Tarrow 1998) and the interaction between the polity and activists (Goldstone and Tilly 2001, Jenkins et al. 2003). In this study I follow Goldstone and Tilly’s (2001:182) definition of political opportunities as “the
While changes at the political institutional level are key to providing opportunities for movements to mobilize, the way in which movements respond to opportunities in order create new institutional openings (including mobilizing networks and constructing frames) as well as the role of pre-existing movements for creating opportunities for future movement success are also critically important.\(^2\) The findings of my research demonstrate that political opportunities must be considered as a dynamic interplay between opportunity structures and movement actors, taking into consideration the importance of activists’ agency and strategic choices, the role of pre-existing movements for creating opportunities for future claims-making, and the need for political opportunities to be considered not just in relation to movement emergence, but also to movement outcomes.\(^3\)

Further, the state-centered focus of the traditional political process model ignores the growing and important role of transnational structures and processes – including an examination of the interplay between domestic and international political opportunity structures (see Meyer 2003, Kay 2005 and Josselin 2007), and the role of the broader political economy (see Pellow 2007 and Schurman and Munro 2009) – in either constraining or creating opportunities for domestic movements to emerge, develop and achieve success. Recent research demonstrates that in an increasingly globalized world, social movements are shifting targets and responding to

\(^2\) The role of networks is discussed in Chapter 5, and the importance of frames is examined in Chapter 7.

\(^3\) See Amenta et al. 1992, Giugni 1998, McCammon et al. 2001, McAdam et al. 2001 and Meyer 2004, for a discussion of the importance of examining the relationship between political opportunities and outcomes.
opportunities and institutions both above the nation state and outside of institutionalized politics, including transnational global processes and structures (Meyer 2003, della Porta and Tarrow 2005, Dryzek 2006, Castells 2007), economic institutions and corporations (Pellow 2001, Walker et al. 2008, Schurman and Munro 2009), or social dynamics such as race, class or gender (Pellow 2007, McCammon et al. 2001). Focusing solely on national level political opportunities also neglects the importance of local political opportunities and structures in shaping local grassroots movements, which operate differently than movements that target the nation state (Bridge and McManus 2000, Diani 2005, Fisher 2007), including the interplay between activists and political elites and international and local opportunities.

**International Opportunity Structures**

Research on globalization demonstrates that the traditional power of the state to shape social policy is undermined by global economic integration and the power of international financial institutions, and points to the growing need for countermovements to bypass state targets and direct grievances to international sites of power (Evans 1995; 2008, Kay 2005, Castells 2007, Pellow 2007). Many scholars argue that globalization diminishes the authoritative power of states to regulate and control resources within their boundaries and make decisions on behalf of its citizens (Dryzek 2006, Pellow 2007). At the same time local political opportunities are constrained by global processes because they are embedded in wider structures and institutions at the national and international levels (Peck and Tickell 2002, Meyer 2004, Josselin 2007). What are the implications of the state’s diminished capacity and legitimacy in regulating environmental protection in the face of increased economic deregulation? How are movements responding to this shift in power from the state to non-state institutions such as corporations and
international financial bodies? How do local movements, including anti-water privatization movements, disrupt flows of neoliberal corporate power by seizing international opportunities and reconstituting them in ways that resonate with domestic political opportunity structures?

I argue that because anti-water privatization movements are influenced by processes occurring at multiple spatial levels – including the local, national and international political economy – they should be analysed differently than the “movement versus the state” framework of traditional political process models. While political institutions play a definitive role in shaping anti-water privatization movements – through their decision-making power around infrastructure and because they are targeted by movement actors – there is a wider context outside of the domestic political process that needs to be addressed, including the power of multinational corporations and global economic institutions, which act as a counterforce to domestic political power and thus are increasingly the target of local social movements. The findings demonstrate that movements that seize both local and international opportunities and target their grievances accordingly are more likely to be successful in their outcomes. By drawing attention to international constraints on the decision-making and regulatory capacity of municipal governments, anti-water privatization activists open up opportunities for grievances to be considered.

National Context: Canada-United States Divergence and Convergence

While I argue that opportunity structures above and below the level of the nation-state are important for shaping anti-water privatization movements, the national level context also matters for explaining the emergence and trajectories of the movements in Vancouver and Stockton. Although Canada and the United States share many similarities in terms of economic organization, educational attainment and standard of living (Card and Freeman 1993), they are
characterized by important political, social and cultural differences that have shaped their
divergent trajectories in terms of worldviews and social policies (Adams 2003, Bloemraad 2006,
Zuberi 2006). For example, while the Canadian government is more interventionist in terms of
social and labour market policies, the United States relies more on unrestricted market forces
(Thomas 2008). Lipset (1990) argues that this divergence is shaped by differences in values
between the populations of the two countries around the role and authority of the state. Policy-
making in the United States, according to Lipset (1990), is shaped by overarching social and
cultural values, including an emphasis on individual freedom and responsibility, a general
tolerance for disparities in wealth, income and well-being and a belief in small government.
These values have resulted in a less interventionist government than its counterpart in Canada.
Michael Adams (2003) also focuses on Canada-U.S. value differences as shaping the diverse
economic and social trajectories of the two countries. His cross-national survey research reveals
significant differences in social values and worldviews between Canadians and Americans, with
Americans consistently articulating a more conservative stance in terms of values around gender,
religion, patriarchy, and immigration.

It would be reasonable to assume that these national institutional and value differences
might explain the divergent movement building trajectories and outcomes between the anti-water
privatization movements in Vancouver and Stockton, particularly the willingness of the regional
government in Vancouver to protect public sector services. Yet some evidence suggests that
subnational and global level factors are more important for explaining differences between these
cases. For example, while the movement in Vancouver was successful at preventing water
privatization, other communities in Canada, including Hamilton, Ontario and Moncton, New
Brunswick have failed to block the outsourcing of public water services through mobilization

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(Barlow and Clarke 2002). At the same time, social movement mobilization has successfully prevented the privatization of municipal water services in several U.S. cities, including in New Orleans, Louisiana and Felton, California (Snitow and Kaufman 2007). In both countries, decisions about the regulation and control of water resources are made at the municipal rather than national level. And while Canada-U.S. value differences are not insignificant, when it comes to values around water, Canadians and Americans share very similar beliefs in the importance of public sector delivery of water services. Recent polls in Canada and the United States reveal that the vast majority of people in both countries believe in the importance of public investments in water services. Given these similarities, national level differences appear to be insufficient for explaining differences between the movements in Vancouver and Stockton and may only have an indirect effect on mobilization trajectories and outcomes.

Despite differences in social and economic policies between Canada and the United States, the two countries have experienced political and economic convergence over the last thirty years, including the spread of neoliberal reforms and the entrenchment of market capitalism (Thomas 2008). The signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has also accelerated economic integration between the two countries (Hakim and Litan 2002). These national level dynamics have important implications for how subnational governments and local social movements have responded to increased economic globalization.

In Vancouver, the decision to consider outsourcing water services was shaped by a broader national context of neoliberal policy reform. A shift toward neoconservatism in Canada

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4 A 2005 national poll in the United States showed that 86 percent of Americans support the creation of a public trust for water (Lunz Research Companies 2005). In Canada, a 2004 Ipsos Reid poll commissioned by the Council of Canadians found that 75 per cent of Canadians support public over private sector investment in water infrastructure (Council of Canadians 2004).
began in the 1980s and rose to prominence in the 1990s, when the governing Liberal Party focused on reforming the traditional role of government as the provider of services by engaging in a program of deregulation, tax cuts and disinvestment in public services (Clarke 2002). These market-based reforms set the stage for increased private sector involvement in public service provision, including water treatment and delivery (Barlow and Clarke 2003, Bakker 2007). The internationalization of financial capital and the negotiation and implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) also created the conditions for the increased privatization of services by emphasizing economic deregulation and removing barriers to foreign investment in Canada (Carroll 1993). Further, with the growth of multinational water companies, cash-strapped municipalities in Canada are increasingly targeted by global water firms seeking to invest in lucrative water infrastructure projects (Clarke 2003, Bakker 2007). This wider national and international context not only transformed the political economy of the federal and provincial governments, but also led to new orderings at the municipal level, including the embrace of market reforms and the adoption of a business model by local governments (Keil 2002).

At the same time, in the United States, federal disinvestment in public infrastructure and services has had an enormous impact at the local level where municipalities are forced to grapple with fewer resources to pay for critical infrastructure upgrades, including water and sewage works (Snitow and Kaufman 2007). This fiscal restraint combined with a neoconservative politics created the conditions for municipal governments to embrace market-reforms at the local level (Thomas 2008). The entrenchment of neoliberal policies in the United States that began in the 1970’s and expanded rapidly throughout the 1980’s and 1990’s under both Republican and Democrat administrations also provided openings for the involvement of the private sector in the
delivery of public services, including the expansion of private-public partnerships at the municipal level (Moulton and Anheim 2000). Multinational water companies have capitalized on these market reforms by lobbying local governments for private infrastructure contracts for drinking water and sewage treatment services. This broader national and local conservative agenda set the stage for the proposal to outsource water treatment in Stockton.

While the national political economic context in Canada and the United States is important for understanding why and how people mobilize against water privatization, it is important not to downplay other levels of governance – including the sub-national and international political context – and how they shape differences in mobilization patterns across contexts. Examining the role of multi-level political structures – beyond the nation state – is particularly important for understanding anti-water privatization movements because they are shaped by the interconnections between local and global opportunity structures. Variation in local context is critical for explaining social movement mobilization to protect water resources because water is a geographically-bounded resource and local and regional governments are responsible for the regulation and control of water. Yet, with the expansion of water privatization globally, local water systems and services are increasingly influenced by the actions of global institutions, including multinational water firms who bypass the nation-state to directly target

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5 The expansion of private sector investment in public service delivery was also enabled by changes in the federal tax code in 1997 under the Clinton Administration. These tax code changes allowed cities to utilize tax-exempt bonds for infrastructure projects financed by the private sector. These new regulations also extended the limit of municipal utility contracts from five years to twenty years, creating a further incentive for private sector involvement in water services (Snitow and Kaufman 2007).

6 Private water firms, including major multinational water companies, regularly attend the yearly Conference of Mayors in the United States where they meet with municipal officials to bid for infrastructure contracts, including water services (Snitow and Kaufman 2007).
municipal governments.\textsuperscript{7} Thus, anti-water privatization movements are more likely to target both local and global opportunity structures over national level political structures.\textsuperscript{8} While national level differences should not be dismissed as irrelevant, the evidence from the Vancouver and Stockton cases, including the interviews and document analysis, points to the critical importance of local political context for shaping the mobilization trajectories and outcomes of anti-water privatization movements.

\textit{Vancouver and Stockton: Comparing Opportunities and Outcomes}

A comparative analysis of the anti-water privatization movements in Vancouver and Stockton reveals differences in political conditions across three levels, including variation in institutional access, the effect of pre-existing movements and the seizing of opportunities and targets by movement actors. First, differences between the two movements are explained by the degree of institutional openness, with the political structures in Vancouver providing favourable access to institutions and authorities, in contrast to Stockton’s more closed institutional structures, which constrained the movement’s ability to have their claims considered. Second, pre-existing movements in Vancouver created alliances with elites who linked activists with decision-making bodies. In Stockton, pre-existing movements targeted state or national political structures and thus critical alliances between local government authorities and anti-water privatization activists were minimal. Finally, differences in mobilization patterns and outcomes

\textsuperscript{7} Recent research on neoliberal governance at the local level points to the decreasing importance of national level politics and the rising importance of both subnational governance and global institutions (MacKinnon 2001, Hackworth 2007). Hackworth (2007: 43) argues that with the shifting of regulatory and financial responsibility for services from national governments to local institutions, local governments “have been thrust into the position of determining exactly how to address, contest, or embrace larger shifts in the global economy.”

\textsuperscript{8} Pellow (2007) argues that movements choose targets that will provide them with the greatest chance of success. Anti-water privatization movements target local political structures because they are more accessible to movement actors and thus are more likely to provide openings for movements to make their claims.
are also explained by the ways in which movement actors seized opportunities, including the merging of international and local opportunities as well as the strategic choice of tactics. The findings demonstrate that beyond the structural conditions of the polity, the actions of social movement actors matter to movement mobilization and outcomes, including the seizing of multi-level opportunities.

Vancouver

In 1999, the Greater Vancouver Regional District made the decision to explore a private sector model for treating and delivering water to the region. Faced with expensive and critical water infrastructure upgrades to meet new provincial drinking water standards, including the construction of a new $150 million treatment plant, and in an era of declining government investment in public services, the GVRD Board opted to contract with a private firm to design, build and operate the new water filtration plant in North Vancouver. At the time of proposed water privatization in the Greater Vancouver region, the GVRD Board was dominated by politicians from right-of-center parties in the region who favoured the privatization approach. Faced with the high cost for the construction of the new water filtration plant in a climate of government fiscal restraint, the GVRD Board decided to outsource the treatment and delivery of drinking water to a private sector firm.

The critical decision by the GVRD Board to privatize the Seymour Water Filtration Plant and contract-out water service delivery provided the opportunity for a coalition of anti-water privatization activists, political leaders and organizations to mobilize against water privatization. Many of the activists and opponents to privatization felt that what they described as the ideological beliefs of some GVRD representatives – specifically the idea that the private sector is
more economical and efficient at delivering services than governments – motivated the GVRD Board proposal to privatize water services.

Mark Spencer, an elected representative in the Greater Vancouver region, felt that the decision to privatize water services was linked to what he perceived to be the ideological beliefs of some of the politicians serving on the board of the GVRD. He has been involved in politics in the Greater Vancouver region for over twenty years, and has twice served as a municipal representative on the board of the Greater Vancouver Regional District. At the time of the GVRD proposal to privatize the filtration plant, he had recently been reappointed to the board and was shocked to hear that discussions about outsourcing the region’s water services had been ongoing since 1996. Although he was dismayed by the initial decision to consider outsourcing water treatment and delivery in the region, he was not surprised that the GVRD board members were supportive of privatization because he viewed the majority of the board as ideologically right of centre. He explained,

In essence, the right wing pretty much had a chokehold on the GVRD government and it was clearly their agenda to include a P3 [public private partnership] project if possible at all. It is like a religion to them. I think they view this much like Catholics view edicts from the Pope. It doesn’t have to make sense. You have to believe. And for people who claim to be logical and objective, when you see them so ideologically committed to a concept, they can’t stand back and examine whether it has worked in Britain or elsewhere or hasn’t worked. So anybody who tells you that it was about pragmatics is misleading you on the issue because for the people on the right, it was purely a belief that the private sector does everything better. And their refusal to see otherwise made a lot of people angry.

Mark Spencer described the unwillingness on the part of some of the GVRD Board members to examine the pros and cons of water privatization as a mobilizing force for anti-water privatization activists. He felt strongly that because privatization is an ideological issue for politicians representing both the right and left of the political spectrum, the decision to privatize water services in the region should not be decided by “a few bureaucrats and politicians”, but
should include input from the public. Mark Spencer utilized his role on the GVRD Board to mobilize the opposition movement and counter the pro-privatization arguments.

Despite the pro-privatization position of many GVRD representatives, the movement in Vancouver was able to overcome these constraints and create openings for their grievances to be heard. One reason for this success is the efforts on part of activists to form alliances with elites. Anti-water privatization activists in Vancouver strategically targeted elected politicians in municipalities across the GVRD, whom they felt would support their claims. Jim Roberts, president of the BCPSEU, the union at the centre of the anti-water privatization movement, and one of the key leaders of the coalition, described how the movement specifically sought the support of councillors throughout the Greater Vancouver region whom they felt would bolster their chances of success. He said,

Well, one of the things we did was to target politicians at the GVRD level. We felt there were many progressive councillors who could speak out at that level and make a difference. And many of them supported us...We had some councillors who were actually coming out publically and saying that we need to re-think this. That worked hugely in our favour. Because of that, the GVRD started to take another look at what they were proposing. At the very least, they began to consider the views of the people.

Jim Roberts’ response reveals the importance of establishing ties with elites for creating openings for movement claims to be considered. As part of his union organizing work, he frequently seeks support from sympathetic elected representatives, and explained that, in his opinion, campaigns targeted at influencing public policy are rarely successful without this critical support from political authorities. The strategic alliances between anti-water privatization activists and elites in the GVRD allowed the movement’s claims to be represented at the decision making level. These alliances also created cleavages between authorities, with some aligning themselves with the movement opposing water privatization, while others remained entrenched
in a pro-privatization position. Pre-existing network ties between social movement actors and alliances within decision making circles facilitated the movement’s ability to generate support from political leaders.

In Vancouver, the targeting of political elites and the creation of alliances with authorities was facilitated by the involvement of activists who were trained in advocacy work as well as the presence of both activists and politicians with previous ties to environmental, social justice and labour organizations that formed the anti-water privatization coalition. Sherry Carruthers, a youth activist, explained how many of the people who were involved in the movement to stop water privatization in Vancouver had been trained in how to target and build relationships with politicians. During the campaign to stop water privatization, she had been working with the Centre for Global Justice, an organization that trains youth to become leaders in their communities and globally, on campaigns designed to mobilize youth and provide them with the organizing and communication skills necessary to lead successful campaigns. As a 22-year-old, Sherry Carruthers said she felt nervous to confront politicians, yet at the same time, felt prepared for these meeting because of her previous training in advocacy and organizing. She described how many of the youth activists involved in the movement had gained advocacy skills from previous anti-globalization campaigns and involvement in other movements for social change that specifically targeted local politicians. She said,

[Centre for Global Justice] was really involved with advocacy work. Those of us involved

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9 Research on political opportunities demonstrates the importance of establishing alliances with elites for opening up opportunities for favourable movement outcomes. Such linkages create cleavages within political structures that allow for movements to gain leverage at the institutional level (McAdam et al. 2001 and Tilly and Tarrow 2007).

10 Research on the role of pre-existing movements demonstrates that prior mobilization facilitates opportunities for future action by creating openings at the political level, fostering alliances with elites, establishing organizational networks, altering beliefs and fostering material resources for action (Oliver 1989, Tarrow 1998, Staggenborg and Lecomte 2009).
weren’t scared at all, even though we were a youth group, with making connections and schmoozing and charming politicians at any level. A lot of the people involved had been involved with other campaigns, against the MAI in 1998 and the protest in Seattle in 1999. And young people had been trained, certainly by the labour movement and the environmental movement about how to go about grassroots organizing. And so we were quite adept at lobbying, at finding people to connect with at provincial and municipal levels.

Formal training and previous experiences targeting politicians facilitated the connection and support with elites used by respondents in Vancouver to bolster their cause. Activists lobbied city councillors, attended meetings of public officials, and sent information packages to elected officials in the Greater Vancouver Regional District.

Along with prior advocacy training, the political openings and pre-existing ties with authorities created by previous movements also facilitated public input on water privatization in Vancouver. In particular, prior movements focused on watershed protection had become institutionalized after decades of protest and advocacy by environmentalists. Many respondents described being involved in the decade long effort to stop logging in the North Shore watersheds and explained that as a result of activism on this issue, the GVRD water board created a permanent public representative position on the water committee, allowing input from citizens groups on policies around water services and watershed protection.

Jennifer Brown, one of the leaders of the coalition against water privatization, is an environmental activist and chair of the organization Conservation Now, a local conservation group. She worked for over 10 years to establish a ban on logging in the region’s watersheds, in order to protect drinking water quality. As part of her advocacy work, she was instrumental in convincing the GVRD water board to create a position on the water committee for an informed member of the public, to allow input from environmentalists and concerned citizens. Jennifer Brown was the first person appointed as citizen representative on the GVRD water committee.
She explained the importance of the relationships between movement organizations and government officials who oversee the delivery of water services to the region, forged out of previous movement focused on watershed protection. She described how these key alliances facilitated openings for the anti-water privatization movement to block water privatization. She said,

Winning the privatization fight had a lot to do with the fact that we had had our previous wins, and we knew the players and they knew us and when they saw us coming they realized they had to sit up and take notice otherwise it would become a controversial issue that might lose them votes... Because of what we had done previously, the water committee was really sensitized. It was a really short battle. And it helped us get people involved too, because they knew who we were and trusted us and so were motivated to come out to the meetings. And certainly the fact that when they did do the public consultations and there was such a huge number of people showing up, that helped. When they saw the public coming they just changed. They really backed off.

Previous movements created the networks and mobilized public needed to respond to opportunities as well as the established alliances with elites that facilitated the openings for movement success.\footnote{Research on pre-existing movement structures demonstrates that a history of social movement activity can create a permanent “subculture” of activism within communities that bolsters the confidence of social movement actors through network ties and organizational resources and enhances their ability to recognize and seize political opportunities (Tarrow 1998, Meyer 2003). For example, Staggenborg and Lecomte’s (2009) research on the Montreal Women’s Movement argues that prior movement activity creates what they call social movement communities, which in turn provide the networks, frames, organizational resources, leadership and mobilized public that allow movements to remain politicized, respond to opportunities and launch new campaigns. In the context of globalization, Ancelovici argues that “the opposition to globalization cannot be reduced to a structural side effect or a spontaneous countermovement. It is the result of a political and cultural process conditioned by previous contentious episodes and struggles.” (2002: 429).}

Beyond advocacy training, the presence of key allies within political institutional settings was critical for the movement’s ability to have their claims considered within the decision-making arena. Mike O’Brian, a national water campaigner for the Citizens Action Network, one of the main organizations of the anti-water privatization coalition, explained that the presence of supportive elected city councillors and mayors, as well as the involvement
of leaders with close ties to municipal civil servants with decision making power, strengthened the movement. He said,

And other people who were leaders in the movement, like [Peter Clark] and people from COPE\textsuperscript{12}, were very connected. And so this wasn’t an outside movement. It had a lot of connections on the inside. It was not entirely outside pressure. It was building the public opposition and then having friends inside to do the inside work, using the public opposition. That was a big part of it.

The presence of key allies within municipal political structures ensured that the anti-water privatization activists were not merely seen as external agitators, while also serving to enhance the legitimacy of the movement’s claims within decision-making circles.

While pre-existing ties between activists and political leaders were important for strengthening the movement’s leverage within the system, the campaign also gained legitimacy by strategically targeting political elites who were not previously considered allies. Frank Dooley, one of the leaders of the anti-water privatization movement, explained that the members of the coalition felt it was important to seek support from city councillors who did not traditionally support the causes of the “left leaning” organizations involved in the movement. He described how the movement considered the support of Vancouver city council members to be of critical importance for securing a positive outcome for the movement. “The support from councillors from Vancouver ended up being really important”, he explained, adding that despite the pro-business stance of the Vancouver City Council, they were seen as “more attentive to community and environmental concerns” as well as “the power brokers of the region.”

During the campaign to stop privatization, Frank Dooley worked closely with the

\textsuperscript{12} The Coalition of Progressive Electors (COPE) is a left-of-centre Vancouver-based municipal party with elected representatives on city council at the time of the anti-water privatization fight. Many of the members of the anti-water privatization movement were also members of COPE, with connections to party insiders and elected officials (www.cope.bc.ca accessed October 10, 2009).

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Citizens Action League (CAL), a national-based social justice organization with local chapters across the region. Because of his involvement with a local chapter of CAL, he felt he was not in a position to convince more conservative politicians to consider the movement’s claims; he worried that his efforts would be dismissed. He chronicled how some of the leaders of the anti-water privatization coalition decided it would be more strategic to solicit the support of someone who was considered an outsider to the social movement organizations that made up the coalition. Several of the leaders, including Frank Dooley, approached Penny Blythe, an independent researcher who was seen as being “an objective outsider.” The coalition members felt that this strategy would be more effective in getting conservative politicians to listen to the concerns about water privatization and local control of resources, particularly in the context of international trade agreements, including NAFTA. He describes the movement’s efforts to work with those generally considered to oppose the issues supported by the left, including Hugh Thompson, a pro-business member of the right-of-centre party in Vancouver. He said,

Hugh Thompson was a really interesting character. In some ways he was probably the most right wing pro-business councillor on Vancouver City Council, but he was his own man. No one could tell Hugh what to think... We knew that if we could get him to read this stuff, that he would see it. And he read it, and he said that, “This is not good, this is a mistake.” And the thing about Hugh was that if you could convince him, everyone else on council fell in behind him. It was like Nixon recognizing China. Because he is a Republican, they figured he is obviously not selling us out because his Republican credentials are solid. It was the same with Hugh. I mean here is a guy whose business credentials are impeccable, his judgement unquestionable and who is the hardest working pro-business councillor on council and so if he says this is bad, it must be bad. Once he got on board, the movement really gained momentum. That was the turning of the tide in our favour.

Targeting pro-business councillors, especially key political leaders from Vancouver, was pivotal in on the part of the Vancouver movement in moderating the anti-water privatization claims and strengthening the movement’s leverage within the institutional structures of the
Many activists in Vancouver also described the decentralized structure of the GVRD as an important factor in creating openings for the movement to voice their concerns.\(^{13}\) Despite the pro-privatization stance of some of the GVRD Board members, respondents described the political culture in the region as flexible because of the dispersed nature of the decision-making power. Because the voting members of the GVRD Board are elected representatives from municipalities across the region and depend on the support of their local constituents for re-election, they tend to represent the interests of these constituents over the political views of the individual members of the GVRD Board. Many respondents pointed to the decentralized representative structure of the GVRD Board for facilitating a more neutral position towards water privatization on the part of many of the directors.

The decentralized structure of the GVRD was a particularly salient factor in the face of widespread and organized opposition from the public. The mobilization efforts, combined with the structural openings at institutional level, were critical for allowing the movement to influence decision making. Peter Clark, one of the main leaders of the anti-water privatization movement, who is a past employee of the GVRD and former president of a local environmental organization, City Green, told me that the GVRD representatives were more vulnerable to mobilization because they understood that their political power lies with their local electoral base rather than through their position at as directors of the regional district. He described how

\(^{13}\) The Greater Vancouver Regional District is comprised of 22 municipalities and one electoral district. It has three main governing roles in the region; the delivery of service – including the provision of drinking water, the treatment of sewage and the management of solid waste – overseeing planning and providing political leadership. The GVRD Board is made up of 37 Directors, elected representatives from the member municipalities who are appointed by their respective city councils. In 2008 the name of the GVRD was changed to Metro Vancouver. (from http://www.metrovancouver.org/about/Pages/faqs.aspx accessed October 5, 2009)
mobilizing public pressure targeted at individual councillors serving as representatives of the GVRD was important for allowing public input on water privatization. He said,

When you’ve got a diversity of local politicians whose base is really not regional, but local, and you have a local push back on those politicians, they all of a sudden say, “What am I doing here? Why am I putting myself in jeopardy in my local constituency for something that I don’t feel comfortable with. I know the math of this. This is not a good deal.” I think the GVRD was more vulnerable to public mobilization than the provincial or federal governments are. They were not as ideologically committed and they are more beholden to their voters. They weren’t prepared to ride it out because they didn’t see it as being important enough.

He argued that the structure of the GVRD made it more vulnerable to mobilization and provided greater opportunities for activists to influence the representatives that sat on the decision-making board. He went on to describe the passionate intensity of the crowds of people who attended the public consultation sessions and the anger they targeted towards GVRD Board members.

I just remember that meeting with over 600 people. And it was actually more because there were people outside who couldn’t even get into the hall. [The Chair of the Water Board] looked terrified. People were so angry. This was not an information meeting. This was a “We are going to lynch you if you do this” kind of meeting, and so that was what was interesting. I mean I’ve been involved in lots of issues where you have an information meeting and people come out and they are very polite, very Canadian, and they go home and think about it. Well, let me tell you, they had already thought about it. This was, “Don’t even think about going there.”

Targeting municipal councillors through organized mobilization forced local politicians to pay attention to the voice of their constituents and weakened their initial commitment to support the GVRD Board’s proposal to privatize water services.

Many respondents in Vancouver echoed Peter Clark’s sentiment about the importance of widespread mobilization and organized opposition. Jane Poole, a 45-year-old mother of two teenaged children, environmental activist and locally elected official at the time of proposed privatization plans, attended the public consultation sessions organized by the GVRD Water
Committee in the spring of 2001. She articulated her serious concerns about outsourcing water to a private company, fearing the negative consequences on the environment and local decision-making power to regulate resources under privatization. She explained that since she was a teenager, she has been active in advocating for policy change at the municipal and regional levels and understands the importance of public input into policy making. After years working with non-governmental organizations, she finally decided to run for local office in her community, where she was twice elected as city councillor and served one term on the GVRD Board.

Jane Poole described how the intense public pressure from local constituents was critical to swaying the opinion of members of the GVRD Board in favour of the movement opposed to water privatization. She said,

The GVRD is more antsy about political pressure than other organizations in the sense that people were looking at it and saying, “Why should I take this shit? What’s in it for me? I don’t think at the end of it I’m really going to save anything and I’m not ideologically committed to this so why piss off all these people for no good reason?” When you get hundreds of people showing up at a meeting, that translates into thousands of people who are pissed off about this and you say to yourself why should I take the heat as a result of it? So I think the GVRD finally backed down due to public pressure and I think the people who already held elective office were thinking that this wasn’t the safest thing to do at the time because it would make them vulnerable during the next election.

The mobilizing efforts on the part of the movement in Vancouver and the attendance of hundreds of protestors at the public consultation sessions was crucial to altering the opinion of political elites. Beyond pre-existing alliances with political elites and the decentralized structure of the GVRD, mobilization efforts on the part of the movement and the presence of hundreds of protesters at the public consultation sessions were pivotal in opening up opportunities for movement success.
The Interplay Between International and Domestic Opportunities

Responses from activists involved in the anti-water privatization movement in Vancouver also reveal the importance of how social movement actors perceive and respond to opportunities, including recognizing and seizing opportunities and targets at multiple institutional levels. While the movement clearly seized local opportunities, including alliances with elites, activists also took advantage of opportunities and targets external to the domestic political arena – including multinational corporations and international trade agreements – to open up new opportunities at local-level. Research on the influence of international opportunity structures on domestic movements demonstrates that demands from the global political economy create new opportunities and constraints for both governments and social movements at the domestic level.\(^{14}\)

In a globalized world, domestic political opportunities, including those at the local or regional level, are increasingly embedded in international institutional structures, creating new orderings of political power and reconstituting how movements resist power (Meyer 2004, Kay 2005, Sassen 2008).

In Vancouver, activists located their critique of water privatization in the dominance of multinational corporations and the power of global financial regulatory institutions, including NAFTA. Many people described their concerns about the negative track record of international water companies in other parts of the world and the profit-driven motive that results in increased rates for water services and a lack of investment in critical infrastructure upgrades and maintenance. Mark Spencer described how the GVRD was under pressure from multinational water companies to outsource water services. He told me that in the years preceding the decision to privatize the water treatment plant, several GVRD board members had been approached by

multinational water corporations at the annual meeting of the Canadian Federation of Municipalities. “Executives from some of the big players in water would be there to meet us and sell us on the idea of P3s”, he told me, adding that, “there were always councillors ready to buy into the scheme.” Mark Spencer explained the role of multinationals in influencing local decisions about infrastructure and service delivery. He said,

The pressure, in essence, comes largely from major multinational companies who come in and want to propose these kinds of schemes. So they started to make their approaches and usually the way they do it is they drag over someone from England. You know, being Canadian we are always impressed with someone with an English accent. It could be the dumbest guy but if you’ve got an English accent, we think you are smart. So it’s got to be a certain kind of English accent. Can’t go with Cockney because we’ve all seen My Fair Lady. It’s got to be a BBC English accent. Plus there are a lot of people out there who recognize that this was a place that they could develop business, so there were a lot of consultant engineers and people like that who suddenly jumped on the bandwagon about privatization. The GVRD was under a lot of pressure to go the privatization route because of the multinational corporate PR machine.

Mark Spencer described how pressure from multinational water companies was instrumental in shaping local decisions about how to treat and deliver water. Leaders in the anti-water privatization movement realized the increasing dominance of global water corporations in influencing local politics and seized on those opportunities to target corporate power structures as well as local political structures.15

Activists articulated their concerns not just about the track record and profit-driven agenda of multinational corporations, but also in the mistrust of local governments and their capacity to regulate and control resources. Sean Becker, a 39-year-old community activist and director of an organization that connects local issues with global concerns around democracy,

15 Ancelovici’s (2002) research on the French anti-globalization organization ATTAC demonstrates that local and national movement organizations increasingly point to the power and dominance of multinational corporations and financial markets and their role in the growing inequality, economic insecurity and race to the bottom both within and between countries.
human rights and the environment, described his lack of faith in municipal governments to safeguard control over resources in the face of multinational corporate power. He said,

At a core level, it was really a mistrust and unease that those who are in the position of making decisions around this were way out of their league in terms of who they were playing with. Some of them I think get excited that they are playing in the big leagues. You know signing contracts with large international corporations and there is a feeling that they are important, when in actuality they are being played. The folks they are playing with, it’s their job to squeeze public players and make us feel good about the fact that we’re getting something out of it. And so there was definitely mistrust that those who were mandated to maintain the resources actually really know what they were talking about.

Drawing attention to the risks of privatization to local political autonomy reflected a general sense of mistrust on the part of anti-water privatization activists in Vancouver about the ability of local governments to regulate corporate power once a public service has been outsourced.

While the movement clearly targeted local political opportunity structures, including forming alliances with elites and engaging local political leaders through the public consultation sessions, activists also targeted economic institutions by focusing on the role of corporations and the consequences of for-profit water delivery. Amanda Jones, a campaigner for Citizens Action League, explained how the movement targeted multinational water corporations in an effort to mobilize public opinion and prevent privatization. The movement focused on the negative track record actions of Bechtel in particular, one of the multinational water companies shortlisted for the private contract in Vancouver. Amanda Jones described how a subsidiary of Bechtel had been awarded the contract for water services in Cochabamba, Bolivia, where dozens of protesters had been injured and one person killed in a mass uprising against the water company and its decision to raise rates and cut off those who could not afford to pay for water. She explained how the anti-water privatization movement highlighted the risks of outsourcing local water services by drawing on this example. She said,
Well they had short-listed a number of large companies that were involved in international water scandals and Bechtel was one of them and the most likely winner of the competition. And I think people really took issue with that and hammered them on it... We said, “the reason that you are looking at contracting these companies is because of their global expertise. Well, what is the other side of that? It is corruption—it’s all of those charges. These companies are involved in killing people who oppose their rainwater being privatized, and you really think that is the best company to run such a precious piece of the public commons?” So we used those arguments to smash their claims that these companies would be good for the local economy and good corporate citizens.

The movement targeted corporate power and seized opportunities from global examples of for-profit water treatment and delivery in order to counter the pro-privatization arguments of some of the GVRD Board members and staff.

Many activists in Vancouver discussed the importance of targeting corporations as well as politicians in order to demonstrate how multinational companies are implicated in decisions that affect local control of resources. Ronald Hudson is an environmental and social justice activist who works with local environmental and community organizations to fight the encroachment of the local economy by multinational corporations. He joined the fight against water privatization because he did not want to see an international company control water in his community. He explained that focusing on corporate power was important for the anti-water privatization movement, both for neutralizing the arguments of elites and mobilizing the broader public to take a stand against privatization. He explained,

I think that it’s a weapon you can use against your targets saying, “You can’t point to every place else in the world and say you were universally accepted with open arms,” as some of these corporations try to do. They say, “Every community wants us in, we bring jobs” and they talk about what wonderful corporate citizens they are. Well, people know differently, and it is good to point out that “Well, why did these people over in Cochabamba kick you out then? Why did you get in that big fight in Atlanta where they said no to you?” If you are so great and you bring such benefits to the community, why are you being kicked out of communities? So that is a very strong argument, but it also naturally motivates people as well to see what happened in other places.
Ronald Hudson points to the importance of targeting corporate structures and using the narrative opportunities provided by the experiences of other communities with multinational water companies for both countering the pro-privatization arguments of local authorities and mobilizing people to join the movement.

While anti-water privatization activists articulated their concerns in the dominance and power of multinational corporations, they also targeted international financial and regulatory institutions that govern trade in goods and services between countries and protect foreign investment. The movement was concerned that the regulations under NAFTA would prevent the regional government from regulating and protecting water resources in order to protect a foreign company that operated the water system. Sandra Gibson, a 48-year-old office manager for the regional office of the Citizens Action League, described how the movement commissioned a legal opinion on the ramifications of privatizing water under NAFTA to challenge the arguments of the GVRD officials and convince them to support their cause. She said,

We focused a lot on the implications under NAFTA. And it was difficult at first, particularly with politicians, to get them to understand there were all these implications from trade agreements. And part of it was that the government could be prevented from regulating water or protecting water if it meant a loss of profit for the company involved. So once we went down that road, it would be a slippery slope in terms of maintaining local control of our water. That focus was the turning point supposedly for the GVRD as well because one of their arguments for choosing to keep water public was the possible consequences under NAFTA.

Providing legal evidence of the risks to local control under NAFTA captured the attention of local elites and created openings for the movement’s claims to be considered.

Seizing global opportunities and expanding targets beyond political opportunity structures to include the broader political economy – including economic institutions such as corporations and international financial and trade agreements – and bringing those concerns
down to the local level, also influenced the tactics utilized by the movement in Vancouver. Activists drew on the tactical repertoires of broader anti-globalization, anti-trade and human rights movements, including citing international law and utilizing disruptive, creative and highly visible tactics borrowed from the anti-globalization protests.

The combination of legal and disruptive tactics facilitated openings at political level. Sherry Carruthers described the importance of global connections and the use of legal and disruptive tactics for galvanizing the movement and for swaying the opinion of some of the GVRD Board members. She said,

I think that the international connection to corporate greed and trade agreements made the movement what it was. The meetings were packed. That clearly galvanized people... Water privatization was seen as part of that broader globalization trend, so I think that is why it caught such a fire and why people were just so pumped up... We made that specific case about the potential liabilities under international trade agreements and why this wasn’t a wise route to go... And in the end that is what resonated with the GVRD folks.

Highlighting the potential risks under international trade law and linking the movement to broader mobilization against globalization galvanized the public to protest against water privatization. Sherry Carruthers describes the effect of global linkages on the elected representatives at the public consultation sessions as:

I don’t think that they knew that it would come home to them so much. The municipal officials, I actually don’t even think that they knew what a big deal it was. I don’t even think [the Chair of the Water Committee] knew that it would be so politicized. I think he knew that it would be a little bit controversial, but I don’t think that he understood that people would be smacking down international law on him. People were like citing human rights conventions! And coming out in such numbers and with such anger. People were really boisterous at those meetings. I think he was just like, “I’m just a little guy from the suburbs!”

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16 Research on tactical repertoires in social movements demonstrates that the choice of target shapes the nature and scope of the tactics used by social movement actors and organizations, and reveals that movements that target corporations or international institutions over domestic political structures will alter their targets accordingly (Cress and Snow 2000, Kay 2005, Walker et al. 2008).
By connecting the movement to broader issues of globalization and international trade, activists in Vancouver not only mobilized a wider pool of movement supporters, but also succeeded in swaying the opinion of the GVRD Board.

The combination of legal and disruptive tactics helped shift the opinion of the GVRD representatives against privatization. Richard Martin, a senior GVRD bureaucrat, explained that the emphasis on threats posed by multinational corporate policies and international trade agreements, including the impact of NAFTA on local political power, as well as the range of disruptive tactics were pivotal to the decision by the GVRD Water Board to reverse plans to privatize water services in the region. He described one of the public consultation sessions and the effect of the legal and unruly movement tactics:

The meeting was scheduled for 8:00 o’clock, and at five minutes to eight I looked around the room and there were maybe about 15 people there. I looked at my director of communications and said, “What the hell is this movement you are talking about? There are only 15 people here.” We thought this was going to be a total breeze. And then about 30 seconds to eight, we heard drums beating, and I thought “Okay, maybe there is something going to happen.” And then literally hundreds of people came into the room. Hundreds... People came into the room, and they were noisy, and there were drums and there were people dressed up as ninjas and fancy costumes and goodness knows what. And it got to the point the room was so full that the proprietor said we couldn’t let anymore in because we are going to start breaking fire regulations. And all hell broke loose. There were people dancing around... and people would run up and steal the mike off the guy who was trying to facilitate it, and all this kind of disruptive behaviour was interspersed with fairly serious questions about the legal ramifications under NAFTA. So we survived the night, but it was a pretty hideous experience... And so we started to think twice about the direction we were headed in the face of all that.

The political opportunities created by connecting the issue of local water privatization to broader anti-globalization issues and the vulnerability of Canadian municipalities in light of international trade obligations was critically important for mobilizing a passionate mass movement protest that ultimately forced GVRD representatives to rethink their position.
Richard Martin went on to describe the impact of the legal opinion presented by the movement:

The opinion they presented asked all kinds of questions. Were we sure that if we allowed a P3 that we would ever be allowed to get it back again if it didn’t work? We had said it was an experiment, could we reverse it? One said, “Once that we had gone to a P3, were we sure that we could defend the rest of the system or would the rules allow the whole system to be taken over by some private sector body? Would we have control over the health regulations anymore or would they be deemed to be too onerous under NAFTA?” These kinds of questions were raised, and they were raised on the basis of a legal opinion. It was a document drawn up by a lawyer for [the BCPSEU], who wrote a relatively inflammatory opinion suggesting that in fact P3’s in the context of WTO regulations and NAFTA were very vulnerable indeed and all kinds of terrible things would happen. So although we weren’t entirely convinced, we were concerned enough and also knew we were facing such enormous opposition, that we decided it probably was not worth the political storm in the end.

Beyond mobilization, the use of international trade law was instrumental in drawing attention to the risks to local control of resources, and resulted in a reconsideration of the ideological pro-privatization stance by elected officials in the region.

The seizing of international opportunities and targets by the anti-privatization movement in Vancouver shaped tactical repertoires that worked to highlight the vulnerability of municipal governments in the face of the growing power of global economic institutions. The attack on corporate power and targeting of opportunities beyond domestic political structures by the movement in Vancouver reflects the growing awareness on the part of activists of the multiple sites of institutional power that shape movement opportunities and constraints, and adds a new dimension to the political opportunity structure model that moves beyond political structures to include corporate targets and international economic institutions.17

In Vancouver, the relative openness of the political institutions involved in the decision-making around water treatment and delivery, and the established activist-elite alliances created

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17 Pellow (2007) calls this the political economic process perspective.
divisions within the local polity. The seizing of global opportunities and the use of disruptive tactics facilitated broad mobilization and opened up opportunities for movement claims to be considered, and ultimately shifted the opinion of the GVRD board members in favour of keeping regional water services under public control.

Stockton: Closed Structures and Conservative Tactics

While the movement in Vancouver faced political structures that were relatively open and receptive to their claims, in Stockton, anti-water privatization activists were confronted by political institutional closure that constrained their ability to have their claims considered or form alliances with political elites. In 2002, a broader national and state level conservative agenda of small government, deregulation and privatization, coupled with federal cutbacks to investment in infrastructure and shrinking city budgets set the stage for the Stockton city council’s decision to outsource municipal water services (Snitow and Kaufman 2007). At the time of the proposal to privatize water services, the mayor had recently returned from the national Conference of Mayors, where he met with representatives from private water firms vying for control of Stockton water services. When the Stockton city council was faced with upgrading the municipal water treatment plant, the mayor turned to the private sector to finance these upgrades and oversee the delivery of municipality water services. As a prominent and successful business leader in the community, the mayor believed in running the city on a business model and believed that the private sector could deliver services more efficiently and at less cost to the taxpayers (Snitow and Kaufman 2007).

Similar to Vancouver, many activists in Stockton described what they perceived as the ideological conservative stance of the city council as driving the decision to privatize water
treatment and delivery services in the city and in shaping movement resistance. Barbara Smith, a 68-year-old grant writer and former teacher, and a member of the anti-water privatization coalition’s steering committee, linked the push for water privatization to the ideology of the mayor at the time. She said,

Of course the city council had a conservative platform, driven by the mayor. The mayor was very popular at that particular point in time. And people really wanted to listen to him. People said, “Here’s a man that has done well in our community, and wants to bring a business model to the city, because heaven knows government is wasteful!” [laughs] And they had all the usual rationale. He had gone to the mayor’s conference where they promote privatization for infrastructure upgrades and came away feeling that this was a way of the future. He was really pushing privatization. And some of the actions by Bush and Congress favoured privatizing, as well. So we were right at this nexus of, “What’s the public worried about? What’s the big deal?”

The right wing ideological stance of the mayor and majority of council, coupled with a broader national Republican agenda that demonized government and favoured the private sector, was described by many of the activists interviewed in Stockton as driving the impetus towards water privatization.

Beyond political ideology, respondents located the push for privatization in the agenda and influence of multinational corporations who target municipal politicians in order to secure lucrative infrastructure contracts. Graham Davis, an elected representative in San Joaquin county, said that the mayor pushed the idea that the private sector is more efficient and effective, in part because he had been influenced by executives from major multinational water corporations at a national mayor’s conference he attended prior to the privatization proposal. Having attended similar conferences in the past, he described being “wined and dined” by private sector firms looking to bid on municipal infrastructure projects. He explained that what happened in Stockton was part of a larger trend across the United States where multinational water corporations target local governments to secure private contracts for water delivery. He
You had the push from these big international water companies going through Minneapolis-St. Paul and... Atlanta and many other cities in the United States. And it became pretty much a good Republican agenda throughout the country. So essentially with all those things... it just got itself alive here in Stockton. We also had a mayor that was very forceful in his position in trying to privatize this issue and through whatever means he was able to generate enough votes to move it forward. He went off to one of the Reason Foundation\textsuperscript{18} conferences because he was a right wing Republican and they said that it’s always cheaper to privatize, and private industry always operates higher quality. So he came back and said that that’s just the way it is, and he just kept pushing this thing and pushing this thing.

A belief in the superiority of the private sector to maximize efficiency and lower costs as well as the lobbying influence of multinational corporations undergirded the pro-privatization position of the Stockton mayor and city council.\textsuperscript{19}

Many activists in Stockton described the conservative stance of the council majority as preventing the movement from accessing the necessary political channels for presenting their arguments against privatization. Some respondents even argued that the closure of political structures went beyond ideology, and reflected the general atmosphere of secrecy that characterized the city council at the time. Kelly Jones, a 45-year-old environmental manager for the City of Stockton, described the lack of transparency of the municipal government as shaping its refusal to consider the claims of the anti-water privatization movement. She said,

Well the mayor and council certainly had their agenda... They decided that this is what was going to happen, and they weren’t going to hear anything else. Part of the whole problem with the way local politics have played in this town for decades and decades is that decisions are made behind closed doors and in violation of the \textit{Brown Act} which requires

\textsuperscript{18} The Reason Foundation is a public policy think tank located in Los Angeles, California. The Foundation focuses on promoting “libertarian values” and the involvement of the private sector in public services and institutions (from http://reason.org/about accessed October 10, 2009).

\textsuperscript{19} Peck and Tickell (2002) argue that competition between cities for infrastructure funding and the corporate seduction of local political elites by multinational companies create partnerships between municipal governments and the private sector. As a result, local councils are persuaded that is no alternative to privatization and are pushed into accepting neoliberal reforms.
all this public transparency.\textsuperscript{20} And so when that whole decision came down it was just more of the same. Everyone knew how everyone was going to vote and they certainly wouldn’t listen to us.

Despite attempts by the movement to have their concerns about privatization considered by the city council, including attending council meetings and making presentations to council, a closed-door policy on the part of the local government prevented the movement from having their claims heard.

Even city officials opposed to privatization were met with hostile responses from the mayor and majority of council when they attempted to present arguments in favour of maintaining a publicly-run water system. Paul Anderson, a former employee of the city of Stockton, who worked in the city manager’s office at the time of the fight over privatization, was opposed to outsourcing the city’s water treatment and delivery services on the grounds that it would be less cost effective than keeping the services in-house. When he heard about the proposal to privatize the water treatment plant, he quickly mobilized employees in his division to complete a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of the water treatment plant, in order to demonstrate the benefits of maintaining a publicly-run system. Despite their evidence showing that keeping water services in the public hands, albeit with considerable restructuring, would be less costly to taxpayers than privatization, Paul Anderson was met with scepticism by the mayor. He described the reaction of the mayor to the business plan created by the city manager’s office as:

Even with the plan and the cost-benefit analysis, essentially the mayor’s attitude was, “I really don’t care about any of that. We just need to privatize because they can do it cheaper.” It was a little bit like George Bush and Iraq. Every time you cornered him, he

\textsuperscript{20} The Brown Act was enacted by the California State Legislature in 1953 to facilitate public participation in local governmental decision-making and prevent secretive meeting by guaranteeing the rights of citizens to attend and participate in the meetings of local governmental bodies (Lockyer 2003).
changed his reason for why to privatize. In the end, he got the majority of the council to agree to go out and bid on a private contract. The mayor had effective psychological control, and I could spend hours telling you how he did it over a majority of the council, regardless of the issue, and he simply drew that line. He knew that he wasn’t going to convince the minority, so he just moved with his majority.

Despite the fact that the city staff were opposed to privatization and presented well-researched and documented evidence about the higher costs associated with privatization, the mayor remained entrenched in his pro-privatization position, and used his persuasive ability to convince other elected officials to ignore the counter-evidence presented by bureaucratic insiders and movement activists.

The relatively closed nature of the local government structures caused activists to turn their attention away from alliance-building with political elites and downplay anti-corporate messages in order to concentrate on local democratic processes, including tactics aimed at usurping the power of council through political and legal challenges that would block or delay privatization. Despite the fact that experts on water privatization and activists from outside of Stockton emphasized the importance of global issues, including the implications and risks of privatization under NAFTA and the negative track record of multinational water companies in other communities, the movement in Stockton chose to focus on legislative challenges.

Barbara Smith described the decision by the movement to push for a ballot initiative requiring voter approval for privatizing water services. She said,

Well first we thought we’d take the more civilized approach, and go to the council and explain our views and why we thought it was not a wise decision, and since they had no interest in listening to this we then went the next step, which was gathering signatures for a ballot initiative that would allow the public to vote on future contracts over 5 million dollars to privatize anything to do with water services. And we won that initiative by a 60 percent margin. But, as you know, the city council went ahead and signed the contract before the vote came in, and it is not retroactive.

Despite gathering the requisite number of signatures to mount a ballot initiative, the attempt to
prevent the Stockton city council from awarding a private contract for water treatment and delivery was thwarted by the council’s decision to vote on the contract before the initiative was considered. A subsequent attempt by the movement to organize a referendum to overturn the council’s vote was also unsuccessful as they were unable to gather the required number of signatures. Their efforts were further hampered when the mayor became personally involved in trying to prevent the movement from securing the required number of signatures for a referendum vote. “He started calling the citizens of Stockton asking them not to sign the referendum petition,” explained Barbara Smith, adding that a private company was circulating a counter-petition and the mayor tried to “convince people to sign the counter-initiative which would effectively remove their name from our list if they had already signed.” She described how the mayor “basically told them that we were lying and misrepresenting the city council.”

The counter-attack by the mayor and council was in part due to the movement’s negative attacks on locally elected representatives and their decision-making procedures. Some of the people interviewed in Stockton felt that the constant vilification of the mayor was harmful to the movement’s chances at preventing privatization because it made authorities un receptive to their arguments. Tom Bailey, a local business leader and proponent of privatization, explained that the anti-government stance by anti-water privatization activists caused the mayor and some of the members of council to entrench themselves further in their pro-privatization position. He described the reaction of the mayor and council when confronted with a challenge to their political authority. He said,

They really felt that they had been elected to lead and make decisions on the behalf of the citizens of Stockton who had voted them into office. And the mayor in particular felt that his integrity had been attacked. He resented them saying that he had no business making decisions about how to run city departments and services because he felt that by being elected he had the approval of the people. You know, why should he have to have a public
referendum on every decision being made when he was elected to make those decisions on behalf of the public? In the end, he felt he was elected to lead and that is what he did.

By maligning the decisions of the mayor and city council, the anti-water privatization movement reduced its chances of success by strengthening the solidarity among political elites, according to some respondents in Stockton.\(^{21}\)

Other respondents felt that it would have been strategic to target local elected representatives and create openings for movement claims to be considered, by emphasizing the threats from international institutions and multinational corporations. They felt that – similar to their Vancouver counterparts – they could potentially have captured the attention of local officials by illuminating the threat to local control from global institutions. Some of the anti-water privatization activists in Stockton emphasized the importance of global processes to shaping decisions about the delivery of local water resources, including the implications for local regulatory control under NAFTA and the threat from multinational corporate bottom-line policies. Yet, unlike the movement in Vancouver, the focus on international threats and opportunities never became central to the campaign. Barbara Smith felt that the movement should have focused more on global concerns in order to raise awareness of these issues with the Stockton city council. She described the efforts of the Citizens Environmental Alliance, a national organization focused on issues of trade and privatization, and some of the academic activists involved in the anti-water privatization battle, to highlight the importance of international institutional threats. She said,

\(^{21}\) Research on social movements using the political process model demonstrates that beyond presence of elite allies who sympathize with movement claims, the stability of elite structures is also important. If activists succeed in creating cleavages between elites, they increase their chances at opening up opportunities for successful outcomes (Tarrow 1998, McAdam 1999, Tilly and Tarrow 2007).
Some people from the university and also people from [the Citizens Environmental Alliance] came and made several presentations on NAFTA and the potential consequences if things got sticky down the road. They also talked about how risky it was to trust these contractors and their spokespersons because their interests are only financial – they are looking to make a profit and not to strengthen the community. They presented a lot of compelling evidence that I thought would be useful to bring to the council. But the movement didn’t end up using those arguments, which have worked in other places. I am not sure that was such a good idea in retrospect.

Barbara Smith felt that making connections to global issues and highlighting concerns about NAFTA would have helped mobilize the broader community and even influence the city council decision on privatization.22

The inability of the movement to create institutional openings and build alliances with elites was exacerbated by the relative inexperience anti-water privatization activists targeting local government. Pre-existing movements and movement organizations either targeted national or state level political structures. Few of the activists had prior experience targeting political institutions or organizing the public at the municipal level. Paul Anderson described the lack of local political organizing experience on the part of anti-water privatization activists,

Many of the people had experience with advocacy and organizing, but the focus was always on state or federal policies or statutes. There weren’t many people involved who had strong connections or experience with how local government works. The coalition came together for the first time around water privatization. And my impression also was that it was sort of a small number of probably five to ten real activists who kept this going. And despite their best efforts they never really built the kind of grassroots movement needed to stop [the mayor] from pushing through [privatization].

A lack of pre-existing movements focused on local issues, combined with little grassroots organizing experience on the part of anti-water privatization activists, meant that few of the

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22 A discussion of why global issues were not central to the anti-water privatization movement in Stockton is included in Chapters 5 and 7.
people involved in the movement in Stockton had ties to municipal authorities, thus limiting their chances for shaping policy decisions around the delivery of water services.  

Further, some of the respondents in Stockton pointed to the inexperience of activists in local politics as contributing to tactical decisions that were detrimental to the movement’s goals, including gathering enough signatures for the referendum. Bernie Jacobs, a retired professional and member of the anti-water privatization coalition steering committee, explained how the decision to use volunteers rather than professional signature gatherers ultimately hurt the movement by preventing them from collecting the required number of signatures for a referendum in time to overturn the council vote authorizing privatization. He said,

I don’t know who or what or why but somebody decided and somebody agreed with that we should not use the professional signature collectors. No one said a word, it never came up on the agenda at any meeting. We were trying to get a referendum on the city council vote and the only way we could do it is by getting enough signatures in 30 days. I thought we are going to be able to do this since we had already won the [initiative] vote by 60 percent. And then I learned all we are going to do is a weekend of door-to-door signature collection. I couldn’t believe it. I mean how we were going to do all of that in four or five weekends when it took us three months of professional signature collection daily to collect enough signatures for the initiative? It was absurd. It really showed a lack of understanding about community organizing on the part of some of the steering committee members.

Bernie Jacobs blamed the inexperience of the steering committee members for strategic missteps that allowed the council to proceed with water privatization. He went on to describe how he felt when the movement failed to gather enough signatures for the referendum. He said,

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23 Research examining the nature of opportunity structures at international, national and local levels reveals that there are significant differences in the type of opportunities facing movements depending on the geographical focus and reveals the importance of spatial scales in the political process model (Bridge and McManus 2000, Diani 2005, Josselin 2007). Differences in the scale of opportunity mean that movement responses and tactical repertoires need to be tailored to the opportunity structure in question in order to increases the chances of a successful outcome. For example, Bridge and McManus’ (2000) comparative research on the timber and mining industries in British Columbia reveals differences in regulation practices between local and national level political structures, which shape the opportunities and constraints available to social movements as well as the choice of tactical response. They argue that, in the case of contention over environmental resources in particular, it is important to recognize political and economic structures at the local level in order to understand the complex ways in which opportunities are embedded in local economies and tied to discrete geographic scales.
Oh, it was awful, awful! This was the big disappointment. First of all, I felt badly about myself. I didn’t play the role I should have played. And secondly I felt badly that people would come to such conclusions, such a decision. But only if it had been put on the agenda, if only it had been discussed, I would have filibustered to stop this from going this way. You know it is so upsetting thinking about it, because had we done that [used professional signature gatherers], then privatization would have been stopped in its tracks. It wouldn’t even have begun.

Bernie Jacobs attributed the failure of the referendum to a tactical error resulting from a lack of experience with local community organizing on the part of some of the key movement leaders.

Other respondents shared Bernie Jacob’s view about the political inexperience of some of the people involved in the anti-water privatization coalition. Charles Barlow, a 52-year-old lawyer and environmental activist, explained how the inexperience of the movement in Stockton and a lack of resources contributed to the inability to collect the required number of signatures for a referendum. He said,

The steering committee was politically naive. A couple of the people who were taking leadership at that point of the signature collection were, well this was their first political experience. They had never done anything like this before and they felt that it could be done only on weekends. We were unsuccessful because there was a strategic blunder which was not realizing that using volunteers for collecting signatures only goes so far and when you have to collect 15,000 signatures over four weekends! You can’t do that without putting out the bucks and bringing in the professionals. And we would have won and stopped privatization if we had been more strategic... And we would not have had to go through that whole surge of litigation and all the costs associated with it.

Charles Barlow felt that with stronger organizational capacity and professionalism on the part of anti-water privatization activists, the movement could have prevented privatization of the water treatment plant by successfully overturning the city council’s vote in favour of outsourcing water services.

Beyond inexperience and missteps, the choice of targets and tactical repertoire adopted by the movement in Stockton were also critical in influencing movement outcomes. Although
some activists in Stockton attributed the referendum failure to a general lack of experience on the part of many of movement activists, others said that the decision not to use professional signature gatherers was a strategic choice on the part of the movements in order to counter what they considered to be underhanded behaviour of mayor and council. Joan Davidson, a former elected representative and member of the anti-water privatization coalition explained that part of the reason for not using professional signature gatherers was due to the belief on the part of some of the coalition members that they were taking the political “high road” by using volunteers and the feeling that “because they felt they were right, that somehow things would work out.” She explained,

There was a strong feeling by the coalition that we wanted to do a lot of the referendum signature collecting door-to-door, just pure grassroots stuff. There was a strong feeling that it had to be, at least on the surface, volunteers doing it. Some of them maybe felt that it would be morally superior, if we go out and get all of these volunteers ourselves we would be morally superior to the mayor and [the private company] who were paying people to collect signatures. They felt that it would show that we had the support of the community. And people just went along because they thought they would be seen as superior to the politicians.

A strong belief in the importance of using grassroots volunteers influenced the organizational tactics around the referendum initiative.

By taking the “high road”, activists in Stockton also deliberately chose more conservative tactics in presenting their case against privatization. Many respondents said that the movement wanted to avoid appearing emotional and angry lest they be accused of lacking the knowledge and expertise to counter pro-privatization arguments. Despite a push by some of the anti-water privatization coalition members, including youth and union representatives, to engage in more disruptive protest tactics, the coalition steering committee ultimately decided to take a more moderate tactical approach by focusing on evidence-base arguments.
Bruce Owen, a retired professional and member of the anti-water privatization steering committee, was opposed to the use of disruptive protest tactics by the movement. “The radical elements of certain movements, like the environmental movement, give the rest of us a bad name”, he argued. He complained that the effectiveness of the anti-water privatization movement was diminished by the involvement of more radical activists. Although he has been a member of the environmental movement for over 20 years and has held leadership positions in several prominent environmental organizations, he describes himself as a lifelong conservative who supported Republican candidates for most of his life. He said he was a strong supporter of private enterprise, and while he felt that in Stockton water privatization was the wrong solution, he explained that he believes it is the right solution for many communities who lack the infrastructure needed for high quality water services.

Bruce Owen felt that the best way to fight privatization was not by holding “candlelight vigils” but through “research and analysis and informed processes”. He said,

The opposition, the city council and their attorneys tried to paint us as emotional. So we felt we had to fight being perceived as emotional. In the initial stages, we had some wonderful people, but they basically wanted to hold a candlelight vigil and protest on the steps of City Hall. Well, they would love us to hold a thousand candlelight vigils and protests. While we are spending time doing that, they are off and they are doing their thing. When you are focused on those kinds of things the other guys are moving the process along at a rapid enough pace that you can’t catch up. So you need to play the facts-based game, not rant and rave outside City Hall.

In an attempt to appear professional and unemotional, the steering committee focused their attention on less disruptive tactics.

While the decision to avoid disruptive protest tactics was supported by many of the steering committee members, other activists involved in the anti-water privatization movement felt that the moderate tactics failed to mobilize a broad-based opposition movement. Scott
Winslow, a union organizer, joined the anti-water privatization movement in Stockton because he felt that a bad policy decision was being railroaded through the community by the mayor and his supporters on council. He disagreed with the decision by the steering committee to use less disruptive tactics, and felt that a more aggressive stance would have mobilized the broader community, and made the council pay attention to the movement’s concerns. He said, “We should have done something more than just make nice presentations to council. We should have said, “Hey boys, you work for us and your instructions are this.” And we should have locked that god damn place down and – I get a bit warmed up – we should have said, ‘You work for us and you need to know it.’ And we should have made god damn sure at every chance we had to know it!” Many respondents echoed similar concerns about the tactical choices of the coalition steering committee, and felt that a more aggressive opposition movement would have contributed to a successful outcome.

Many activists in Stockton argued that along with a more radical approach, more attention should have been paid to mobilizing the broader community to oppose water privatization, including an emphasis on grassroots community organizing. Paul Anderson said he felt that the decision to play a “facts-based game”, rather than mobilizing broad community support, resulted in the failure to block water privatization. He said,

They were doomed to lose with their facts-based approach. Had they doubled up and ran a “You dirty rats”, a really strong “You dirty rats, you are violating democratic principles here” campaign and presented a more angry face for the movement, things might have been different. They also didn’t build a powerful enough opposition. They should have focused more attention on grassroots organizing. Some of the younger people wanted to organize demonstrations and generally be loud and use in your face kind of tactics. But the coalition felt they had to play it safe and take the moral high road. If they had been able to show how widespread the opposition was… then the issue would have died... That was their only chance to win. Otherwise they were doomed to lose.
Paul Anderson described how the non-disruptive tactical approach by the coalition steering committee prevented the movement from engaging in grassroots politics and community mobilizing, which he felt would have been effective for preventing privatization. When asked why he thought the movement failed to pursue a more aggressive organizing model, he said: “Because they [the steering committee members] are facts-based people and I don’t think they really understood the whole – what it takes to win. You know, if Saul Alinsky had been in town it would have been a whole different game. They might have stood a chance at winning.” The decision to avoid disruptive protest and grassroots mobilizing failed to generate the broad-based opposition that many respondents felt would have swayed the city council’s decision to privatize water services.24

Overturning Privatization: The Role of Legal Opportunity Structures

While the anti-privatization movement in Stockton was unable to prevent the privatization of the water treatment plant, they were ultimately successful in overturning the private contract that was awarded to OMI Thames in 2003. Rather than simply give up in the face of defeat, activists in Stockton mounted a legal challenge to the outsourcing of the water treatment plant, and argued that the city of Stockton violated the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) by not requiring a full environmental assessment of the proposed infrastructure upgrades to the municipal wastewater utility plant. With support from a team of lawyers with expertise in environmental law from a law firm based in San Francisco, the anti-

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24 The political conditions in Stockton, including unwanted policy change and closed institutional access, provided opportunities for mobilizing widespread support from the community. Research on social movements and mobilization demonstrates that unfavourable policy changes coupled with closed political structures provide favourable conditions for mobilizing broad support for social movement campaigns (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996, Meyer 2004). For example Meyer’s (1993) research on anti-nuclear movements in the United States found that activists are more likely to succeed in mobilizing broad-based public support and thus in influencing policy when government decisions are unpopular and institutional access is closed.
water privatization coalition challenged the city of Stockton and OMI Thames in court and, after a drawn-out processes, with wins and appeals on both sides, the coalition ultimately prevailed when city officials decided not to appeal the final court decision that ruled against the city of Stockton and OMI Thames. The private contract was rescinded in 2008 and the water treatment plant was turned back over to the public sector. In an ironic twist, the city of Stockton was unable to renegotiate a contract with OMI Thames that would meet the requirements of CEQA because of the successful ballot initiative (Measure F) brought about by the anti-water privatization movement, requiring voter approval on private contracts over 5 million dollars. Any new contract would have to be approved by the citizens of Stockton, an impossible task for elected officials in Stockton under Measure F.

While many of the activists interviewed felt that the anti-water privatization movement did not fail in its efforts to block privatization because of the eventual legal outcome in favour of the coalition, others described the win as pyrrhic victory because of the devastating cost to the community from privatization. Dave Alexis, a 56-year-old business owner and former elected representative said,

For me it [the legal win] was bittersweet. I mean it was good that the right thing ended up happening, and the truth came out, and that it showed we can’t circumvent process. The bitter part was that we impacted human lives, and that this experiment cost the city a lot of money, and it was a huge cost in terms of liability too. And there is still one employee who has fallen through the cracks and is unemployed and has serious lifetime medical issues, whose life is now in limbo. I felt vindicated that when you stand up to something but also very bad in terms of the costs for our citizens and these groups and the city and the cost in terms of dollars but more important the human cost which is almost irreparable.

The high financial costs, job losses and human suffering that resulted from privatization cast a shadow on the legal victory for some of the activists in Stockton. Others echoed Dave Alexis’ view that the legal win was not a complete victory. Bernie Jacobs lamented the financial costs to
the taxpayers of Stockton and said that he regretted the tactical missteps that impeded the movement’s efforts to stop privatization. He explained,

I have really strong feelings that this should be a lesson to other popular groups, to community groups, to become more conscious of the choices they have in tactics and strategies and so on. I wish that I could have done more to prevent what happened because, if we hadn’t made those mistakes, the several million dollars in costs that privatization brought about plus the costs of transitioning back to the public there was several more million dollars involved. And then our attorneys cost two million [dollars], which the city had to pay. But what I’m saying is that hardly any of that money would have been spent. That’s a huge waste of money based on mistakes. That is something that is not popular to say in our group, but it is important to know it to avoid making those same mistakes again.

Even when ultimately prevailing against proponents of privatization, many people who were closely involved in the movement felt that the legal win was not a complete victory because of the high personal and financial costs associated with privatization and the costs incurred by the city as a result of the legal challenge that ultimately reversed privatization.

In Stockton, the closed political institutional structures, combined with the centralized power and ideological stance of the mayor and majority of city councillors, prevented the anti-water privatization movement from successfully blocking the privatization of the municipal water treatment plant. The lack of pre-existing movements focused on local electoral politics, as well as the relative inexperience of the activists involved in the fight against privatization, prevented the movement from forming alliances with elites, and gaining access to internal political structures. As a result, they focused more attention on targeting the mayor and council, and downplayed the use of disruptive protest tactics and linking the issue to global concerns, thus failing to mobilize the kind of broad community activism and engagement needed for a successful outcome.

Yet despite initially failing to block privatization, the success of legal challenge launched by Stockton activists that ultimately overturned the privatization of the water treatment plant,
demonstrates that even when facing closed institutional access, movements that draw on legal tactics can force openings at the political institutional level. This reveals the importance of the role of extra-institutional legal opportunities in shaping the outcomes of social movements. While the movement in Stockton failed in its initial goal to prevent water privatization, they ultimately succeeded in overturning privatization and creating the conditions for protecting water as a public resource in perpetuity. The movement’s eventual success demonstrates the need to adopt a wider understanding of movement outcomes by looking beyond the success or failure of movement in achieving their immediate goals. Examining the consequences of sustained mobilization – across different stages in time – allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of social movements, how they shape broader policy changes and how success is measured.

25 Social movements in the U.S. have generally had more success utilizing legal tactics to shape policy rather than electoral pressure (Giugni 2004). Research comparing policy outcomes across countries reveals that those with proportional electoral systems generate greater electoral incentives (and thus governments are more likely to respond to political protest) than countries with majoritarian electoral systems, such as the U.S. (Joppke 1993, Giugni 2004, Harrison and Sundstrum 2007).

26 Research on the role of legal opportunities in social movements reveals the importance of litigation in influencing policy change. Legal opportunities provide an additional threat to authorities that increases the leverage of citizen-based campaigns (Joppke 1993, Hilson 2002). Joppke’s (1993) research on the anti-nuclear power movement in the United States focuses on the nature of American pluralism and reveals that the closed nature of the state combined with multiple pathways for movements to counter state power, including litigation and advocacy, means movements are more likely to work outside of formal political institutions and utilize external challenges such as legal threats. Hilson (2002) argues that the role of law and the courts has been downplayed in the literature on social movements and contentious politics and suggests that more attention should be paid to legal opportunity structures and how they influence movement outcomes. Yet the findings of my research also reveal that relying too heavily on legal tactics can be detrimental to social movement success as organizations shift attention and resources away from mobilizing broad-based support and targeted action designed to bring about policy change. In some movements, legal tactics combined with organized collective action is a strategy more likely to succeed than a reliance on lawsuits alone.

27 Gamson (1990) examines the outcomes of social movements by assessing whether or not they achieved their stated goals. Andrews (2004) argues that this definition of movement success is limited in terms of assessing the full range of consequences of mobilization. He argues that because movement objectives can change over time and broader outcomes are often the unintended consequences of mobilization, social movement scholars need to broaden their understanding of how they measure success. Other scholars argue that while some movements may fail in their initial goals, they may achieve other outcomes that represent substantial gains for their constituents (Amenta and Caren 2004).
Conclusion

Despite the presence of a similar problem – a government initiated proposal to outsource the treatment and delivery of local water services to a multinational corporation – differences in the degree of institutional openness in Vancouver and Stockton shaped the diverse responses to opportunities by the anti-water privatization movements. Table 6.1 presents the differences in opportunities between the two movements Vancouver and Stockton, including differences in institutional openings and the way in which social movement actors responded to opportunities and created openings for grievances to be heard.

Table 6.1 Comparison of Opportunity Type by City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Opportunity</th>
<th>Stockton</th>
<th>Vancouver</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elite Disunity</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Openness</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliances with Authorities</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-existing Movements</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeting Local Structures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Opportunities</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Opportunities</td>
<td>x</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Opportunities/Tactics</td>
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<td>x</td>
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As table 6.1 shows, the anti-water privatization movement in Vancouver faced more favourable opportunities for the consideration of grievances because of the relatively high degree of institutional openness of the regional government, divisions with elites and alliances with authorities. At the same time, the success of the movement in Vancouver in preventing water privatization was facilitated by more than structural openness. Pre-existing movements, including the watershed protection and anti-globalization movements, created alliances between
activists and local elites and shaped the choice of targets and tactics utilized by the anti-water privatization movement. Activists seized global opportunities, including multinational corporate policies and threats from international trade agreements to increase mobilization and create a sense of local solidarity in the face of global concerns. Faced with widespread opposition, authorities in the GVRD agreed to provide a forum for public deliberation, opening up critical opportunities for movement success.

On the other hand, Table 6.1 demonstrates that in Stockton, anti-water privatization activists were constrained by the relatively closed nature of local political institutional structures, including the city council and mayor’s office which prevented activists from creating alliances with political authorities. The municipal government – led by a conservative mayor – remained unwilling to consider movement claims and ultimately voted in favour of privatization, without any public input. Indeed growing pressure from the anti-water privatization movement forced them to rush through the vote on privatization. Beyond institutional closure, the unfavourable conditions in Stockton were exacerbated by the lack of pre-existing movements targeting the local polity and the relative inexperience of activists dealing with issues of local electoral reform. A narrow focus on legal and non-disruptive tactics prevented the movement from seizing international opportunities, including anti-corporate and anti-globalization arguments, and blocked efforts by some activists to mobilize a broad-based grassroots opposition movement. Without widespread mobilization or the integration of international concerns into the repertoire of contention, the movement in Stockton failed to mobilize the kind of public opposition needed to open up opportunities to influence policy decisions, nor was it able to create a sense of local solidarity in the face of global threats. Yet through a legal challenge, the movement was eventually able to overturn privatization and achieve success, suggesting the need for scholars to
adopt a broader understanding of movement outcomes, beyond evaluating the success or failure of a movement’s initial goals.

The findings of my research suggest the scholars need to rethink and refine the way political opportunity structures are conceptualized in social movement research in order to understand how global processes shape domestic opportunities as well as to shed light on the dynamic relationship between structural conditions and the actions of social movement actors. First, I argue that it is important to consider the interaction of multi-scale opportunity structures in shaping local movements. Political opportunities are available to movement actors at different institutional levels, including sites of local and international power. While there has been considerable attention paid to the role of transnational opportunities by social movement scholars, most of this research focuses on how transnational opportunities either facilitate the emergence of global movements or create linkages between domestic and global actors, through social ties and the sharing of resources and knowledge (see Kay 2005, Evans 2008, della Porta et al. 2006). My research adds a more nuanced understanding of the role of international opportunities and threats for shaping local political process and for explaining movement building at the local level. The findings demonstrate that international opportunities strengthen local movements by fostering ties between domestic actors and creating a sense of solidarity between local authorities and activists.

The findings also demonstrate the importance of examining and understanding how movement actors – particularly those resisting neoliberal globalization – draw on multi-sited opportunities to make their claims and mobilize constituents.\textsuperscript{28} Anti-water privatization

\textsuperscript{28} Research on multi-level opportunity structures reveals how local opportunity structures are embedded in wider international processes and institutions that shape the opportunities available to domestic actors see (Meyer 2003, Josselin 2007). Other scholars argue that a truly effective global counterhegemonic movement needs to bring
movements provide a useful case study for understanding multiple opportunity scales because they are locally rooted and dependent on domestic institutions, while at the same time are implicated in multinational economic power structures that influence the nature and availability of political opportunities on the ground. Activists at the local level can draw upon global threats and issues and apply them in ways that make sense in their communities, creating a sense of local empowerment that is important for strengthening the capacity of local social movements to organize, mobilize and respond to local opportunity structures. Movements that seize global opportunities and synthesize them with local opportunities by engaging in strategic localism, as in the case of the anti-water privatization movement in Vancouver, create a sense of local solidarity that allows communities to overcome divisions between authorities and activists, who unite in a common desire to protect local resources from threats from multinational corporate power and international trade provisions that protect foreign investment over local regulation and control.

Second, while it is important to investigate different levels of opportunity, the findings also demonstrate the importance of understanding opportunities as part of a dynamic interplay between political structures and movement agency in order to shed light on how the choice of tactics and seizing of opportunities by activists generate new opportunities for movements to make their claims. While most research on political process examines the role of political opportunities for shaping pathways for mobilization, the findings show that it also is critical to understand how the strategic actions and choices of social movement actors shape opportunity together different levels of protest at the local, national and international levels, what Evans calls “scales of contestation” (Evans 2008, Castells 2007). Evans (2008) argues that this type of movement must be grounded in local communities while at the same time capable of organizing globally.
structures, including how activists respond to opportunities as well as how they create new opportunities through mobilization.

In Vancouver, the institutionalization resulting from previous movements facilitated the building of alliances with elites and shaped the opportunities available for anti-water privatization movement. Pre-existing anti-globalization movements also influenced the opportunities and tactics utilized by activists. The movement targeted transnational opportunity structures and adopted the more disruptive tactical repertoire of the anti-globalization movement, which facilitated mobilization and created openings at the political institutional level.²⁹

At the same time, in Stockton, the lack of existing movements targeting local political structures and the relative inexperience of activists dealing with local electoral politics prevented the movement from forming critical alliances with elites and forced the movement to work from outside of the institutional context. This external positioning shaped the opportunities and tactics utilized by the anti-water privatization coalition, with more moderate tactics being privileged over the use of disruptive protest, in an attempt to appear objective and professional. Further, the focus on battling local political structures shifted attention away from the global risks to local institutions and impeded grassroots mobilizing efforts. As a result, the movement failed to mobilize the broad-based support needed to prevent water privatization.

Most research on political opportunity structures adopts an overly structural or static approach, examining how political institutions shape individual and organizational behaviour and neglecting an analysis of how social movement actors and organizations in turn shape political institutions, policies and opportunities. My findings underscore the dynamic nature of

²⁹ Research on the use of disruptive versus conservative tactics demonstrates that movements that use more disruptive, innovative and creative tactics are more likely to achieve success in their goals versus those that try to demonstrate tactical restraint (Piven and Cloward 1977, McAdam 1983, Gamson 1990).
political opportunities and demonstrate that because state-actor interactions operate in two directions, it is necessary to expand the focus of political process to include an analysis of how actors shape opportunities.\footnote{Joppke (1993) calls this an “actor-centered political process perspective” and draws on Weber’s understanding of the role of social action in producing and reproducing social structures. Meyer (2004) calls for a more dynamic political process approach that allows for an examination of the ways in which movements shape opportunities through mobilization, networks and frames. And Goodwin and Jasper (1999) critique the structural bias of the political process model and argue that the exclusive focus on exogenous structural factors such as institutions, alliances with elites, and the wider political context, ignores the internal processes and mechanisms of social movements such as agency, cognition and emotion that shape social movement actors’ interpretation of external opportunities. While scholars have argued for a more agency-focused approach to political process, there has been little empirical research that specifically examines the mechanisms that shape the interplay between social movement actors and opportunity structures.}

Third, I argue that beyond political opportunities, more attention needs to be paid to the role of economic opportunity structures as targets of mobilization. Recent scholarship on social movements suggests that in the face of economic globalization and the growing power of capital, movements are increasingly seizing opportunities provided by economic structures and targeting institutions beyond the political realm. Many scholars have argued that globalization undermines the capacity of the domestic polity to regulate financial markets and enforce environmental and social policies, reconstituting the role of the state in protecting the well-being of its citizens (Peck and Tickell 2002, Berger 2000). In light of economic globalization, social movement scholars are beginning to examine the role of economic opportunity structures in creating new opportunities and targets for social movements (Pellow 2007, Schurman and Munro 2009).\footnote{For example, Schurman and Munro’s (2009) research on the anti-genetic engineering movements in Britain and the United States demonstrates that beyond political opportunity structures, economic structures are critical for creating opportunities for favourable movement outcomes. Pellow (2001, 2007) argues that because multinational corporate policies constrain state power and thus shape the context in which domestic movements operate, it is important to refine the political process model to include an analysis of economic opportunity structures. He offers an extension to the political process model, which he calls the “political economic process perspective”. The model recognizes the connection between formal political structures and economic institutions and how they both shape social movements. Pellow argues that in the context of the growing influence of economic institutions over domestic policies and regulation, corporations are as likely as formal political institutions to be the target of social movement campaigns (2001, 2007).}
Political economy approaches, particularly those that explain shed light on growing transnational corporate power and the global institutions that uphold and support such power, are useful in explaining how movements are responding to economic globalization by seizing global economic opportunity structures and shifting targets from the polity to economic institutions.

Yet while the findings of my research demonstrate that social movements increasingly recognize the power of transnational economic institutions for shaping domestic policy and shift targets accordingly, they also reveal that some movements remain committed to reaffirming the role of the state in regulating social and environmental policies. In Vancouver, although the anti-water privatization movement seized opportunities provided by international economic structures, including multinational water corporations and international trade agreements, they drew on these opportunities only insofar as they would enable them to gain the attention of local authorities; throughout the campaign, the target remained squarely fixed on local political structures. I argue that this focus on the local polity can be explained by the fact that water was the central focus of the movement. Because water is considered a public resource that is part of the commons, and the goal of anti-water privatization movements is to prevent commodification, the main target of such movements is likely to be the political institutions that govern and regulate water resources and services, rather than multinational water corporations and financial institutions regulating trade and investment.

The findings of my research reveal that movements choose targets according to the nature of the “product” that is the focus of their campaigns and suggests a need to refine the economic opportunity structure model to include differences between the commons and commodities. In the case of environmental resources, particularly those that are part of the commons, such as water, the polity is considered to have the power to protect and regulate public resources, thus
making it more likely to be the target of anti-privatization movements. While these movements target economic structures, they are more likely to be used as symbolic targets to highlight the political vulnerability of governments. Because the commodification of resources is not seen as inevitable, what matters to movements focused on protecting the commons is reasserting the power of the state to uphold democratic and public control of these resources and protect the sovereignty of communities in light of economic globalization. While activists in both Stockton and Vancouver were critical of political authorities and the push to privatize water, they recognized the power of government to protect critical environmental resources from the encroachment of private capital.32

While my research demonstrates the importance of distinguishing between commons and commodity and how these differences shape the nature of movement targets, it also reveals the importance of differentiating between different levels of government when assessing the capacity of governments to resist the power of international economic structures. Despite the traditional assumption that the nation state is the site of power, both instrumental and coercive, with the strongest capacity to ensure the well-being of its citizens, the findings of my research show that, in the face of economic globalization, local governments have – under certain circumstances – increased leverage over national governments because they are not signatories to global governance agreements, and are therefore not as constrained by international economic structures. While nation states are constrained by economic globalization and the increasing

32 While many scholars argue that globalization delegitimizes the authority of the state in the eyes of its citizens (Beck 1999, Dryzek 2006), the findings of my research demonstrate that in some cases, globalization can actually increase the legitimacy of the state, particularly for protecting the commons. Recent research examining anti-globalization movements demonstrates that these movements continue to target the state because the negative consequences of globalization are considered to be political in origin and thus reversible by the actions of governments, whom they consider to have the most leverage (Berger 2000, Ancelovici 2002). Other scholars point to the democratic nature of political institutions as being critical to countering the power of non-democratic institutions such as corporations and financial regulatory bodies (Tilly 2004, Evans 2008, Habermas 1984).
power of international financial and regulatory bodies, leaving an institutional void at the national level, local governments have the capacity to retain an important form of democratic power in the face of such pressures. Greater access to elites and the existence of more participatory forms of deliberation at the local level provide concrete targets and clear channels for movements to influence policy and strengthen local political power in the face of economic globalization. Responses from anti-water privatization activists in Vancouver demonstrate that social movement actors are aware of this power dynamic and seize opportunities to strengthen democratic processes at the municipal level. These findings demonstrate that more research is needed on the role of local governments for resisting and overcoming the power of global capital, especially in the context of environmental resources that are embedded in local economies and geographies.

The comparison of the different trajectories of the anti-water privatization movements in Vancouver and Stockton reveals that while differences in opportunity structures are important factors, the responses of social movement actors are also critical for understanding the role of opportunities in shaping mobilization. Activists in Vancouver had access to more open and receptive opportunity structures, yet also shaped the opportunities available to them by forging alliances with elites, seizing international opportunity structures and utilizing disruptive tactics to both mobilize a broad-based constituency. In Stockton, anti-water privatization activists were constrained by the closure of local political structures, yet the inexperience of movement leaders and the downplaying of international opportunities combined with the use of tactical restraint further impeded the movement from generating widespread grassroots support. As a result, the movement was unable to prevent water privatization. Yet their eventual victory in overturning

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33 See Hayer 2003
water privatization reveals that even when social movements do not achieve their immediate goals, they can create favourable outcomes through sustained mobilization and shifting tactics.

My research demonstrates that despite the hegemonic power of neoliberal globalization, how it resonates at the local level, including the resistance movements that emerge in response to it, is not uniform across different contexts. The findings reveal the need to refine the political process model to clarify the interaction between international and domestic opportunity structures, particularly in light of economic globalization and the pressure to commodify the commons.
Chapter 7: Mobilizing against Water Privatization: Cross Movement Coalitions

“Is there a connection between the labour movement and the environmental movement? I haven’t seen it yet. Again, the labour movement is going to be very pragmatic in how it looks at things and not to denigrate the environmental movement, but my view of the environmental movement is they still have that kind of iffy-based mentality about minimum wage types of issues, and those kinds of things where unions have laboured hard. We were born out of, seriously, people losing their lives and those kinds of things. So our view of it is a hundred years ahead of the environmental view.”

– Ken Bernardo, Union Representative, Stockton

“I think it is starting to come. I think environmental groups know that things like climate change are starting to get taken more seriously, and are becoming more cognisant of policies and how they play out on the ground, and so then are more concerned about the social justice side of things. And I think a lot of trade unions are becoming greener in terms of how they think about things. We need to bring together unions and the resource sector with environmentalists and First Nations... to talk about common ground and how we can have a sustainable resource sector and good well paying jobs. There has been a lot of groundwork that has been laid but they are still coming together. To me the politics of the future is around those two elements coming together in a concerted way.”

– David Smith, economist and environmentalist, Vancouver

The previous two chapters focused on the differences in frames and opportunities between the anti-water privatization movements in Stockton and Vancouver. Beyond differences in cognitive and structural mechanisms, the two movements were also shaped by their network dynamics. Cross-movement coalitions, including the involvement of labour and environmental organizations, emerged in both Stockton and Vancouver in response to proposed water privatization plans in each city. Yet the coalition in Stockton never gained the strength, momentum or positive outcome of the Vancouver coalition, quickly abating after a promising start. Why? The interviews with movement participants suggest the critical role of both labour union culture and bridge building organizations for overcoming conflicting interests between labour and the environment and for explaining the divergence between these two social movements. The differing perspectives of two key labour leaders from each movement reveal
important clues for understanding the divergent trajectories of the coalitions in Stockton compared to Vancouver.

Stockton

When the city of Stockton, California announced plans to contract out the operations and maintenance of the city’s water utilities in 2001, a coalition of organizations came together to oppose the outsourcing of municipal water services. The coalition included representatives from diverse social movement sectors, including environmental organizations, civil rights and voter advocacy groups, and labour unions. During the initial stages of planning, the coalition reached out to employees of the municipal water utility in an attempt to engage them in the movement and help voice their concerns over privatization. One of the employees who heeded the call was Vince O’Neil, a 53-year-old senior plant maintenance worker. Vince O’Neil joined the coalition’s efforts because he was tired of the portrayal of public employees by the mayor and council as “fat, lazy, dumb workers who come to work every day and lean on a shovel.” He said that he believes government employees should have a say in political decisions about the running of public utilities, and became involved with the coalition against water privatization in Stockton primarily to ensure that, “from the employee point of view, fair and balanced information was getting out to the public”.

Born and raised in Stockton, Vince O’Neil, is a grandfather and the full-time caregiver of his two-year old granddaughter. He has worked maintaining the pumps at the Stockton Water Treatment plant for over 32 years, and is a member of the Utility Workers Local 5, the union representing municipal utility employees in Stockton, as well as president of his union’s association. Despite having voted Republican most of his life and believing in limited government, he has faith in the value of the public sector and takes great pride in the work
completed by himself and his fellow employees at the plant. He spoke about often working extensive overtime hours, returning to the plant in the middle of the night to complete critical repair work when no one else could come in, although he does not single himself out as unique in this regard. He claims that, “the bottom line is there are a lot of employees that do what I do. Nobody talks about it, and we are not out there to get any accolades for it”. As an active member of his union local, including having held an executive position for many years previously, Vince O’Neil wanted to see things done right for the employees, whom he describes as, “gifted employees who come to work every day dedicated to doing a good job and willing to put in time after work”. He described an emotional attachment and strong sense of dedication to the job, and credits the municipal utilities department for turning his life around from his self-described “hellion” days where he “drank a lot, drove a motorcycle and was crazy,” and describes the department as the place where he grew up “from a boy to a man”. At the same time, Vince O’Neil worries about the potential health and safety risks of working at “a dirty job, a filthy job, on the wastewater side of it”.

Vince O’Neil was not previously acquainted with the key leaders of the citizen’s coalition that formed in opposition to privatization, although he initially worked closely with coalition members from outside of the labour movement and told me that he has great respect for the work they do. At the same time, his interests soon shifted from working with the coalition to fight the private company, to focus instead on workplace issues under the private contract. Vince O’Neil said he is concerned about environmental issues, particularly about multinational water companies’ “dismal track record on the environment,” but he is not a member of any environmental organizations and does not identify with the environmental movement. He expressed frustration with environmentalists for not recognizing what matters to workers’ lives,
including on-the-job health and safety, decent wages and job protection. A sense of respect for and desire to protect public sector workers was a strong motivating factor for Vince O’Neil’s initial involvement in the anti-water privatization movement, but he felt that workers’ issues were dismissed by the coalition and thus chose to focus his efforts elsewhere.

Vancouver

In the fall of 1999, when rumours that the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) was planning to privatize the management of water treatment and delivery systems first began to surface, the British Columbia Public Sector Employees Union (BCPSEU) – one of the largest public sector unions in Canada – began to organize a public opposition movement. Leading the campaign was Heather Harrison, a lawyer by training and long time community activist in the Vancouver region, who at the time of the proposed water privatization plan, had been working as a researcher for the BCPSEU, specifically focusing on the privatization of public services. Heather Harrison, a 55-year-old mother of five adult children, works full-time, including putting in a considerable amount of overtime hours at the BCPSEU union office, which comprises three floors of a five-story office building in suburban Vancouver. The office includes a large research library containing information about the importance of public services and the dangers of privatization. When I interviewed Heather Harrison at the union head office, the place was buzzing with talk about the current government push for outsourcing public sector jobs. Many posters adorned the walls of the halls, with messages highlighting a range of issues – from the link between public ownership and democracy to the importance of public investment for environmental regulation – and it was clear that a significant amount of resources are devoted to issues beyond labour market concerns, including those that matter in the broader public policy arena.
In 2002, a Freedom of Information request revealed that the GVRD had been exploring water privatization since 1995, and was aware that there would be widespread public concern about the issue. Heather Harrison sprang into action, knowing there was little time to waste in getting the message out to the public before privatization plans were finalized. She began to focus her research exclusively on the dangers of municipal water privatization. The issue was considered so important to the BCPSEU that she was provided with the full-time support of two other colleagues – a fellow researcher and a communications staff member. The union president also devoted a significant amount of his “public” time to the issue, speaking at public meetings and reaching out to the media.

Heather Harrison told me that she strongly believes that political change will only occur as a result of individuals and organizations uniting to form a strong opposition to what she calls the “corporatocracy” that she feels “is pushing for trade agreements that will increasingly take away room for government to make public policy decisions in the best interests of the people.”

As part of the BCPSEU mandate, Heather Harrison regularly works with community groups and social movement organizations outside of the labour movement on issues that are considered of significant importance to the wider community including the environmental, economic and social impacts of neoliberal globalization. She described the anti-water privatization campaign as, “a load of fun and very empowering,” and saw it as a natural extension of her previous work as a community activist. Her involvement in the political community – her husband is active in local politics – and strong ties to environmental and social justice groups throughout the region gave her a strong network base to mobilize. The BCPSEU also has a history of reaching out to social movement organizations to create “solidarity with the community”, working for over a decade on fighting the privatization of water services as part of a coalition of labour, environmental and
social justice groups, called Protect Public Water!, which she described as, “a very natural coalition for us to be involved with.”

Heather Harrison and her colleagues at BCPSEU recognized the importance of building a broad-based coalition and immediately began to solicit community support. For example, they commissioned a poll showing widespread public opposition to privatization, held high profile community meetings with prominent environmental leaders, and organized information packages about water privatization and the risks to public control that were sent to several prominent community leaders and local politicians. As Heather Harrison explained, “community coalitions were huge. We knew how important this was so we got a list of all the community groups in Vancouver... There were seniors groups, neighbourhood groups, youth groups, some churches—all sorts of community groups. And we sent out packages of materials explaining what our concerns were to around 70 community groups”. As she explained, these included City Green, a local environmental organization that had previously been heavily involved in watershed protection issues, Conservation Now, a prominent conservation group who had worked closely with the Greater Vancouver Regional District Water Board and The Citizens Action League, a large citizen-based social justice organization, among others.

According to Heather Harrison, the BCPSEU was able to attract significant public and media attention because they focused on issues of “public control, privatization and globalization and water quality and service,” a strategy that was, “really effective in mobilizing public support.” What was also significant, according to Heather Harrison, was the fact that the BCPSEU engaged in the anti-water privatization movement even though they did not represent the public sector GVRD employees at the water treatment plant, whose jobs would be affected by privatization. This strategy was effective, she argued, because it increased their credibility
with both the public and political elites because “they couldn’t argue that we were doing it to protect jobs and workers.” The BCPSEU was also strategic about their role, providing more resources than visible leadership in the coalition. Throughout the campaign, Heather Harrison and her colleagues were conscious of maintaining a low profile in terms of leadership so that the campaign would not be dismissed as “just another union campaign.” As a result of the union’s efforts to reach out to the wider community, the campaign, “took off, it just resonated with people”, and those who attended the public consultation meetings were representative of a diverse group of citizens. Heather Harrison describes the meetings as “astonishing” in terms of the sheer numbers of people and who they represented. In one case, the fire marshal was forced to turn dozens of people away because of overcrowding. She told me, “There were so many different groups and people. There were young people dressed with blue paint on their faces, but it wasn’t just young people. There were a lot of seniors... and there were also just a lot of people that were concerned that just showed up that didn’t want their water privatized.” For Heather Harrison, the widespread public representation at the public hearings signalled that the movement had moved beyond a union battle, and become a true community-based opposition movement.

**Cross-Movement Coalition Building in Social Movements**

Anti-water privatization movements across the globe frequently include cross-movement coalition building – with involvement by labour, social justice and environmental organizations – in response to local concerns. The water movements in both Stockton and Vancouver were comprised of coalitions of community organizations that in the past had frequently found themselves on opposing sides of many issues, including labour and environmental organizations. Although coalition building was a major factor in the resistance movements in both cities, the
trajectories of the community alliances took on diverse forms and outcomes, with the movement in Vancouver reflecting a stronger, more unified movement than in Stockton. Specifically, while labour remained an integral part of the anti-water privatization coalition in Vancouver, it eventually withdrew from the movement in Stockton. This divergence in the nature of union participation provides important insights into the dynamics of coalition building – particularly labour-environmental coalitions – in social movements. In this chapter, I present the findings related to the success and failure of labour-environmental coalition building in the two cases and discuss the challenges and opportunities facing social movement coalitions involved in local contestations of global issues. I argue that labour-environmental alliances are more successful when the labour unions involved are guided by a social movement unionism model versus a traditional business unionism model, as in the case of the Vancouver movement. Then I argue that the presence of key bridge building organizations – social justice groups in particular – is fundamental to building successful labour-environmental coalitions because of their capacity to unite previously disconnected groups and synthesize framing strategies. Finally, I discuss the need for social movement scholars to examine cross-movement coalition building, especially in the context of localized resistance to neoliberal globalization.

Social Movements: The Role of Networks and Coalitions

Research on the relational dynamics of social movements has become an important focus for understanding the processes of collective behaviour, including individual recruitment (Fernandez and McAdam 1988, Tindall 2002), organizational ties and coalition building (Roth 2003, Baldassarri and Diani 2007), and policy networks (Knoke et al. 1996, Broadbent 1998). Research on meso-level or organizational factors points to the importance of direct ties between movement organizations – both domestic and transnational – for information sharing, frame
bridging, the pooling and mobilization of resources, and for influencing the political arena (Evans and Kay 2008, Diani and Bison 2004, Evans 2000). Recently, there has been increased attention on cross-movement coalitions, with a focus on how shared social understandings and solidarity between organizations can bring together groups from diverse movement sectors for the broader good of civil society. Research on coalitions demonstrates that movements are not separate, discrete entities, but are often connected to one another, through the existence of bridging organizations or individuals which link diverse movement organizations and enable broad coalitions (Roth 2003, Baldassarri and Diani 2007, Mische 2009). In an era of global economic capitalism, some scholars argue that to build the counter-hegemonic movement necessary to effect fundamental and long-term political, social and economic change, movements will need to build strong cross-movement (and cross-border) coalitions that unite previously disconnected movement sectors, such as labour and environmental movements (Evans 2008, Brulle and Jenkins 2008).

**Coalition Building in Response to Public Sector Restructuring**

With the rise of the neoliberal agenda globally, and the push for private sector involvement in areas once considered the domain of the private sector – from healthcare and education to water treatment and delivery – new threats to public sector service delivery and management of natural resources have dramatically expanded. A critical example of private sector involvement in public services is the outsourcing of water treatment and delivery in municipalities across the United States and Canada and globally, an area previously nearly the exclusive domain of the public sector (Conca 2006, Bakker 2005).

While the trend towards restructuring municipal water services threatens public sector workers in terms of both wages and job protection, it also creates the potential for coalition
building between unions and other social movement sectors, including environmental and social justice movements. Water privatization as an issue resonates across multiple dimensions, encompassing economic, social and environmental concerns, and thus offers the possibility for previously disconnected movements and organizations, even those previously positioning themselves on opposite sides of issues, to work strategically together to protect public water resources and services. Moreover, water service restructuring offers a tangible target for grievances, facilitating the building of community coalitions by offering a clear opportunity for collective action.\(^1\) In many communities around the world – from Cochabamba, Bolivia to Orange, South Africa – anti-water privatization movements have resulted in the formation of coalitions between labour unions and other community-based social movement organizations (Shiva 2002, Barlow 2003, Olivera and Lewis 2004). Yet these coalitions vary in strength and outcomes, and opposition movements are less likely to succeed without these broad coalitions.

Community coalitions that form in opposition to the privatization of public services – including water – are often made up of diverse social movement organizations and actors, including representatives from labour, environmental and social justice movements. Increasingly, these organizations and movements have created coalitions around campaigns that oppose privatization and the broader deleterious consequences of neo-liberalism. Recently, many scholars have argued that local, broad-based community coalitions – especially those that unite labour and environmental movements – represent the countermovement that is needed to oppose the destructive social, economic and environmental policies of neo-liberal globalization and promote social and ecological justice (see Rose 2000, Obach 2004, and Evans 2008).

\(^1\) Staggenborg’s research on coalition building in the pro-choice movement in the United States demonstrates that coalitions are more likely to develop with the presence of clear and tangible opportunities or threats (Staggenborg 1986).
The Revitalization of Labour Movements: Building Community Coalitions

While labour unions around the world are struggling in the face of pressures from economic globalization – including capital mobility, outsourcing and declining labour regulation – labour movements are fighting back, moving beyond the traditional focus on collective bargaining and workplace protection, and seeking to influence public policy through grassroots organizing and by soliciting support from allies from the wider community. With the goal of broadening both their organizing capacity and political influence – to counter the power of capital and the erosion of public services – many sectors of the labour movement had undergone a cultural shift from the traditional business union model to social movement style unionism with a focus on reaching out to new sectors of society – including women and new immigrants – and seeking support from a wide variety of community organizations to create a collective source of power and solidarity (Chun 2009, Milkman 2006, Lopez 2004, Fantasia and Voss 2004, Clawson 2003).

A key strategy for mobilizing people from outside of the labour movement is a shift in union framing strategies, from an exclusive focus on labour market issues to a more broad understanding of neoliberal globalization, including its social, economic and environmental consequences. Mobilizing wider publics is particularly important for unions engaged in anti-privatization campaigns because successful outcomes depend in large part on broad community support for maintaining public sector services. For example, Lopez’s (2004) analysis of labour movement anti-privatization campaigns in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania suggests that framing grievances in social justice terms allows unions to move issues off the shop floor and build solidarity with the wider community, increasing opportunities for successful movement outcomes. Lopez argues that shifting the focus to the broader social good strengthens the
political leverage of unions, giving them a form of moral authority they are not able to achieve when the focus is on internal workplace issues. As a result, political elites have greater difficulty effectively responding to coalitions between labour and community organizations because they raise important questions about the effect of economic restructuring on diverse sectors of society, they are more representative of civil society, and they cannot simply be dismissed as acting in their own self-interest (Lopez 2004).

While there is much scholarly focus on this new social movement unionism, most research focuses on community-alliance building around issues that, while they may be broader in focus than narrow labour market concerns, remain centered on job- and employee-related issues, such as living wage campaigns, labour law reform or immigrant worker rights. Recently, some scholars have begun to argue that in order to build a truly effective and powerful counter-movement to neo-liberal globalization, including the mass mobilization and alternative institutional power needed to overhaul and radically transform the political and economic institutions that are the driving force behind global neo-liberal restructuring, unions must both build alliances with social movement sectors outside of the labour movement and focus on issues with broad social appeal (see Obach 2004, Rose 2000 and Evans 2008).

The environmental movement is a key target for alliance-building with organized labour because of its widespread appeal and – similar to the labour movement – its high degree of power and influence in the decision making arena relative to other social movements. Despite the very real divisions and adversarial relations that have historically occurred between the two movements - generally perceived as the “jobs versus the environment” problem2 - there are new

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2 During the last several decades, many measures supported by environmentalists have often been opposed by labour unions, who see increased environmental protection as a threat to jobs. In British Columbia, during the 1980s and early 1990s, the “war in the woods” pitted labour unions and the pro-labour government against environmentalists over forest industry regulation, creating a division between the labour and environmental movements (Wilson 1998).
opportunities for labour and environmental movements to work together on certain issues or campaigns in the face of growing threats from common foes, including advocates of neoliberal policies and reforms. Workers are facing increasing threats of job loss, outsourcing of public sector jobs and downsizing, while multinational corporate policies and obligations under international trade agreements threaten the ability of local governments to enact legislation to protect both workers and the environment.

Building a fair and sustainable economy is dependent on the ability of these two social movements to work strategically together. Environmental sociologists have pointed to the growing credibility of green-labour alliances, pointing to economic globalization and capitalist economies as the common cause of both labour injustice and environmental degradation (Gould, Pellow and Schnaiberg 2008). Much of the research on labour-environmental linkages suggests that there is a cultural and generational shift in both the labour and environmental movements, with younger activists more open to cross-class alliances and less willing to adhere to ideological anti-union or anti-environmentalist attitudes (Rose 2000, Obach 2004).

The push to privatize public services at the municipal level is an important area for labour-community coalition building. Unions and other community organizations frequently come together to fight what they perceive as a threat to local control of resources and services, especially in key areas such as health (see Lopez 2004) and the environment (see Rose 2000 and Obach 2004). Water privatization is an issue with broad social appeal because it deals with dimensions related to both labour and environmental concerns, including social, economic and environmental injustice, and therefore has the potential to bring these two movements together to

In California, the dispute over air-emissions regulations reflects a long history of antagonism and conflict between environmentalists and labour unions, particularly those representing auto-workers (Samuel 2009).
fight for a common goal. Because of its multiple dimensions, the threat of water privatization has the potential to mobilize a broad support base, link diverse movements and bridge frames.

The anti-water privatization movement in both Stockton and Vancouver included representatives from diverse movement sectors, including union members, social justice advocates and environmentalists. The contrasting stories at the beginning of the chapter illustrate the different views of labour leaders in each city in terms of coalitions with environmental and community groups. In Stockton, the Utility Workers Local 5 union, with its focus on workplace concerns, was more detached from the other community organizations that participated in the coalition. In contrast, in Vancouver, the British Columbia Public Sector Employees Union (BCPSEU) strategically decided to reach out to organizations outside of the labour movement by actively engaging theses organizations and framing their opposition using arguments that would have broader social appeal instead of traditional labour market issues. In order to understand how coalitions work, and what makes some more successful than others, it is important to examine the processes that underlie their development, including how and why they emerge, how network ties mediate mobilization, and what creates the conditions for successful outcomes. These are some of the themes explored in the remainder of this chapter.

Collaboration, Coalitions and Networks: The Role of Labour

Part of the tension concerning labour-environmental coalitions often arises from the conflicting focus and goals and the organizational culture of the organizations involved in each movement. Historically, much of the antagonism between the labour and environmental movements is rooted class-based differences, with labour focusing on traditional working-class concerns, such as jobs, wages and benefits, and the environmental movement being motivated by issues that were often perceived as anti-union and a threat to jobs, including wilderness
protection, and the regulation of toxic pollutants. Recently, there has been a waning of conflict as cross-movement collaboration grows, and each movement, independently, is experiencing reinvigoration. This change can be explained in part by a shift in organizational culture. For example, Rose (2000) argues that social movement unionism provides the labour movement with a means of survival because it strengthens its political power by facilitating grassroots organizing, access to resources, and coalition building with the broader community. Other research points to the potential of local, grassroots environmental organizations to reinvigorate the environmental movement because by focusing on building coalitions with diverse organizations around local political issues (Diani and Rambaldo 2007).

One of the major factors explaining the divergent trajectories of the Stockton and Vancouver movements is related to the organizational culture of the unions and other organizations involved. In Stockton, UW Local 5 was involved in the formation of the coalition against water privatization, but in concentrating attention and mobilizing efforts on workplace concerns, their role soon diminished as the movement solidified because of their inability to connect their arguments to the goals and framing strategies of the other organizations in the coalition. In Vancouver, on the other hand, the BCPSEU focused on issues beyond workplace concerns and thus were able to play a key role in the coalition by synthesizing their arguments and goals with that of the broader public. The perceptions and motivations of the coalition actors in Stockton and Vancouver sheds light on the factors that explain the different trajectories of the coalition.

**Stockton**

In July 1997, the mayor of Stockton visited the city’s Municipal Utilities Department (MUD), which oversees wastewater treatment and drinking water delivery services, and, in front
of the public sector employees and managers, announced plans to seek proposals from the private sector for the operation of the utility. He argued that as a public utility, the department was a drain on the city’s budget, was inefficient in its operations, and would be better managed by the private sector. The mayor’s visit was the “thrown gauntlet” that represented the beginning of the long battle with City Hall, according to Ken Bernardo, who at the time was a senior wastewater treatment plant operator and chief steward of Utility Workers Local 5, the largest construction trades local in the United States, representing workers from four states. Ken Bernardo is a long time union activist with years of experience working in the private sector. Because of this experience, Ken Bernardo told me that he often agrees with private sector criticism of publicly run services and systems, claiming that there is some truth to the argument that the private sector is more efficient. While he had ongoing issues with the MUD management, and did not disagree that there were inefficiencies in plant operations, he felt that the employees were unfairly attacked and viewed the situation as, “more of a management problem than [as]... an employee problem.”

As chief union steward, Ken Bernardo became centrally involved in the fight against privatization. His main goal was to, “negotiate on behalf of the welfare and livelihoods of the employees” and ensure “the fair treatment of workers in the face of a double attack: A battle with... management as well as with the mayor and the business community that was backing him into the privatization of the treatment facilities.” When Ken Bernardo was approached by a group of individuals from the wider community asking for the union’s support in the fight against privatization, he agreed to work with them, but remained focused on ensuring a fair deal for the workers, whom he describes as being worried about their jobs and their future at the department. He explained, “They felt like the assault was on them and their livelihood, and they
were concerned that the change and all of that was going mean they would be attacked. I think like the other classic institutionalized employees, they don’t like to hear the burden is on them. They were worried about their jobs, worried about their income, having to actually perform change. All of those things were on their minds.” While Ken Bernardo believes that union struggles have a positive role in creating “a healthy society and a fair society,” he told me that he felt the unions were primarily involved in the anti-water privatization movement to fight for job security and to protect wages.

Ken Bernardo explained that although the unions were part of the community coalition, they played a less visible role than the other coalition partners because of the perceived threat to their jobs both before and after the plant was privatized and the concern that they would lose their jobs if their involvement in the movement became known. Although he argues that the employees were discouraged when their jobs were privatized because of their concern that their wages and benefits would decrease under the new contract with the private company, he described the union’s focus on negotiation and job protection as being successful because they were able to secure a higher hourly wage for workers with the private company than under government control. He explains that, in general, the employees were not worse off after privatization. He said,

The pay was better in the private sector because we were able to negotiate. They wanted to throw money at people to quiet us, so they threw a lot of money at us. We lost some protections from termination and those kinds of things. But, on the other hand, things could be done quicker. I think there are a full group of employees out there who think that we are actually better off under the private sector because we get paid for any disagreement or anything like that. The city can’t do that as a public entity. They can’t make a gift to of public funds, so cash settlements and those kinds of things were not really kind of in the cards.

Many of Ken Bernardo’s colleagues who were involved in the anti-water privatization movement in Stockton shared his traditional view of the role of unions and the reasons for
engaging in the movement to prevent water privatization. John Sandler, a 53-year-old city employee, was a maintenance supervisor at the water treatment plant at the time of the proposed privatization. He was a high profile union leader and joined the coalition against privatization because of his concerns that privatization would reduce the job security and work conditions of the plant workers. John Sandler is an extrovert; he exudes confidence and considers himself a leader in the fight to block privatization. As he explains, the employees at the Stockton wastewater treatment plant, “looked to me for direction and guidance because of my leadership abilities at work.” His nearly thirty years of work experience at the plant underlies his sense that he is strongly connected to the natural environment and his feeling that it should be protected for future generations. At the same time, he said he does not feel connected to the environmental movement and is not a member of any environmental organization. While he joined the coalition, his role in fighting privatization was motivated by a sense of pride in providing a public service and of the work the employees did at the wastewater treatment plant. He explained,

I was there for 26 years. There was a lot of pride of ownership with all of the employees. Everybody took a lot of pride in it. It was theirs, this is ours. You can’t put a price tag on that. It was a very tight-knit group [the employees]... this is what we planned on doing until we all retired, and we planned on bringing younger people in, and hopefully they would still have the same passion for what we did. There is something about wastewater... and seeing what the product looks like coming in the door, and then what it looks like out near water going out the back end. And where most of us have boats, and we fish in the delta. There is something about seeing it, and saying ‘I did that’. Well, with this you can see it every day. You work on this equipment, you make it work, you see the end product as a result of what you did, and it just gets in your system. Ninety percent of us could have gone and worked elsewhere, but that is what we chose to do because we genuinely loved what we was doing.

Many of the workers expressed similar sentiments to John Sandler about the sense of pride of public service. He felt that his pride in delivering a public service would not translate into working for a private for-profit corporation.

John Sandler explained that once the plant was privatized, the workers felt “worn down”
and “no longer had their hearts in their work”. Personally, he resented the mayor’s disparaging remarks about the work ethic of the plant employees and resigned his position in protest before the private company took control. He said, “I couldn’t get myself up every morning and look myself in the mirror and accept this... I flat out refused to work for the private company because of that. I couldn’t go in and make money for them, after they told me how inefficient and ineffective I was.” A focus on work efficiency and defending the pride of workers were common themes expressed by many of the plant workers and union representatives interviewed.

Senior plant maintenance worker Vince O’Neil also expressed the desire to protect workers, and highlighted the pride of public service as his motivation for getting involved on behalf of the union. He said his reasons for joining the movement were,

Two reasons. One on a personal level, because I took a lot of pride in that department... The other reason I got involved was because being that I am not one afraid to speak my mind. A lot of the guys came and asked me if I would put together the association from the union side to help fight for our jobs because we were going to disband from the rest of the city, so we needed to start our own association... So from the union’s side, as president of the association, I was involved and just wanted to see things done right for the workers... We have a tremendous amount of gifted employees, who come to work everyday dedicated to doing a good job.

Similar to many other union members interviewed, Vince O’Neil describes how the union’s focus was on the risks to the proper functioning of the water treatment plant under a private corporation, whose profit-driven bottom line would mean cutting back on the number of employees. He said,

We knew the private sector doesn’t come in and do anything to break even. They are there for profit. In order to make a profit, your biggest payroll issue when you are running a company ninety-nine percent of the time is personnel, staff. It’s your payroll, it’s your benefits, it’s all this. So we knew coming in that the first thing that was going to be cut would be staff. Staffing would be cut. We knew they needed to make changes at the plant and in order for them to make this profit what was going to suffer was maintenance. The infrastructure was going to suffer.

Vince O’Neil and John Sandler’s responses represent major motivations behind the initial
involvement of the labour movement in Stockton’s anti-water privatization coalition: to protect their members and highlight the dedication of the workers and the ability of public sector workers to deliver services efficiently and effectively. The quality of work and plant-based concerns did not naturally align with the interests of the other organizations in the coalition who were the driving force behind the coalition, including environmental and voter advocacy groups, whose focus was on issues of accountability and environmental risk.

In Stockton, the union clearly operated largely under the traditional business unionism model, with a focus on addressing grievances, securing contracts, and looking out for the best interests of the employees it represented. There was little analysis or understanding of the wider issues beyond job protection and union pride. For union representatives in Stockton, the anti-water privatization fight was about job protection. It was about worker morale. It was ideological – pitting management and elected officials against unionized public sector plant employees. While the plant workers and union members interviewed participated in and expressed support for the grassroots community coalition and for public control of water, the prevailing culture of business unionism prevented them from moving beyond narrow workplace issues and interests. As a result, the union’s initial support and involvement waned when it became clear to the employees and their representatives that the city government would move forward with privatization, in part because they were discouraged and demoralized, but also because their attention turned to negotiating a strong collective agreement with the private company. The reliance on a business unionism model meant that the union representing the plant workers quickly shifted their focus away from fighting privatization and into a strategic bargaining position with the new private employer in order to secure the best possible deal for the remaining plant workers.
Community-Labour Coalitions: Collaboration and Tension

Although the connection between unions and others coalition members was relatively strong at the beginning of the anti-water privatization fight in Stockton – the unions provided financial resources, meeting space and leadership on community organizing – the relationship eventually became strained. While the unions focused on protecting the jobs, wages and benefits of its workers with the private company, the coalition continued to oppose and fight to overturn privatization, with new tactics, including a legal challenge. With the withdrawal of the unions as a central partner in the anti-water privatization movement, the remaining groups became disheartened with the labour movement. Many of the coalitions members interviewed said they believed that the unions were mainly working for their own self-interest, rather than for the benefit of the community as a whole. This perception was widespread amongst non-union respondents in Stockton. When asked if there was a strong connection between the labour movement and the other community groups involved in the coalition, Joan Davidson, a former elected representative, local small-business owner and member of the coalition steering committee, told me,

I don’t see any direct or strong connection. I think this one was self-preservation. The unions wanted to stay within the City of Stockton for a variety of reasons; they did not want to be employees of a private company. So that was one of those alliances made out of necessity ... but, in general, I don’t know. You’d have to ask union leadership about it. But the [Utility Workers] union, they were working very hard to keep the private company out because obviously it was about jobs and workers here.

Joan Davidson is a tall, well-dressed, 60-year-old business woman with a professional demeanour. She moved to Stockton 30 years ago, from Los Angeles, to raise her family and is active in the business and political community, running her own small business and having served as an elected representative in the past. I interviewed Joan Davidson in a business she owned; a small shop located in a run-down, depressed area of the city. Just off the freeway, the
store is situated near a busy road, lined with fast food restaurants, car repair shops and dilapidated motels, as well as several boarded up and abandoned buildings. Similar to many other parts of Stockton, the area is economically depressed, replete with pot-holed streets, and abandoned, boarded-up buildings. A general air of hardship pervades. While the rest of the state enjoyed the height of an economic boom, the current recession was already in full-swing in this part of California. Many of the motel residents on the strip near the shop are previous home owners who lost their homes due to foreclosure.³

As a small business owner and member of the Chamber of Commerce, Joan Davidson often finds herself on the opposite side of the bargaining table when it comes to local labour issues. Yet she is very concerned about the economic situation in Stockton, and the plight of those who had lost their homes and jobs, issues which motivate her involvement in local politics. Joan Davidson said that she believes a stronger coalition between labour and other community organizations would be a positive force in shaping public policy and believes that had the unions and the community organizations formed a stronger, more unified coalition, they would have had a bigger impact on the political decision-making around water privatization. She described her belief in the power of community coalitions and argued that, “the broader the coalition the better they are and the more credibility we have if we have people coming from different outlooks joining in a group”. At the same time, Joan Davidson feels that it is non-union coalition leaders that bring credibility to labour-community alliances, and argues that unions should work more closely with community coalitions because they represent the interests of the wider community rather than the vested interests of their workers and their organizations. When I asked her if she

³ At the time of my fieldwork, Stockton had the highest rate of foreclosures in the United States with one foreclosure for every 27 households in 2008, representing a 256 percent increase compared to 2007 (San Francisco Business Times Friday July 25th 2008).
thought that labour and community organizations should work more closely together, she responded,

Oh, I do think so. Absolutely. Because if you only hear from one segment and it is considered a radical segment, like labour, for example, you tend to take only so much. You take everything kind of with a grain of salt. You think, “Well, this is their agenda, this is their program.” But if, on the other hand, you have a group that is well-respected for their neutrality on things—not neutrality, but independence—then there is a balance that is struck. So I think that is a good thing.

Despite a general support for labour-community alliances, Joan Davidson feels that organizations outside of the labour movement, including conservation and voter advocacy organizations, are more likely to have a broad social appeal because they are not tied to vested interests. She also feels that coalitions should reflect the middle ground, rather than what she perceives as the interests of “radical groups” such as labour. Unlike the individuals representing the community organizations, whom Joan Davidson believes were fair and balanced in their approach to water privatization, she feels that the unions in Stockton were acting largely in their own self-interest in order to protect their jobs. Many other non-union coalition members in Stockton described similar sentiments about the motivations and participation of unions in the anti-privatization fight. The perceptions of the non-labour members of the coalition are important because they illuminate the role of community organizations and leaders in shaping the development and outcome of the coalition and suggest that the failure of the coalition to coalesce around either a shared identity or argument has as much to do with the culture of the union as it does with the class-based anti-union sentiment of the community members.

Joan Davidson worked closely with the community coalition from the beginning, in her role as elected official, and then subsequently as a member of the steering committee. While she had no previous ties to the labour movement, she knew many of the community leaders and considers them “well-respected citizens in this community, who were always paying attention to
local government”. While she describes the union leaders as being motivated by self-interest, she regards the non-union members of the community coalition as “the real leaders” in the anti-water privatization movement. She describe them as, “the core group of dedicated people who care, who are generally educated, generally have a stake a community, have been here long enough to know the history, and also have enough knowledge of the rest of the world.” The general perception amongst non-union coalition members that the labour movement is motivated for the most part by labour market interests and therefore cannot truly represent the wider community, also contributed to the withdrawal of labour from the anti-water privatization movement in Stockton.

The anti-union sentiment expressed by Joan Davidson was echoed by many of her fellow coalition members. Yet most of them worked alongside the union leaders at the beginning of the anti-water privatization movement, particularly as the unions provided most of the resources needed to mount the organizing effort, including financial and organizing support. As Bernie Jacobs, a retired professional and member of the coalition steering committee told me, “At first, all of our meetings were held at the union hall downtown... They gave us free use of the room, their personnel was there... they contributed money, they came to the meetings, they sent representation, they got back to their members and all of that. They gave us every convenience.” By providing much need financial and material support, as well as advice on organizing petitions and collecting signatures, the union was instrumental in the early formation and development of the coalition⁴. As time progressed, however, so did the coalition members’ perception that the

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⁴ Research on alliances between labour and other social movements demonstrates that labour often provides resources and support for other movements, including environmental and social justice movements, in part because they want to raise awareness about workers’ issues and rights, but also in order to build a shared global agenda for social change (Bonin 2007). Examples include the “Teamsters for Turtles” campaign in the battle of Seattle, which saw unions allied with environmentalists in an effort to create a unified global justice movement (Berg 2003) and the United Students Against Sweatshops, an alliance between college students, NGOs and labour unions to monitor the labour conditions in factories that produce college apparel (Featherstone 2002).
union was not working in the interest of the public, but for the protection of their own workers. The coalition steering committee’s negative assessment of the union’s involvement intensified when the workers failed to show up for the critical signature gathering event because they were focused on contract negotiations with OMI Thames.

Barbara Smith, a key member of the steering committee, told me that the coalition chose not to hire professional signature gatherers, because they were confident that the plant employees would lend their support. She said,

And two or three of our members of our steering committee, felt that, felt that was fine, because the plant employees would turn out. They didn’t! They didn’t! They didn’t! At that point, they were dealing with their union chiefs in terms of where they going to get the best deal. They were also disappointed and discouraged that the City had gone ahead with this project.

Barbara Smith is a committed community activist, who traces her organizing roots back to her student days at Berkeley. She is a strong believer in social justice and feels that broad coalitions are important because they, “Add more power. More voices” to social movements. Although she believes that movements can be more effective when unions and other community organizations work together, she feels that the union representing the plant workers was very centered on their own self-interest, arguing that, “Certainly unions aren’t going to go against something that is going to lower their pay check or put their future job in jeopardy”. Barbara Smith explained that this view was widespread among non-union coalition members and supporters. As a result, the coalition was strategic in presenting a clear message that they “weren’t working in the interest of unions” but “in the public interest”. Part of the strategy to distance themselves from the union stemmed also from fear that the mayor and council would dismiss the coalition as another “interest group”. They also had legal advice that the coalition should present itself as “working for the public”. As Barbara Smith explained,
Something interesting our attorney said is that we should be clear in our court briefs that we were working in the public interest. We weren’t working in the interest of unions, we weren’t working for the local water run-off organizations but we were working in the general interest of the public, which we were and we listed reasons for that.

Just as the union strategically chose to focus on workplace issues, the coalition intentionally framed their opposition to water privatization as representing the broader public interest and explicitly not about the interests of the workers at the plant, demonstrating that the coalition’s failure to coalesce is explained by both the union’s internal culture as well as the ideological anti-union stance of the community members.

The division between the union and the community coalition members not only weakened the coalition, but also caused internal division within the coalition itself, particularly between members of the steering committee. The anti-union sentiment caused by the withdrawal of the union after privatization led many members of the steering committee to argue against working with the labour movement in the future. Others disagreed. The difference of opinion created tension within the leadership circle. Bernie Jacobs said,

They [the unions] did come in and they contributed and they participated and they got maybe some of the volunteers and so on and on. Well yes in a very obvious way. But I think that there was among some members, there was a feeling that although we needed the unions, we needed their money, that unions were not such a good thing, and we shouldn’t give them too much support and so on. Now that issue came up a couple of times during this period when one of the unions, which was one of our strongest supporters in every way including financially, was having an issue with the management about salary increases and working conditions. And so they contacted us for our help. They asked “Could you send a letter of support; a public letter supporting our union?” Well we had a discussion within our meeting, and one view was, “Why should we do this? This is an internal labour management dispute. We shouldn’t be involved in that.” And of course my position was “What are you talking about? These are human beings, these are workers, these are people who contribute to this community, by all means we should – and look at all the help they give us – we don’t even send them a letter.”

Although the steering committee eventually agreed to provide the union with a letter of support, the arguments amongst the leadership created an atmosphere that, according to Bernie Jacobs,
was “not pleasant” and created lasting tensions between individuals who had worked closely together throughout the struggle to prevent privatization. Bernie Jacobs and others who supported his view were frustrated and disappointed that decisions about working with labour were made without any discussion or official motion.

The non-union coalition members who supported the labour movement also felt that the coalition could benefit from the union’s role as a key political power broker in the community, and were disappointed when their views were dismissed. Bernie Jacobs expressed his sense of frustration about this issue. He said,

It wasn’t ever anything that was fully discussed. A lot of things are discussed, but I just saw that some people, as I say, didn’t like being between labour/management sort of thing, which I had completely disagreed with. Others maybe didn’t like going to a union hall and so on. And I tried to make the case that some of these unions have several thousand members and they have their own newspapers and political clout. We can get our story to them, they put it in their paper and several thousand people will know and be involved in this and perhaps can become volunteers. But it was, “No, no, we are not interested”.

Bernie Jacobs was one of the first members of the coalition against privatization, becoming involved through a friend and colleague from his workplace before he retired. Although he attended meetings from the beginning, he had no previous ties to any of the coalition members, other than his work colleague. He joined the movement out of a strong sense of social justice. He considers himself a social advocate and felt his background in community organizing would be useful to the coalition’s work. Bernie Jacobs sees a strong connection between the concerns of labour and those of other community organizations, including environmental and social justice groups, emphasizing the “conflict between the needs and the goals of a few people who can make a lot of profit and the needs of the more ordinary people who need to just make a living and so on”. Although he continues to play an active role with the coalition, he is critical of many
of the tactical choices the organization has adopted, particularly the decision to distance itself from the concerns of the labour movement.

Unlike many other coalition members interviewed, Bernie Jacobs sees the movement in terms of failure as well as success, and believes that had the coalition worked more closely with unions and other social justice groups, they would have been able to prevent privatization without the legal challenge, saving the city millions of dollars. Before moving to Stockton twenty years ago, Bernie Jacobs lived and worked in San Francisco, where he was deeply involved in community organizing and political campaigns. He feels Stockton lacks sophistication when it comes to civic organizing and building strong community coalitions. Bernie Jacobs believes that community organizations must work together to fight neo-liberal corporate power and that unions are key to winning those battles. He is frustrated with the coalition’s lack of understanding about the importance of community allies. He said,

Although I have great respect for the other key people who are involved and I think every single one of them has made a very strong contribution to this ultimate victory, I think they are still making the same mistakes. For example, when we began the process of getting the city to change back to public [ownership], during that whole process there was the decision made that we would have a board. We call it a steering committee, and there would be only a few of us on it. I disagreed. So I presented the idea that they should keep all the allies that we had – several unions, the police union, the fire fighters union, the SEIU, the UW5 – all of them, so that they would each send at least one maybe two representatives to our meetings, and that we should hold our meetings at one of the union halls and we should keep the churches and other organizations. And the view that prevailed was, “No, we’ve got the Sierra Club, we’ve got the League of Women Voters and we’ve got another one and just a few of us. Let’s meet in our own homes and let’s do it that way”. And I was very critical of that because that was just the continuation of making the same mistakes because I believed that this could have been a continually political, a fair and strong political, organization on the issues that would have been very beneficial to Stockton. And it’s not that it cannot be, but it is much less likely to be now, because that is where it has moved. We are meeting in people’s homes, there are only a few of us, and there is a bit of internal squabble.
The reluctance on the part of the steering committee to include the wider community in the coalition, including labour and social justice organizations, weakened its capacity to influence policy decisions, particularly around water privatization.

At the same time, the reliance on traditional business unionism on the part of the plant employees and union members, and their subsequent retreat from the movement, alienated the other coalition members, and damaged the alliance between the labour movement and the community organizations in this case. Because of the rift between labour and other community organizations, the broad-based coalition required for a successful movement outcome never solidified in Stockton. The divide between the community coalition and the unions resulted in a fractured framing strategy\(^5\), with the workers focusing on work related issues and the coalition targeting the mayor and council’s views as unrepresentative of public opinion.

As a result of internal movement division and a disjointed argument, the coalition was unable to persuasively convince political elites to support their cause, enabling the mayor and his supporters to dismiss the opposition movement, as “small rag-tag group of ideologues and greedy workers”, as one key political figure told me. In fact, some coalition members felt the unions focus on workplace concerns provided an opportunity for the mayor to neutralize the argument and divide the movement. Wendy Lawson, a member of the steering committee and community educator, sympathized with the plant workers and their fear of job loss, arguing it was a “scary time”. Wendy Lawson, a wealthy, highly educated mother of five children, had worked closely with the plant employees through her environmental education work focusing on water quality and conservation. She told me that she knew many of the workers at the plant and

\(^5\) Research on claims making processes in social movements demonstrates that movements that construct common master frames – the result of negotiated meanings across organizations – are more likely to have successful outcomes because it allows social movements to move beyond single-issue politics to construct broader, more inclusive arguments. (Benford and Snow 2000, Carroll and Ratner 1996).
appreciated the work that they did. Nevertheless, she felt that the union’s message was detrimental to the success of the movement, explaining that, “if your only argument is the loss of municipal jobs, and the contract says everyone who has a job gets a job, and that job is going to be equal or better than what you already have, then the union’s argument [is] lost.” Despite the fact that union members felt that they were working for the good of the entire community, by withdrawing from the movement and concentrating on labour market concerns, their message of community solidarity failed to resonate with non-union coalition members. They created a division within the movement which was seized upon by political representatives in favour of privatization. This sharply contrasts with the Vancouver case, where labour successfully played a central role in the coalition against water privatization.

Vancouver

In Vancouver, there were key differences in the nature and outcome of the labour-community coalition that emerged in response to the proposal to privatize the water treatment plant. The anti-privatization coalition included members of environmental groups, social justice organizations and labour unions, including one of the largest public sector unions in British Columbia, the BCPSEU. When it became clear in early 2001 that the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) was moving forward with plans to privatize the Seymour Water Filtration Plant, researchers at the BCPSEU quickly began mobilizing to get the anti-privatization message out to the public.

At first there appeared to be little interest in the issue outside of the union itself, but when the research and communications team – made up of three long-time community organizers – reached out to their networks outside of the labour movement, the issue began to gain traction in the wider community. Eric Robinson, a 55-year-old long time political and community activist,
with ties to other social movement organizations and political allies was one of the three researchers and community organizers who worked full-time on the anti-water privatization campaign. He explained to me that one of the key tactics to broaden the issue beyond the concerns of labour was to appeal to the media, to environmental organizations and to the general public by framing the issue as critical in terms of public control and environmental protection.

Eric Robinson describes his efforts to mobilize the public as,

The first thing we did is we got funding from [our] national [office] to do a poll. And what that found was that first of all nobody in the GVRD knew that this was being done, and when they found out they weren’t happy about it. And that is when we were sort of able to get some breakthrough on it because we had a real good communications person working with us at the time and he was able to talk to [a prominent local newspaper journalist] and give it to her as an exclusive in return for her committing to actually publishing it. That was the first big public break we had because all of a sudden after that story broke in the newspaper, people began to get a lot more interested because of the concerns they had about public control and accountability.

Along with the media attention, Eric Robinson describes the importance of support from the environmental community for the Vancouver anti-water privatization movement. He said,

So then I gave a speech [to a local environmental group] based on the stuff we had gotten from the GVRD and some general stuff on privatization, and discovered in fact that they were extremely interested. It was a much stronger response than I had expected, and these groups were really clear that they were unhappy about this and wanted to do something about it. They played a real important role in this kind of stuff... We realized that there was a lot of interest in this in the environmental groups. So we went down to the public library and got their list of environmental groups in the GVRD and started doing mailings to them... basically if there was an environmental group that we could find in the Lower Mainland, we were sending information to them.

By mailing information to environmental groups, the union was attempting to engage them in the issue, laying the groundwork for a future coalition opposed to water privatization.

According to Eric Robinson, the support of the environmental community was fundamental to the movement’s success. He describes how when environmental organizations joined the cause, the issue of water privatization, “stopped being a union issue and became a
community issue.” By involving the wider community and strategically framing the issue as a public concern – one that affects both local control of resources and environmental protection – the Vancouver-based local of the union was able to move the issue beyond the workplace and into the public arena in a way that had broader appeal.

One important difference between the movement in Stockton and Vancouver in terms of the union involvement is that, while the labour movement in Vancouver was heavily involved in the anti-privatization movement – in both mobilizing the public and providing critical resources – the union that played a central role did not actually represent the workers at the water treatment plant. Hence, unlike UW5 in Stockton, the BCPSEU did not focus on workplace or labour market concerns, but instead framed the problem of water privatization in such a way as to mobilize other movement sectors and appeal to the public.

The BCPSEU is one of the largest public sector unions in British Columbia, representing over 100,000 employees. A strong member base provides a strategic advantage to the BCPSEU by allowing them to shift attention away from traditional business unionism model and its focus on organizing new members and concentrate instead on issues with broad public appeal. As part of this strategy, the BCPSEU often downplays their role in campaigns, to avoid being labelled as self-interested or alienating the broader public. Jim Roberts, the current president of BCPSEU explained,

> We try to stay in the background only as a result of us actually hurting a campaign. Sometimes because people bring their own biases forward, and as soon as they hear the word “union” it sets off this alarm in their head that, “Okay, it used to be a really good thing but now everything is wrong because the union is involved and there has to be sort

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6 Research on social movement unionism shows that unions with large membership bases seek to expand their support by building coalitions with organizations and movements outside of labour (Lopez 2004, Rose 2000). While a strong member base allows unions to shift focus from organizing to broader political agendas, Baccaro, Haman and Turner (2003) found that having a strong institutional and political power reduces the incentive for unions to organize more members, which they argue is necessary to achieve long-term political influence.
of an alternate agenda somewhere”. We don’t make it about us. There is no reason for us to. We are the largest union in British Columbia, we don’t do anything by the head and we don’t do head counts. We don’t need more members particularly. We have over 80,000 and have a tough enough time actually servicing them. But that is the myth; that unions have their agenda. And so we can’t spend a lot of time out front because a campaign would actually be over in any number of areas if we did that, even though we are always well entrenched.

Because the BCPSEU does not need to focus on organizing workers, it has been able to transition from traditional business unionism to social movement unionism, where organizing shifts from the workplace to the community. While campaigns remain important to job protection, wages and workplace conditions, they are also more broadly focused on the wider social good and the public policy domain. Building community solidarity is an essential strategy for social movement unionism (Milkman 2006, Roth 2003), and the mandate of the BCPSEU’s is reflective of this critical awareness of the importance of community support. For example, the campaigns highlighted on their website only focus indirectly on job- and worker- related issues, instead they describe issues including sustainable communities, local economic development and alternatives to neo-liberal global capitalism.

Building alliances with the wider community was a central tactic adopted from the outset by the BCPSEU anti-water privatization organizers. For this reason, they downplayed the “jobs” issue – including a strategic decision for the union representing the workers to stay out of the fight – in order to shift the focus from labour market concerns and redefine the struggle in political and social terms. As labour researcher Heather Harrison explained, this strategy was critical for the movement to gain credibility outside the labour movement. She said,

One of the reasons we got credibility on this, and we did get blamed for it later, we were blamed by various people in their official reports and so on, but one of the reasons that I think we had some credibility in it is that we fought to keep the water public, but it wasn’t our members. And I think that gave [us] some credibility because they couldn’t argue we were just doing it for the workers [because] we’ve never represented those workers.
Beyond generating credibility with the public and with elites, the involvement of a union that did not represent the workers also allowed labour organizers to reach out and build a coalition of community groups from diverse social movement sectors because they were not perceived as purely self-interested. The BCPSEU had a sophisticated understanding of what their role in the movement should be: to provide vital resources and organizing power, while taking a backseat in terms of the public face of the campaign. As Jim Roberts explains, the BCPSEU recognized the need to focus on mobilizing other organizations, while not taking credit in the eyes of the public or the media. He said,

What we needed to do, because we had the resources – whether that be research or legal and the work that we had been doing on the international trade agreements – is to actually get some interest around this [issue]. So the campaign that we used there was actually to motivate activists, to actually supply some funding to make sure that some of our researchers – actually our whole team of researchers and communicators – could work with like-minded organizations that got involved in it, including people that just said, “Hey, this [privatization idea] is really stupid.” Because we really understood that we couldn’t carry the ball on this. We wouldn’t have the kind of credibility that a church group might have or just a small business group or one of those people. So that is what we focused on – actually trying to get people involved and not taking a position necessarily against it, but giving them some information and background material on what we had, and it kind of snowballed from there.

These smaller organizations didn’t have the resources to actually send something out for a legal opinion or develop a research paper that would actually rebut what was being said and I don’t blame them. The church of whatever, their parishioners, they aren’t going to hire [a prestigious law firm] to do things like that. So we were able to do that. We were able to counter all of that bureaucratic language and we were more than willing to do that. In fact, we thought that was a better role for us to do after initiating the campaign.

To avoid criticism of union involvement and to strengthen the movement opposing water privatization, Jim Roberts felt that the BCPSEU needed to provide resources to other organizations and activists who would lead the fight against privatization. Jim Roberts has worked his entire career with organized labour, but believes that unions cannot generate the kind of political clout that is necessary to protect public sector “living wage” jobs without building solidarity with community organizations. He believes that a key area for coalition building is
with the environmental movement and argues that, “the link has never been stronger.” An essential component of building community solidarity is to provide resources – from research and legal opinions to public workshops and conferences – to organizations outside of the labour movement to help make linkages between the concerns of labour and those of other movement sectors. The BCPSEU researchers and organizers interviewed explained that the union regularly devotes considerable resources and educational outreach to engage communities and movements outside of the labour movement in the issues that they believe are important for the good of society as a whole. As a result of the community outreach work, the union has developed and fostered strong social ties across various movement sectors that they are able to draw upon for support as opportunities for collective action arise.

The union’s involvement in the anti-water privatization is an example of the BCPSEU’s work building truly broad-based coalitions. Eric Robinson noted that the union’s success in engaging movements outside of labour is tied to their ability to argue their case in terms that resonate beyond union members. In the case of water privatization, the BCPSEU organizers focused on the importance of public control. As Eric Robinson said, “Well the biggest thing was simply public control. If you had to summarize what everybody was concerned about it would have been summarized under the frame of public control of water. That was our focus.”

A strategic choice not to be the public face of the movement and to frame the issue as a public policy concern rather than a labour issue was essential in mobilizing a wide pool of activists and organizations from other movement sectors. When I asked why he thought the movement was successful, Eric Robinson, said,

Because it simply became such a broadly-based opposition. If it had really been sort of a narrow union thing, if it had just been [the BCPSEU], it never would have been successful. It is interesting that one of the things that probably helped make it successful is the fact that we don’t represent the GVRD because the biggest argument we often face
with these things is “You are only doing this because you’ve got members who are involved”. And so we were able to make it about something that matters to the public and not just workers. In this case, we were able to say, “We are opposed to public/private partnerships and are particularly opposed when it comes to privatization of water services, but we don’t represent these workers. This is a policy perspective.”

For Eric Robinson and other members of the BCPSEU working with a coalition of community partners shifted the issue from a union issue to an issue of community concern, and allowed the campaign to take off and mobilize a wide range of activists from diverse backgrounds.⁷

Community Coalitions: Collaboration, Solidarity and Dense Networks

An important result of social movement unionism is the support it enables unions to generate from the broader public. The perceptions in the community of the BCPSEU reflect the union’s strategy to focus on issues that would appeal to constituents outside of the labour movement. Many of the respondents from diverse community organizations spoke favourably of the union’s involvement and particularly of the focus on issues that resonated widely. Many of them were individuals who had no previous ties with the labour movement, but recognized and appreciated the BCPSEU’s efforts to reach out to non-union members. Bob Davies, a 70-year old retired engineer and member of a local chapter of the Citizens Action League, a grassroots social justice organization with chapters across Canada, explained that the BCPSEU made important connections between the concerns of their members and those of the general public. He said,

The opposition to the water privatization was based on the fact that it should be a public utility. I think a lot of labour movement, particularly such as we still have it in Canada, is people who work in the public activity areas, healthcare, water systems, municipal, whatever. And their issues obviously spill over into much larger issues that concern everyone, which I

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⁷ Ancelovici’s (2002) research on the French anti-globalization movement (ATTAC) demonstrates that the movement’s success is related to the downplaying of traditional working class frames – despite the strong involvement of labor unions and leaders – in favour of frames with broader social appeal, including citizenship, democracy, solidarity, global economic and corporate frames. The use of frames focused on the broader social good brokered connections between organizations from the old class-based movements with those of the new left and allowed for widespread mobilization against economic globalization.
think you find the labour movement both in healthcare and this water issue had quite a significant input in that because they make those connections. I think, quite frankly, the fact that whether this system up here at Seymour Creek was going to be public or private would have in the long haul or even the short haul, very little economic impact on the members of [the union] per se. But they were going beyond their focus of members’ benefits to the larger community. So, yes, they made that connection.

Bob Davies feels that, in general, social movements have demonstrated little success in creating social change because:

I think one of the difficulties or failings of people on that side of the spectrum is that history has shown over the years that it is very difficult for many, many groups, and there are a lot of them on the so-called “left” to get together to do something united in opposition to something. You know, to have a single united face on something.

However, he credits the success of the anti-water privatization movement in Vancouver to the ability of organizations from different movement sectors to move past their differences and work together. He said that the strong labour-community coalition in this case led him to “question [his] belief that the left can’t get it together and do something – in a unified sense coherently to the external world.”

A sense of appreciation for the support of the union was widespread amongst members of community organizations in part because of the choice to provide resources and organizing capacity, but remain on the sidelines in terms of public presence. Fiona Rogers was one of the main community organizers of the anti-water privatization movement. Fiona Rogers is a 37-year-old community educator, who has been active in issues of globalization, privatization and social justice since being an undergraduate in Montreal. After graduating with a B.A. in political science, she completed a Master’s degree in environmental studies, where her research focused on environmental justice movements in Latin America. She also spent a year in South America, working with indigenous groups who were fighting to prevent privatization of their natural resources. At the time of the proposed privatization plan, Fiona Rogers was working for a local
theatre company that – coincidentally – was mounting a dance theatre production about water privatization. She was hired to, “build community involvement around the project and... to connect with other people doing water work.” When the issue of water privatization came up, she began to focus some of her outreach work on “activism around the issue” and ended up working closely with both the BCPSEU and the BC regional office of the Citizens Action League.

According to Fiona Rogers, the ability of the BCPSEU to provide critical resources without being a visible movement leader was critical to the movement’s success. She explained,

The [BCSPEU] was actually one of the first groups to really get moving on the water stuff. We were just kind of becoming aware of the issue, the rest of us, when they had already had a legal opinion done. The [BCPSEU] was really good I have to say... I can say they were really good at not stealing the limelight, which is really important because unions often do that, and it pisses off community people to no end. But the [BCPSEU] actually was really supportive, but they also were strategic around realizing that if they were too visible then anti-union people wouldn’t pay attention to us. And so there were a number of times where the [BCPSEU] had actually either financed what was happening or really played an important role research-wise or something where they would say to us at the end, “Don’t put our name on it. Don’t make this a [BCPSEU] thing”. And so there were some pamphlets and stuff that we did where the [BCPSEU] had done a lot of the research work for it and then they weren’t even mentioned. So I think they played a very important role and were really good about how they played it.

A strong understanding the importance of connecting with community, and balancing resource and organizing support with the need to keep a low profile was instrumental in building trust and credibility with organizations and individuals outside of the labour movement. As a result, a unified opposition movement was able to present a strong and convincing argument against water privatization.

8 The findings of my research demonstrate that sharing resources without assuming a leadership role, increases the potential for unions to build strong and cohesive social movement coalitions with the broader community and ultimately contribute to successful outcomes. While there is little research on this particular strategic tactic, Rose’s (2000) research on coalition-building between the environmental, labour, and peace movements shows that organizations often use their diverse styles strategically, creating a “good cop, bad cop” routine, whereby organizations shift leadership roles, alternating between organizations with a more cooperative and conciliatory style to those – typically the role of unions – with a more activist, protest-orientated focus.
The anti-water privatization movement in Vancouver was not the first time that the BCPSEU had worked with organizations outside of the labour movement. Although their primary focus is on protecting public sector jobs and services, the BCPSEU has a long history of working with community groups to raise awareness of the importance of public services and utilities. Several years before the water privatization issue came up in Vancouver, the BCPSEU had forged alliances with other organizations across the country – including the Citizens Action League – to raise awareness of the implications of water privatization for communities. The focus on community issues enabled the BCPSEU to connect labour concerns with those of the wider community. As President Jim Roberts explains, water was a key area for making connections and building networks. He said,

Water, of course, which was a huge environmental issue for our organization and, as well, the international trade agreements and how they were impacting everything. So it all kind of tied together for us so it was the perfect kind of footing for us to get involved in all those areas and work with other people – actually talk about why we need to keep water public. Why we need to be particularly concerned about water, if in fact something happens, it would stay in the public domain, and we should own it and the consequences of the hurdles that local governments are going to have to go through to in fact keep their ability to be responsible to their citizens in water with the big water companies. Because there was and still is billions and billions of dollars in water. I mean that is the motive and we understand that is why business was actually involved in it. So that is how we actually got involved in it and as we actually started to research it more we found out quickly that it tied to a whole lot of other things – industry, small business – besides the sort of big platform issues that we were talking about... So that is how it all kind of started out and even I was surprised at the time the implications of what losing control of water might do to not only the community but an economy. So that is how we got involved and it was a natural fit for us to make that happen.

The potential broad based appeal and multi-dimensional issues around water privatization facilitated the union’s links with other important organizations and interests. Despite the fact that the water privatization would not directly affect the workers they represent, the BCPSEU believed it was in their own interest to participate in the campaign against water privatization
because of its connection to broader economic and social justice concerns that the union considered important and in the long-term interests of its workers.

The networks that formed out of previous work around water were also strengthened by the battle over the Multilateral Agreement on Investment\textsuperscript{9}, which a coalition of labour unions, environmentalists and social justice groups had worked to defeat the previous year. Many respondents in Vancouver described the importance of the anti-MAI coalition for the ability of the water movement to organize quickly and effectively against water privatization. The relationships that had formed between diverse organizations and the educational outreach around complex issues of trade and investment provided the foundation for the anti-water privatization movement to emerge and develop as a cohesive and broad-based coalition\textsuperscript{10}. Many of the respondents in Vancouver referred to the MAI movement as being an important precursor to the anti-water privatization movement because it united movements around the dangers of trade agreements for local control of resources; having raised awareness about trade concerns with the public made it easier for organizations to draw parallels with the issue of water privatization and mobilize a wide pool of constituents. Mike O’Brian, a water campaigner for the Citizens Action

\textsuperscript{9} In the mid-1990s the OECD began negotiations for a new global investment treaty, The Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), that would expand international trade and investment regulations to new economic sectors not previously covered by the existing agreements negotiated under the WTO (World Trade Organization), including services such as health and education, trade in currency and other financial investments such as stocks and bonds, as well as ownership of natural resources (Singer and Orbuch 1997). The MAI negotiations sparked a global opposition movement, where activists and organizations joined forces to speak out against the potential curtailing of the powers of local and national governments and the threats to environmental protection, and labour and human rights under the agreement. Because of intense public pressure, the MAI talks eventually broke down in 1998 (Public Citizen 1998).

\textsuperscript{10} Diani (2003b) contends that the sustained interaction between political organizations facilitates the creation of movement coalitions that move beyond single-issue campaigns facilitating the production of a collective identity amongst the organizational networks involved. In Vancouver, pre-existing networks and campaigns, such as the MAI, created a sustained interaction between organizations and movements that was able to respond to water privatization by drawing on previously constructed collective identities.
League, described the importance of the pre-existing network that formed during the stop the MAI campaign. He said,

That is where the network from the MAI came in really handy. They found the grassroots organizers, plugged in the grassroots groups, the church groups, the community groups, the university and student, youth groups. They had the networks established, even down to where to have the meeting. So this network was right there, they knew each other, they had worked together, they had the success of the MAI and that was seen as a huge victory. They were already working. It was very broad-based; it was environmental issues; it was anti-privatization issues, poverty issues; it was labour groups, globalization groups. And they had already kind of practiced doing it. They knew what to do, they knew how to organize, they knew who their speakers were, they had connections in government already. Because that kind of mobilization around the MAI and probably drawing too on the NAFTA mobilization, it was kind of the next battle, as opposed to re-inventing the whole process.

The movement in Vancouver was perceived as a broad-based and representative because of a history of collaboration and dense networks between diverse movement sectors. The MAI networks in Vancouver were essential for creating a successful movement not only because of the strong ties between labour unions, social justice groups and environmentalists, but also because of the pre-existing ties between the activist sector and political elites. While social embeddeness between community organizations matters for movement outcomes, so does the presence of political opportunities for grievances to be heard\(^\text{11}\). In Vancouver, pre-existing ties between activists and political representatives facilitated access to key political opportunity structures that were critical to shaping movement outcomes.

The movement in Vancouver, unlike in Stockton, was able to create a successful labour-community alliance because the union involved in the coalition constructed their opposition in

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\(^\text{11}\) Previous research on movement outcomes reveals the importance of sympathetic political allies to movement success (Gamson 1990, Amenta et al. 1992, Cress and Snow 2000, Broadbent 2003). For example, Broadbent’s (2003) research on environmental policy networks in Japan, points to the importance of ties between community activists and political elites for opening up political opportunities for grievances to be heard. Interactions between elites and movement actors – in the form of vertical ties extending from political structures down through business organizations to community organizations – facilitate mobilization and successful outcomes through the presence of high status leaders who are linked to those who hold political power.
terms that would resonate with movements outside of labour. This strategy – based on social movement unionism – was important because it allowed the union to reach out to their networks and provide critical resources while remaining in the background so as not to make it appear a union issue. Beyond the culture of the union and the pre-existing networks, the coalition in Vancouver was successful because of the vital role of bridge builders.

The Unifying Role of Bridge-building Organizations: Bringing Together Networks and Frames

The previous section focuses on the role of coalitions for mobilization and movement success and emphasizes the importance of dense networks between diverse movement organizations in Vancouver in facilitating the emergence of a strong and unified anti-water privatization coalition. While the existence of strong ties between movement sectors can shed light on the either the presence or absence of coalitions or their relative strength\(^\text{12}\), it is also important to understand the processes that underlie coalition formation to be able to clarify how coalitions emerge and develop. Examining underlying causal processes or mechanisms is useful for explaining why similar movements take different trajectories in terms of network structures. What contributes to the creation of cross-movement coalitions?

Recent research on networks and coalitions in social movements demonstrates the importance of achieving the correct balance between dense formal networks and loose informal networks for increasing the social integration of civil society (Baldassarri and Diani 2007). The success of a social movement depends on its ability to build inter-organizational alliances, and these alliances are more likely occur when there is the right combination of strong ties and weak ties between organizations (Mische 2003). What mechanisms are important for achieving the right balance between strong and weak network ties? Recent theoretical perspectives point to the

\(^{12}\) See Baldassari and Diani 2007, Mische 2009.
importance of bridge building organizations and individuals for connecting disparate groups through cross-over ties and frame bridging strategies, through a process called brokerage. Bridge builders or “brokers” function as connectors of “two or more previously unconnected social sites by a unit that mediates their relations with one another and/or with yet other sites” (McAdam et al. 2001:26). Brokerage acts as a key causal mechanism for bringing together different organizations during periods of contention. Bridging organizations are particularly important in linking organizations or movements whose relationship has historically been strained (Roth 2004).

One of the main differences between the movements in Stockton and Vancouver is the presence of bridge building organizations in Vancouver. The existence of a critical brokerage organization – the Citizens Action League – with ties to both the labour movement and the environmental movement, played a central role in bridging the green-labour divide and creating strategic alliances across movement sectors. The Citizens Action League’s main focus is on social, environmental and economic issues, including fighting to protect public services and ensure the environmental protection. Because of this broad focus, the Citizens Action League (CAL) often finds itself working closely with both labour and environmental groups. In 2001, when the issue of water privatization in Vancouver came to the forefront, the BC office of the Citizens Action League had been working regularly with both the BCPSEU and environmental organizations on a range of issues facing the region, including the concern over bulk water exports and the efforts to stop the MAI. Many of the respondents interviewed in Vancouver were connected to CAL, either through existing alliances, membership or volunteer work. Figure 7.1 presents the overlapping ties of Vancouver activists and reveals the density of overlapping ties.
Figure 7.1 – Network centrality in Vancouver
between Vancouver activists from environmental, labour and community organizations. The graph reveals the centrality of the Citizens Action League (CAL) in brokering ties between diverse social movement sectors. The size of the triangle represents the centrality of the organization, with CAL being the largest and hence most central organization, acting as a brokerage organization in the network of anti-water privatization activists and organizations.

Many respondents spoke of the importance of CAL for bringing organizations together and connecting movement agendas. Lynn McCain, a 56-year-old office administrator and vice-president of a BCPSEU local described the important relationship that existed between the union and CAL, especially with the work they had done around water issues and concerns. She described their relationship as strong, explaining their history of working closely together: “We always have had that relationship because they are really big into the water stuff. We’ve done events with them and we support a lot of their ideas and we tell each other – information sharing. We have that connection.” In order to mobilize people to join the anti-water privatization movement, CAL and the BCPSEU teamed up to organize several public information sessions, with the goal of reaching out beyond their own membership base. As union researcher and community organizer Heather Harrison explained, CAL was instrumental in connecting the BCPSEU with a wide range of individuals and groups across the Lower Mainland. She described the importance of CAL as a bridging organization,

The [Citizens Action League] was huge. Absolutely. So when you get to working in coalitions, the [Citizens Action League] was key. I mean we did a lot of work, but they also did an awful lot of work. That helped us connect not just with their members, but with many other groups... I remember that at one of the public meetings that they had, a woman stood up and said something like – this was over in North Vancouver – and she said: “I’m your worst nightmare. I’m educated and I’m recently retired and I have nothing but time on my hands”. And we had no idea who she was, who most of the people were. So, we knew that this thing was going to be [big]. We thought we were going to win when we completely lost control of the campaign! When things are happening when we were saying “Did you know about this group?”

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“No, I’ve never heard of them.” “Well, they left a message on my machine that this is an outrage and they are going to go to their city council.” So it just took off, it just resonated with people. The [Citizens Action League] was key with that.

One of the reasons that CAL was so effective at mobilizing a large number of people to join the movement was linked to their membership base, their recent history of winning campaigns and their internal structure which gave them access to critical resources. Andrew Walters, an activist and past chair of a local CAL chapter, described the fundamental role played by CAL in ensuring the movement’s success both in terms of their credibility in the community and their access to a large membership base. He said,

I mean the [Citizens Action League] was sort of a force to be reckoned with. Between 1995 and 2000 we had some major national victories. We had contributed to stopping the MAI, we contributed to stopping the merger of the banks, we had stopped the cutbacks on the old age security... So [CAL] was seen as an organization that had real clout... There was this sense that [CAL] in Vancouver and elsewhere was a powerful force, and at that time we had just opened the provincial organizers and the local organizer was very effective. So he and I sort of worked together on mobilizing [CAL] members of whom there are probably 5,000 in the – well over 5,000 in the Lower Mainland. We had access to a [large] group.

CAL’s access to a large and diverse membership, made up of individuals across the Lower Mainland, was critical in ensuring a significant turn-out at the public consultation meetings organized by the GVRD Water Board. The ability to mobilize an extraordinarily large turn-out at these public consultation events turned out to be one of the most important organizing outcomes for the movement because it was a signal to the political leadership that there was widespread public opposition to their proposed privatization plan.

The structure of CAL also facilitated their ability to mobilize resources and reach out to diverse networks, acting to connect diverse groups around a common cause. Mike O’Brian, CAL’s water campaigner, describes the importance of the activist network that was buttressed through the work of the Citizens Action League. He said,

At the time, we had regional chapters and local organizers and we had organizers in a few
cities across Canada, Vancouver being one of them. That was really effective in taking part in the anti-privatization because there were a lot of people already following it through an activist network, and we had a full-time organizer, paid organizer to assist with that. A lot of people who were involved, were involved in other things that were connected. You know, same old gang, same people, different meeting. But because it has a core of people who make the connections easily – especially those who work with the [Citizens Action League] – and then reach out to their networks. So that was really key in involving CAL. Having CAL there with that network really supported the movement and also at the time a lot of the people were overlapping with the municipal structure through the city councils and with the work with labour... that network was rolled over very easily into the water privatization issue.

CAL’s dense organizational network structure, including its many connections with local political opportunity structures facilitated the sharing of information and mobilization across diverse organizations and movements in Vancouver. The anti-water privatization activists in Vancouver were from multiple social worlds, but through existing network ties and previous campaign work, were able to move easily between worlds and identities and work collaboratively together.

Bridge-building organizations are important not only for network integration, but are also fundamental for synthesizing the goals and strategies of different organizations in order to construct common frames (Roth 2003). In Vancouver, activists were able to draw on a common master frame – the risks to public services from corporate power and international trade agreements – that resonated across movement sectors and organizations\(^\text{13}\). The key brokerage role played by the Citizens Action League facilitated the successful framing strategy because of their campaign emphasis on corporate power structures and international trade agreements, which easily linked the concerns of both environmental organizations and labour unions through the identification of corporate hegemony as a common root cause for deregulation both of environmental protection and public services. Mike O’Brian, former water campaigner for the

\(^{13}\) The process of frame construction in social movements is discussed further in Chapter 7.
Citizens Action League described the fears around the corporate agenda as being the common connection across movement sectors. He explained,

If you had asked someone working on the water privatization campaign in Vancouver what it was about... I think they would say it was a corporate issue. That particular movement brought a lot of different analytical perspectives into the fight – right from poverty issues to trade – making that kind of corporate agenda connection very strongly with people on a kind of intellectual or esoteric level. And it was about getting active and making the connections. We starting going down the water privatization list with horror stories. It was about this is a sell-off, corporate control. And I think that that dovetailed in with just the sensitivity that people have with the issue and all their other concerns. So, those corporate issues, those were the connections that were made and so all of these organizations that were fighting different issues, but with the same analysis, found it very easy to come together over water. And I think what [CAL] did is that they informed people about the corporate agenda and made the connections.

The focus of CAL’s campaigns shed light on the connections between corporate and trade issues and the concerns of both environmental and labour organizations, allowing for the development of a common frame around the corporate control of water that resonated across both the labour and environmental movement.

The BCPSEU had completed in-depth research on the detrimental consequences of water privatization and the effects on water quality, public accountability and transparency, with a particular focus on the risks under NAFTA’s investment clause, including commissioning a legal opinion from one of Canada’s experts in international trade and investment law. The focus on corporate control and trade was instrumental in connecting their agenda with that of the Citizens Action League. Where the union had less success was in merging their analyses with the concerns of environmentalists, whom they needed to mobilize because of their significant clout in the community and their access to political opportunity structures. Connecting the labour and environmental movement was an essential strategy in building a broad-based movement in Vancouver that would resonate not only with members of the general public, but also with
political elites. The Citizens Action League was instrumental in bridging the green-labour divide by making linking together environmental and labour concerns under the common master frame of corporate power.

Jennifer Brown, an environmental activist and chair of the organization Conservation Now, a local conservation group, was one of the leaders of the coalition against water privatization. Jennifer Brown is a married mother of two teenage children who completed a PhD in Chemistry and has dedicated her life to, “raising her children and being a full-time activist”. Because of her expertise in issues of water quality and her role as chair of a prominent conservation organization, she was appointed as a citizen representative on the GVRD Water committee, a position she filled for several years. As part of her work with the water committee, Jennifer Brown worked for over a decade to convince elected representatives and bureaucrats in the GVRD to implement a successful plan to protect the North Shore watersheds from logging. It was critical that the coalition be supported by environmental leaders like Jennifer Brown, not only because of her expertise around water issues, but because of her strong connections and credibility with local policy makers. When I interviewed her, Jennifer Brown described the role of the Citizens Action League in bringing together environmentalists such as herself with labour representatives and in connecting the issues. She said,

[Conservation Now], we played a somewhat larger role than you would expect a local conservation group would play, and that was just in part because of our good links with our local chapter of [Citizens Action League]... The other was this rising awareness of how important public assets were in fact being privatized and coming under the control of private interest for profit. And I really credit the [Citizens Action League] with doing a great job with bringing in the corporate issue, of course. We were lucky because one of the key members on my conservation committee was also very active with the local chapter of the [Citizens Action League] and so, again, it ended up being a really good synergy for us.

Diani (1996) contends that frames do not develop independent of political opportunities, arguing that collective action frames must not only resonate across movements but also with political elites in order to open up the political opportunity structures necessary to secure successful movement outcomes.
During the interview, Jennifer explained that CAL connected Conservation Now with the BCPSEU when they organized a meeting with environmentalists and labour activists around the theme of trade and corporate control. An excerpt from the May 2001 newsletter of Conservation Now describes a presentation by Eric Robinson from the BCPSEU on the risks to public control of water under NAFTA, as being important for mobilizing their members. The newsletter states: “He did a compelling presentation of why we need to maintain public control of drinking water and oppose water exports under NAFTA. So a number of people signed a list indicating their interest in working on this issue.” The focus on trade issues and the connection to environmental protection, highlighted by CAL and the BCPSEU was instrumental in securing the support of key environmental leaders in Vancouver.

Framing anti-water privatization arguments around corporate concerns and public control, including the environmental and economic risks of private investment and trade regulations, was an important strategy to unite previously disconnected groups including environmental and labour organizations. Amanda Jones, a 40-year-old mother of two who worked as the Citizens Action League’s regional organizer at the time of the anti-privatization battle argued that CAL not only worked to bring together different organizations, but also focused on creating a common messaging strategy to synthesize the concerns and goals of environmentalists and labour unions. She said,

Because the [Citizens Action League] really worked from kind of the trade perspective and privatization issues were major themes, our materials focused on that. We had worked with the [BCPSEU] before on those issues many times. And we worked with other organizations that... focused more on the environment. I think they [environmental organizations] at the time... had talked quite a bit about the reasons for the need for a filtration system when you deforest an area and it degrades the water quality, and so on, and then you have the need for filtration. So they kind of brought that historical perspective in to people understanding what the context was. There were different kinds of perspective. But we were able to show how all those issues – what the [BCPSEU] brought to the table, what the environmental groups were
doing – we were able to show that it was, that they all reinforced each other and when we had meetings we would talk about making sure that we were reinforcing each other’s messages and not contradicting each other. That was a planned strategy.

CAL’s role was no accident. They strategically acted to build on the strengths of each movement’s potential contribution and sought to bring them into the coalition. In successful social movements, bridge builders facilitate the shift from single issue grievances to broad common agendas, widening the pool of movement supporters, creating a sense of solidarity and generating a unified movement that cannot easily be dismissed by elites as representing the narrow interests of a few organizations. In Vancouver, organizations from different movement sectors worked together along several of strategic dimensions to build a cross-movement coalition to fight the privatization of water, thanks to the brokerage role of a critical bridge building organization. Coalition partners shared resources, used agreed-upon organizing tactics, cooperated across networks and adopted common frames that acted to bring together previously disconnected movement sectors\(^\text{15}\).

The central role of brokerage by a bridge building organization is a key explanatory difference between the movements in Vancouver and Stockton. In Stockton, despite the existence of multiple social movement organizations, there was no key bridge building organization to link previously disconnected groups, particularly environmental and voter advocacy organizations with labour unions\(^\text{16}\).

\(^{15}\) See Evans and Kay (2008) for a discussion of how the alignment of networks, tactics, resources, and frames in the environmental movement facilitated a successful outcome in the campaign to include environmental protection in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

\(^{16}\) In Stockton, the Citizens Environmental Alliance, a national organization that focuses on the link between corporate power and environmental protection, attempted to unite diverse community organizations – unions and environmental organizations in particular – around a common theme of corporate control. Unlike Citizens Action League in Vancouver, however, the Citizens Environmental Alliance was unable to assume a brokerage role because they lacked ties to local community organizations and thus had not developed the trust and reciprocity needed to assume a bridge building role.
In addition to the absence of an effective bridge building organization in Stockton, the network profile of coalition members also mattered. In Stockton, coalition members were either associated with labour unions or community organizations, with very little overlapping membership. Figure 7.2 presents respondents membership ties and reveals the low network density and integration between social movement organizations in Stockton and little overlapping membership of anti-water privatization activists. It demonstrates that the movement in Stockton was fragmented, with little cohesion between social movement organizations and actors involved in the movement. In particular, with the absence of a brokerage organization, the graph demonstrates that there were few ties between UW5 (the main labor organization) and other organizations, including environmental and community organizations. Coalition members were either associated with labor unions, environmental groups or community organizations, with little density and integration across movement organizations amongst Stockton respondents.

Without the facilitating role of brokerage, the movement remained a loose network of organizations and individuals unable to coalesce around a common frame. There were few pre-existing networks between the organizations that formed the anti-water privatization coalition. The main organizations besides the labour union – including a prominent conservation group and a high profile voter advocacy group – were traditionally unsupportive of labour concerns. Despite the initial alliance between unions and other community organizations, without a critical bridge-building organization to connect the community organizations with the labour union and bridge frames, the coalition remained divided around both tactics and framing strategies, with unions advocating a focus on workers and job protection, while other coalition members focused on accountability and democracy frames. As a result the movement was dismissed by political elites as a small group of self-interested individuals.
Figure 7.2 – Network centrality in Stockton
Conclusion

The privatization of water as a multi-dimensional issue provides the opportunity for involvement from diverse movement sectors in the fight to prevent privatization. The contrasting examples of the Stockton and Vancouver movements demonstrate that an important factor in explaining the strength of anti-water privatization movements is the development broad-based, unified coalitions that create consensus over tactics and frames. The activists interviewed in Stockton and Vancouver articulated their understandings about coalition building in the face of a common grievance. Although their answers reflect a wide range of opinions and sentiments, activists from both movements described the importance of coalition building and community solidarity. Why then did the development and trajectories of the community coalitions in Vancouver and Stockton take such different form, with the movement in Vancouver demonstrating a more cohesive and interdependent alliance between labour unions and community organizations than in Stockton?

There are two reasons that explain the diverse network outcomes in Stockton and Vancouver. First, dissimilarities in the culture and structure of the labour movement led to differences in both meaning construction and the role played by unions. In Stockton, the union that was centrally involved in the coalition opposing water privatization – the Utility Workers Local 5 – had an organizing structure shaped by a business unionism model, whose focus rarely extends beyond labour market concerns. As a result, the union members involved in the movement framed their grievances around job protection and wages, a strategy that was resisted by other members of the coalition. By concentrating on issues of self-interest, the union was unable to build solidarity in the wider community, ultimately leading to a division between the union members and the other coalition partners.
In Vancouver, the role of the labour movement took on a different form. The BCPSEU, the main labour union involved in the anti-water privatization coalition, was a more activist-oriented union and explicitly focused on building solidarity with other movements, to the point of being willing to provide resources without recognition and strategically obscure their own role for the good of the larger cause. The BCPSEU has a history of framing issues more broadly in order to generate support from outside the labour movement, and in building critical alliances with organizations across movement sectors. Using frames that resonate with a wide-range of organizations allows social movements to move beyond local, single-issue politics to a more thorough analysis of hegemony (Carroll and Ratner 1996). The focus on social movement unionism facilitated the creation of a unified coalition that was able to create a shared collective identity and coalesce around the common master frame of corporate power. The vision articulated by the Vancouver activists reflects a shared understanding of the root of the problem. The ability to build a common frame across diverse movements reflects a sense of trust and reciprocity amongst the different groups in Vancouver and this is largely the result of the more activist structure of the labour movement. These findings challenge previous research on labor-community coalitions claiming that unions are incapable of acting as equal partners in broad-based coalitions or in working for a broader common cause because they consistently fall back on issues of self-interest (see Heckscher and Palmer 1993). 

One key difference between the Stockton and California is the nature of the unions involved, with the Utility Workers Local 5 in Stockton largely representing private sector construction and trades people, and the BCPSEU in Vancouver mainly representing public

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17 This claim has also been challenged by Nissan’s (2004) research on labour-community alliances in South Florida demonstrating the increase of “common-cause” versus “vanguard” coalitions between labour unions and the broader community.
service sector employees. The unions that have been most successful incorporating social movement unionism into their organizing practices have largely been service sector unions, representing employees in “post-industrial” jobs (Lopez 2004). For labour to regain the political and organizing power they once held in the U.S. and Canada, it needs to adopt social movement unionism as a model, across labour union sectors, including assuming a broader political and social agenda and building solidarity with movements outside of labour\textsuperscript{18}. Transitioning to a

\textsuperscript{18} The variation in union culture in Stockton as compared to Vancouver may reflect differences in union strength between Canada and the U.S. In the last decade, the rate of unionization in the U.S., nationally, was 12.1 per cent of the workforce (Zipperer and Schmitt 2008) as compared with just over 35 per cent in Canada (Lipsit and Meltz 2004). Previous research on labour unions in Canada and the U.S. demonstrates that Canada’s labour unions are relatively strong in terms of political influence as compared to the U.S. where the union movement has been in steady decline, with decreasing influence on political decision-making and civil society (Riddell 1993, Zuberi 2006). However, despite thirty years of decline, the organizing and political power of unions in the United States is increasing, in part because of the growth of social movement unionism (Fantasia and Voss 2004, Milkman and Voss 2004). With the adoption of social movement unionism on the part of a large number of unions – including both private and public sector unions – California was able to increase union membership by over 200,000 workers (Zipperer and Schmitt 2008).

Although there are clear differences between Canada and the U.S. in terms of union density, these differences should not necessarily be attributed to a divergence in values of the populations of the two countries. While some research has pointed to cross-national variation in values (with Americans being more individualistic and anti-statist than Canadians) for explaining differences in union density between Canada and the U.S. (Lipset 1995), other more recent research suggests that there is little difference between Canada and the U.S. in terms of support for unionization (Taras and Ponak 2001, Lipset and Meltz 2004). Other research points to differences in labour laws and union organizing rules for explaining differences between the two countries (Chaison and Rose 1985, Taras and Ponak 2001, Johnson 2004).

Differences in union culture between the Stockton and Vancouver cases may also be explained by broader organizational cultural differences between private and public sector unions. Research examining these differences suggests that public sector unions have a greater capacity to mobilize political power and are more likely to engage in social movement unionism than those representing private sector workers. For example, Johnston (1994) argues that because they have diverse goals, public sector unions adopt different cultural forms and tactics than private sector counterparts. She argues that public sector unions assume a political-bureaucratic form (versus the market oriented form of private sector unions) because of their need to mobilize political organizational resources. Social movement unionism facilitates this process because it enables public sector unions to reach out more broadly to movements and organizations from outside of the labour movement in order to increase their political leverage. At the same time, examples such as the strong social movement emphasis of certain private sector unions – the SEIU (Service Employees International Union) in particular – challenge this argument and suggest that private sector unions benefit both in strength and political influence by shifting to a social movement unionism model (see Milkman 2006).
more activist-oriented labour movement will create a stronger, more unified political force for labour to both counteract the power of global corporate hegemony and effect positive social policy changes.

Social movement unionism is more inclusive, devotes more resources to research and community outreach and has a history of cooperating with other movement sectors, including environmental and social justice organizations (Milkman 2006, Fantasia and Ross 2004). As a result, more activist-oriented labour unions have increased their political power and been more successful at building broad based movements that offer an alternative vision to neoliberal corporate power (Rose 2000, Lopez 2004). Much of the research on labour revitalization argues that unless labour movements adopt new organizing practices and shift to social movement unionism, unions in North America will continue to suffer the kind of defeats witnessed in from the 1970s onwards (Fantasia and Ross 2004, Milkman 2006, Clawson 2003).

The findings of my research demonstrate that labour-environmental coalitions can be a potentially powerful force against privatization and the increasing commodification of the global commons as well as in fighting the deleterious consequences of neo-liberal globalization. The findings also show that the success of labour-community coalitions around the privatization of public services depends on the capacity of labour unions to move beyond narrow labour market concerns and offer a more broad public understanding of privatization. This strategy includes focusing on issues of corporate hegemony and trade and investment policies in order to build solidarity across social movement sectors and mobilize a wider pool of movement participants. For the labour movement, this means investing more resources in research and educational outreach in order to create linkages with social, environmental and economic concerns that lie
beyond the direct interests of union members. At the same time, environmental and community
groups must be willing to tap into the potential resources and support from labour unions.

While much of the research on social movement unionism and labour revitalization
concentrates on labour campaigns that center on work-related issues that are broadly framed to
gain support from non-union community stakeholders, my research demonstrates that labour
movements have the potential to play a critical role in movements that are less directly
concerned with labour market issues, and that more research attention should be directed to
examining the role of labour unions in other social movements, particularly those that resist
global corporate power – water privatization being a key example.

Second, the differences in coalition strength between Stockton and Vancouver can be explained by the presence or absence of bridge building organizations. Research on network processes in social movements points to the importance of brokerage as a key causal mechanism in uniting previously disconnected movements (McAdam et al. 2001). Research that specifically focuses on coalitions demonstrates that successful movement outcomes are dependent on the ability of diverse movement sectors to build inter-organizational alliances and these alliances are more likely occur when there is the presence of bridge building organizations or individuals and the right combination of strong ties (social bonds between dense network clusters) and weak ties (transaction bonds between loosely affiliated movements or organizations that act as bridging ties) (Baldassarri and Diani 2007, Mische 2009).

In Vancouver, the brokerage role played by the Citizens Action league facilitated the bridging of social cleavages between dense network clusters – the labour and environmental movements – and the formation of a unified coalition to counter water privatization. The brokerage process functioned both to construct broad-based arguments that linked labour issues
to wider global social, environmental and economic concerns, and to utilize the research and analysis provided by labour to connect diverse movements together under the common frame of corporate power. In Stockton, on the other hand, the absence of bridge building organizations or leaders meant that that coalition was unable to coalesce around a common grievance or master framing strategy. The absence of a unified coalition allowed the political structures to neutralize the labour argument about jobs and working conditions, leaving the union with little leverage in fighting to prevent the privatization of the water treatment plant and further fracturing the movement coalition.

My research demonstrates that social movement coalitions are more likely to build solidarity and strength with the presence of bridge builders, who link networks and frames, and facilitate resource interdependence. At the same time, it is important to go beyond a structural analysis of brokerage in order to understand how it operates as a process. Beyond the presence of bridge building organizations – those that have pre-existing ties to diverse organizations – it is important to consider the nature of the brokerage organization. In the case of counter hegemonic movements that depend on a unified alliance between labour unions and environmentalists – including anti-water privatization movements – the presence of social justice oriented organizations is critical because of their ability to bridge green-labour concerns. Social justice organizations play a key role in bringing together the environmental movement with the labour movement because they have key relationships in both movement sectors and are able to not only bridge networks, but link movement frames by dovetailing environmental and social justice issues with global issues such as trade and corporate ideology and agendas.

In Vancouver, the Citizens Action League was an important broker between movements, not only because of its pre-existing ties with labour unions and environmental organizations, but
because its ability to bridge labour and environmental frames through its focus on the role of neo-liberal corporate globalization in creating social, economic and environmental injustice. The social justice lens allowed the Citizens Action League to facilitate the building of a strong labour-environmental coalition because they were able to amalgamate labour and environmental concerns under the shared rubric of corporate control. In order to reverse the devastating social and environmental consequences of capitalist economies, the environmental movement and the labour movement must recognize the common root causes of both labour injustice and environmental degradation. The globalization of neo-liberal capitalism provides the political opportunity structure for labour-environmental coalitions to build the counter hegemonic movement necessary for creating viable alternatives to the problem of the treadmill of production (see Gould, Pellow and Schnaiberg 2008). Social justice organizations, such as the Citizens Action League, are fundamental to facilitating labour-environmental alliances because of the brokerage role they can play in highlighting economic globalization and corporate power as the common cause of both labour and environmental injustices.

Beyond the role of bridge building organizations, labour and environmental movements must demonstrate a cultural shift internally in order to move beyond identity politics\(^ {19} \), broaden their focus and create viable alternatives to economic globalization. This transition would require putting the traditional “jobs versus the environment” conflict to rest and focusing on what policies would counteract the deleterious effects of global capitalist hegemony, in order to overcome the traditional dichotomy between middle class anti-unionism on the one hand and

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\(^ {19} \) Many social movement scholars argue that “new social movements” – including feminist and ecological and youth movements – are fundamentally shaped by identity politics and emphasize the importance of shared culture and identity rather than class consciousness to collective behaviour (Melucci 1996). At the same time, recent research on movements that resist neoliberal globalization suggests that movements are moving beyond identity politics to create shared understandings of common threats in the face of corporate power, despite differences in cultural identities (Rose 2000).
narrow self-interest of labour on the other. Labour unions need to embrace broader social, economic and political issues and build community solidarity to overcome what Lopez (2004) calls, “do nothing unionism”. At the same time, the environmental movement needs to shed its narrow focus on “middle-class” issues and recognize the link between poverty, inequality and environmental justice if it wants to go beyond symbolic actions and affect fundamental change. Labour unions and environmental movement organizations are among the most powerful social movement sectors in the United States and Canada. When they act together, they can advance policies that protect both working people and the natural environment. Yet divisions between these two actors can yield environmental devastation and attacks on the interests of workers and the power of unions. The creation of a just and sustainable economy depends on the ability of these two social movement sectors to work together to advance this common goal.

Finally, the findings of my research suggest that examining cross-movement coalition building is an important area for research on collective behaviour. Most social movement research focuses on discrete movements, while most network analyses focus on ties between organizations in similar movement sectors (see Broadbent 1998, Tindall 2004). Understanding how diverse movements such as labour and environmental movements come together around shared concerns is important for social movement scholars, environmental sociologists, labour scholars and those interested in globalization and its effects. As the power of neo-liberal globalization extends further into the social worlds of communities and individuals, counter hegemonic movements will continue to strengthen. Social and economic transformation and the

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20 Voss and Sherman (2000) argue that, contrary to Michel’s *Iron Law of Oligarchy* – that organizations become more bureaucratic and inflexible as they grow – the shift to social movement unionism on the part of many labour unions facilitates broader cultural shifts within unions that allow them to embrace new ways of organizing and build alliances with the wider community.
development of new policies and institutions that reflect social, environmental and economic justice will not be achieved by the work of a single social movement organization or sector alone. More research on movement coalitions is needed – particularly around resistance to neo-liberal restructuring – to increase our theoretical understanding of the processes by which diverse movement coalitions emerge, develop and strengthen.
In my study of anti-water privatization movements I have examined the role of ideology and frames, multi-level opportunity structures and network dynamics in shaping two local movements facing similar global forces. Based on a comparison of the movements against water privatization in Vancouver, British Columbia and Stockton, California, I have demonstrated that a combination of multiple mechanisms explains the development and outcomes of these two cases. The findings of my study contribute to the sociological understanding of local social movements in a globalizing world and demonstrate that differences in mobilization across contexts matters for the outcomes of neoliberal globalization.

My study addresses two weaknesses in the social movements and globalization research literatures. First, by examining mechanisms and processes of contention both holistically and in combination, I provide a dynamic explanation for social movements and thus move beyond the limitations of previous studies of contention that focus only one particular mechanism or process. My multi-scale analysis adds to the understanding of how different levels and types of mechanisms interact to explain movement development and outcomes, and generates a more complete and fluid explanation of discrete episodes of contention. Second, my study presents a situated analysis of how globalization shapes contention at the local level. By revealing how global processes are constituted and reconstituted by local social movement actors and organizations – as well as how they interact with frames, opportunities and networks – my research adds a more nuanced and complete understanding of the specific ways globalization is shaping movement trajectories and outcomes on the ground. While there is considerable research investigating transnational social movements and the shift in mobilization from the domestic to
the global arena, my research examines the flipside of globalized contention and focuses on the
dynamics of local movements in the context of globalization.

I begin by discussing the main findings of the research, including how the interplay of ideolo
gy and frames, opportunity structures and networks contributes to an understanding of social
movements as dynamic processes. I describe how the divergent movement trajectories and outcom
es between the movements in Vancouver and Stockton are explained by differences in frames, opportunities and coalitions. Specifically, the integration of global opportunities and frames in Vancouver – through the presence of global connectors – as well as strong cross-
movement coalitions facilitated favourable conditions for the anti-water privatization movement by creating a sense of local solidarity in the face of global threats. At the same time in Stockton, divisions within the coalition combined with a focus on local political process resulted in a
fractured framing strategy that alienated political elites and limited opportunities for public input on water privatization. After presenting the key findings, I locate the research in the broader theoretical debates surrounding globalization and social movements and specifically discuss the contribution of the research to advancing the understanding of local forms of resistance to globalization as different from transnational movement activity.

A Dynamic Approach to Contention

The responses of the activists in this study reveal how multiple mechanisms and processes operate in combination to produce mobilization emergence, development and outcomes. The findings suggest that the interaction of different processes is important for explaining the divergence in movement development and outcomes between the two cases, including cognitive mechanisms, such as ideology and frames, external mechanisms – the
political, economic and institutional context – and relational mechanisms, including the role of social networks and movement coalitions. The findings also demonstrate that examined separately, none of these mechanisms provides a complete explanation of differences between the anti-water privatization movements in Stockton and Vancouver. Instead these mechanisms interact to produce variation across the two movements. Divergence between the two movements is explained by differences in framing strategies, political institutional openings and social networks, as well as how opportunities were seized upon by activists to create new openings for the consideration of movement claims.

My research also advances the understanding of local social movements responding to globalization by demonstrating the complex pathways in which global forces shape contention on the ground. I argue that global processes affect local movements in three ways. First, globalization provides new opportunities and targets – in the form of global economic institutions and capital investment – for social movement actors to respond to and mobilize against. Recognition of global opportunity structures by social movement actors is important because local institutions are increasingly shaped by wider shifts in the global economy. Second, transnational contention fosters new networks that link transnational and local processes through the presence of global connectors – organizations and individuals with ties to both global and local movements. These network ties shape movement tactics drawn from broader anti-globalization movements. Third, global opportunities and transnational movement ties facilitate the formation of global frames that highlight the risks to local sovereignty from global financial institutions and flows of capital. Movements that recognize the global nature of local problems and draw attention to the interplay between global and local processes, by engaging in strategic
localism, create a sense of local solidarity that brings together activists and political elites under a common sense of community well-being.

While I argue that it is necessary to adopt a holistic and dynamic explanation for explaining anti-water privatization movements, each chapter of this study contributes to the understanding of the different mechanisms that shape social movements in the context of neoliberal globalization. The following sections present the findings on how these mechanisms shape local anti-water privatization movements and discuss how they advance the literature on social movements and globalization.

**Cognitive Mechanisms: Clarifying the Difference between Ideology and Frames**

The findings of my research demonstrate the importance of examining ideology and frames as separate processes that shape mobilization in different ways, both in nature and timing. Despite sharing similar ideological understandings of water as part of the commons, the anti-water privatization movements in Vancouver and Stockton constructed different frames to make their claims. While research on framing demonstrates the importance of cognitive mechanisms to movement development and outcomes, most studies of framing focus on the strategic meanings formulated by movement activists during the cycle of protest and ignore broader ideational processes – including people’s social experiences and the ways in which they understand the world around them – that shape activists’ political understandings particularly at the pre-mobilization stage (Oliver and Johnston 2005, Schurman and Munro 2006).

My research shows that ideology operates as a separate and distinct process from strategic frame construction and is critical at the pre-movement emergence stage.\(^1\) While frames

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\(^1\) Although my research occurred at the post-movement stage, by asking people questions about why they participated in the movement and about their beliefs and values concerning water, I was able to generate important
are important at later stages of mobilization, when conscious and strategic decisions are needed to mobilize and create openings for favourable outcomes, ideology matters more at the pre-mobilization stage where individual beliefs and motivations shape how problems are constructed and who participates in a movement.

This distinction between ideology and frames is particularly important for understanding participation in and motivations for joining movements related to environmental resources because understandings of nature are intricately linked to people’s social, political and situated experiences. The meanings of water articulated by respondents in my study demonstrate that socially constructed and contextually-mediated understandings of water are critical to shaping people’s political understandings of water and their participation in the anti-water privatization movements in their communities. In Vancouver, activists’ attachments to and meanings of water were closely connected to nearby watersheds and their desire to protect what they perceived to be the clean and natural source of water. In Stockton, activists were equally concerned about protecting water resources, yet their articulations about water reflect the geographic, historical and political context of drought, delta pollution and water diversion proposals.

Examining ideology as an important and distinct process from framing sheds light on how and why particular social or environmental issues are constructed as problems while also illuminating why opposition to a particular problem emerges before mobilization and the construction of strategic frames by social movement organizations. Although the conceptions of water in Vancouver and Stockton were shaped by the peculiarities of context, in both places, 

insights into how people’s social constructions of water – pre-movement ideology – shaped decisions to participate in the anti-water privatization movements in their communities. The interview data also demonstrates that people’s ideological beliefs about water were similar across the two contexts, and yet the frames utilized by the two movements differed significantly, providing evidence for treating ideology as separate – both in timing and in nature – from frames.
these situated meanings resulted in similar political understandings of water as part of the commons, which drove activists’ desire to mobilize against privatization. Yet while the movements shared similar pre-mobilization ideological understandings of water, the framing strategies constructed at later stages of the movements revealed significant differences, with the movement in Vancouver focusing on global risks and the movement in Stockton concentrating on issues of voter rights and democratic accountability. The differences in framing strategies, despite shared understandings of water across the two cases, demonstrate that ideology and frames function as separate and distinct processes of contention.

In the context of environmental social movements – in particular mobilization against the commodification of water – I argue that theories of environmental sociology offer a means of clarifying the difference between pre-movement ideology and strategic frame construction because they shed light on the socially constructed meanings of nature and environmental risk that shape people’s relationships to the world around them. These ideological processes help explain the emergence of environmental movements and the political mobilization to protect the commons. In the case of water privatization, these socio-natural relationships are particularly important because of the deep attachments that individuals have to water a source of life and a human right. The responses of activists in Vancouver and Stockton demonstrate that water is linked emotionally and spiritually to symbolic meanings and discourses of power and rights. Further, understandings of water are intricately linked to “locality”; the unique geographic, historical and political context. Investigating social-psychological and situated perceptions of water is important for explaining pre-mobilization attitudes and values that influence people’s

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2 McNaghten and Urry 1998 and Satterfield 2002
3 Shiva 2002 and Bakker 2007.
decisions to participate in broader environmental movements and helps clarify why people mobilize to protect water resources as part of the commons.

My research demonstrates the importance of examining processes beyond the context of mobilization for illuminating how political beliefs are shaped by the broader cultural toolkits that guide social behaviour (Swidler 1986). Synthesizing theories of environmental sociology and social movements adds rigour to the understanding of socio-natural relationships by demonstrating how situated meanings of nature are translated into political action, while at the same time strengthens theoretical conceptions of cognitive mechanisms in research on social movements by clarifying the difference between pre-movement ideology and strategic frames.

**Local Resistance/Global Frames**

Despite shared political understandings of water as part of the commons, the anti-water privatization movements in Vancouver and Stockton utilized diverse framing strategies to mobilize and make their claims, revealing the significance of local context to the construction of frames. The findings of my comparative study on anti-water privatization movements demonstrate the critical role of frames for influencing mobilization and show that their success is contingent upon broader cultural codes, organizational ideology, social networks and, in the case of localized resistance to economic globalization, the linking of local and global frames.

In Vancouver, anti-water privatization activists translated their understandings of the commons into frames reflecting the global risks to local control of water, and highlighted the dangers of multinational corporations and international financial and trade institutions to local democracy. The linking of global and local frames is explained by a cultural and organizational context that centered on issues of social justice and globalization as well as by the presence of
activists and organizations that were linked to broader transnational movement networks. Several movement leaders in Vancouver – whom I call global connectors – were linked both structurally – through network ties and cognitively – through understandings of globalization – to global water movements. These global connectors were instrumental in synthesizing global and local concerns and in creating a sense of local solidarity in the face of global power structures, which ultimately united activists with elites and created favourable conditions for the movement to prevent water privatization.

In Stockton, on the other hand, the framing strategy utilized by the movement remained focused on issues of deliberative democracy and voter rights. A broader cultural and organizational context that centered on the use of voter-driven ballot initiatives as well as long-standing deep divisions and mistrust between political elites and social movement actors shifted attention away from the global nature of the problem and located the problem in the undemocratic actions of the mayor and city council. Unlike the movement in Vancouver, an organizational culture focused on local electoral politics meant that few of the key leaders of the movement in Stockton were connected to transnational movements and thus were unable to act as global connectors and link local issues with global processes. A focus on local political culture and accountability emphasized divisions between activists and authorities and prevented the movement from adopting a framing strategy that could potentially have resonated with elected officials, including the dangers of privatization and the risks of local control from global institutional structures.

The findings of the study advance the understanding of how “the global” is used in meaning work by activists on the ground. The differences in the incorporation of global concerns into local framing strategies between the movements in Vancouver and Stockton demonstrate the
importance of *global frames* and the presence of *global connectors* for local movements implicated in transnational flows of capital and the power of international institutions. My findings also suggest that for these kinds of movements, drawing attention to the shift in environmental risks – from the domestic to the transnational realm – legitimizes the claims of movement actors and facilitates new opportunities for shaping policies that resist commodification and corporate power. The construction of *global risk frames* through the presence of *global connectors* is of strategic importance for anti-water privatization movements because it draws attention away from the local conflict between activists and authorities to the international arena, creating a sense of *local solidarity* and shared sense of fate in the face of global threats.

**Multi-level Opportunity Structures**

Beyond ideology and frames, political context at multiple spatial scales is also critical for shaping anti-water privatization movements. My study on local anti-water privatization movements advances the understanding of the role of global economic and political structures in shaping the opportunities and targets of local social movements by revealing differences between political contexts and by pointing to the importance of the nature of the “commodity” under threat. An examination of differences in political context between Vancouver and Stockton reveals that the divergent trajectories and outcomes of the two movements is, in part, explained by differences in political openings as well as the way activists in both places responded to opportunities and targets. In Vancouver, the ability of the anti-water privatization movement to prevent water privatization was facilitated by greater institutional access, including alliances with elites, as well as through the synthesis of global and local political opportunities.
The seizing of opportunities at the global level by activists in Vancouver, including multinational corporate policies and threats from international trade agreements, increased mobilization and created a sense of local solidarity, resulting in new political openings for anti-water privatization activists to influence policy around the outsourcing of water resources and services. In Stockton, on the other hand, activists were constrained by the more closed nature of local political structures, which limited access elites. Yet the movement’s focus on domestic political culture and the lack of attention to international opportunities further limited their ability to influence political decision-making by creating a schism between activists and authorities.

These findings advance the understanding of political process by moving beyond a static, top-down understanding of political opportunities to reveal the importance of the interplay between political institutions and social movement actors. Specifically, the findings demonstrate that activists who respond to multi-level political and economic opportunity structures, including those at the local and global level create favourable conditions for influencing policy outcomes. In the broader context of neoliberal globalization and the increasing power of transnational economic institutions – including corporations and international trade agreements – a multi-level opportunity structure analysis is important for understanding the interplay between global and local processes and the creation of new opportunities and targets for mobilization on the ground.

International power structures have varying influence over governments and resources, depending on the level of government and the nature of the resource, affecting the way in which power is constituted and resisted by social movement actors. I argue that environmental resources, particularly those considered as part of the commons need to be examined in a different light than resources that are considered commodifiable because differences in how
social movement actors view the commons versus commodities shape movement opportunities, targets and frames. In particular, the critical role of government as protector of the public realm is essential for influencing the way in which anti-water privatization activists seize opportunities and choose targets.

The findings also suggest that it is necessary to recognize the distinct nature of national and local level movement dynamics, particularly regarding the capacity of governments to make policy decisions in the face of the growing power of international economic structures as well as how social movements respond to neoliberal globalization. While the responses of the anti-water privatization activists reveal the importance of incorporating economic structures and targets into a broader understanding of the role of opportunity structures for social movements within the context of increased economic globalization, of critical importance to these movements is the targeting of local political structures. Whether the context for mobilization is local or global matters for how economic opportunities structures are seized and utilized by social movement actors. Activists opposed to water privatization at the local level do indeed target international opportunity structures, including multinational water companies and international trade and investment agreements, yet the main target for mobilization remains domestic political structures because of the nature of both the resource and the opportunity structure.

While multinational corporations and international trade and investment treaties shape both policy decisions about water resources and mobilization by activists on the ground, anti-privatization movement actors utilize these global economic opportunity structures as symbolic targets, while local political structures remain the central target of contention. In this context, because the privatization of water exists merely as a threat and not a reality, activists focus on attempting to sway the decisions of political elites and influence their behaviour, rather than on
changing corporate policies and practices. What matters is not whether the authority of the state is waning, but how and to what extent globalization – including flows of capital and shifts of regulatory power to the international realm – has altered the capacity of the state to regulate services and environmental resources and transformed the ways in which domestic movements operate. In the case of public resources that are considered non-commodifiable, such as water, the power to regulate, conserve and protect these resources as part of the commons is understood to be in the hands of the polity. This is especially true at the local level where the link between government regulation of resources and the delivery of services is more clearly understood than with other levels of government.

While most theoretical debates over diminishing state capacity focus on national level governments, my study on anti-water privatization movements demonstrates that while the power of nation states may be constrained by economic globalization and the power of international financial and regulatory bodies, local governments, on the other hand, have the capacity to resist such pressures. As local governments are not signatory to international trade agreements, they are not beholden to international economic pressures in the same way as are national level governments. Further, the existence of more participatory forms of deliberation at the local level and the greater access to elites provides concrete targets and clear channels for social movements to influence policy and strengthen local political power in the face of economic globalization.

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Understanding how the interplay between economic and political opportunities differs depending on the political context and nature of the “commodity” is important for advancing the political economic process perspective\(^5\) especially in the case of local movements resisting neoliberal globalization. I argue that for resources that are considered part of the commons, social movement organizations and actors are more likely to target political structures rather than corporations because of the “public” nature of these resources. For activists interviewed as part of this study, water is a local, geographically bound resource that is part of the commons, and therefore decisions about how to regulate, protect and deliver drinking water to local populations is considered to be the responsibility of municipal governments.

**Cross-Sector Movement Coalitions**

While the nature and scale of opportunity structures matter for explaining differences between the anti-water privatization movements in Stockton and Vancouver, the role of social networks, including the nature and strength of cross-movement coalition building is also critical for explaining differences between the two movements. In both the Vancouver and Stockton cases cross-sector coalitions between labour unions and environmental organizations emerged. Yet the coalition in Stockton never gained the strength or cohesion of the coalition in Vancouver, where labour activists and environmentalists united under a common anti-corporate, anti-trade frame that increased mobilization and resonated with political elites. The responses of activists in Vancouver and Stockton highlight important barriers and opportunities to successful cross-movement coalition building. The findings suggest the critical role of both labour union culture

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\(^5\) see Pellow 2007
and bridge-building organizations for overcoming conflicting interests between labour and the environment and for explaining the divergence between movement outcomes.

First, differences in the organizational culture and structure of the labour movements in Stockton and Vancouver led to divergence in coalition frames as well as the nature of the role played by unions in each case. In Vancouver, the union at the centre of the anti-water privatization coalition had a history of social movement unionism, including framing issues in broader social justice terms and forging alliances with organizations outside of the labour movement. The focus on social movement unionism and on building solidarity with the broader community strengthened the labour-environmental coalition by creating a shared collective identity united under the common frame of corporate hegemony.

In contrast, the organizational culture of the union centrally involved in the movement to block water privatization in Stockton was characterized by traditional business unionism, with a focus on job and labour market concerns. Labour leaders and union members in Stockton framed their grievances around wage and job protection, a strategy that conflicted with the arguments of the environmental and community organizations involved in the coalition, whose focus was on voter rights and democratic accountability. The entrenchment on the part of the union around workplace concerns alienated the other community organizations and led to divisions within the anti-water privatization coalition. As a result the coalition was unable to present the strong and unified argument needed to mobilize a wide-constituency.

Second, the differences in the nature and outcomes of the coalitions in Vancouver and Stockton can be explained by the presence or absence of bridge building organizations. In Vancouver – beyond the organizational culture of the union involved in the coalition – the presence of a key bridge building organization was crucial for bringing together labour and
environmental organizations and synthesizing their concerns under a common social justice frame. At the same time, the absence of a bridge building organization in Stockton meant that long-standing divisions between labour, environmental and community organizations remained entrenched, resulting in a fractured framing strategy that weakened the coalition.

While previous research on social movement networks and coalitions points to the importance of brokerage for forging cross-organizational and cross-sector alliances, my research demonstrates that the nature of the brokerage organization also matters for network outcomes. In Vancouver, a social justice organization – the Citizens Action League – strengthened the coalition’s leverage by uniting labour and environmental concerns, ensuring the use of agreed upon tactics and unifying frames around corporate control and the risk of international trade agreements.

The findings also reveal the potential for building and strengthening environmental labour coalitions in the context of countering the deleterious consequences of globalization. Movements focusing on economic, social and environmental concerns – particularly in the context of economic globalization – have the potential to unite actors and organizations from diverse movement sectors, including environmental and labour movements. The success of these counter-hegemonic movements depends on the formation of cross-sectoral alliances and the creation of common framing strategies. Social justice organizations can play a critical role in bridging green-labour concerns because they have ties to both movement sectors, and thus have the capacity to bridge networks while synthesizing diverse environmental, labour and social justice frames with global issues such as trade policies and corporate ideology.

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The findings also point to the role of broad-based community coalitions for resisting the consequences of neoliberal globalization and demonstrate that labour-environmental coalitions are a potentially powerful force against the growing encroachment of private capital on the global commons. Yet for these coalitions to be successful in offering viable policy alternatives to economic globalization they must move beyond traditional identity or issue-based politics and offer a more broadly framed understanding of privatization and neoliberalism. Strong cross-sector alliances in the context of neoliberal globalization have the potential to overcome the constraints of identity or issue-based politics and create a common collective identity.

While some scholars argue that broad-based coalitions lack the strong collective identity demonstrated by within-movement networks because they lack the identity bonds facilitated by shared interests and issue commonalities, there is growing recognition that in the face of economic globalization many social movement sectors and organizations are beginning to shift from identity or issue based politics to a wider focus on social justice and social change. Broader issues of social and economic justice have the potential to bring together previously disconnected movements and create a common collective identity in response to neoliberal globalization because they create an overarching frame that resonates widely across movement sectors.

One avenue for building stronger alliances between labour and environmental movements and creating a shared collective identity lies in localized resistance to globalization. My research

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7 Diani and Bison 2004
9 Focusing on collective identity as an outcome of these types of movements is also useful in advancing the understanding of the cultural outcomes of social movements. Polletta and Jasper (2001), for example, argue that most research on social movement outcomes tends to examine the institutional or policy outcomes of mobilization and downplay its broader cultural effects. They contend that an examination of collective identity as an outcome will advance the understanding of the non-structural impacts of social movements.
shows that local manifestations of global problems – such as the attack on public sector services and the economic risks from international corporations and trade agreements – have the ability to forge solidarity between previously disconnected or conflicting communities such as labour and environmental movements because they enable the focus to shift to community well-being and solidarity. The ability of these alliances to create the kind of political power necessary to counter global forces depends on the capacity of movements to bring global issues down to the ground and root them in local concerns, creating a sense of “we are all in this together”. This strategy not only creates common targets but provides tangible solutions and manageable outcomes to problems – such as economic globalization, trade and investment law and climate change – that are often seen as too complex and unwieldy when manifested at levels beyond the community.

The findings of my comparative study of anti-water privatization demonstrate that the outcomes of these types of movements – which operate at the global-local nexus – are contingent upon the interaction of multiple mechanisms. Figure 8.1 provides a dynamic and interactive framework for analyzing anti-water privatization movements. It demonstrates that these movements are shaped by the interplay of environmental, relational and cognitive mechanisms that are continual and recursive (McAdam et al. 2001). First, the model shows that political economic opportunities – at both the global and local level – shape mobilization by providing targets and threats around which social movement actors mobilize. In the case of local water privatization these opportunity structures include the interplay between global economic institutions – including multinational water firms and global financial and trade institutions – and local political context, including institutional openness. Second, the model reveals that multi-level opportunities are not static in nature and must be appropriated by activists. Anti-water privatization activists synthesize global threats with local opportunity structures to highlight the
vulnerability of local governments in the face of global forces. Third, the model demonstrates that the way in which activists respond to opportunities in turn shapes the formation of movement networks, frames and tactical repertoires utilized. The presence of social justice organizations facilitates the building of cross-motion coalitions by bringing together previously disconnected groups, including labour and environmental organizations under the common rubric of corporate control. Finally, the model shows that global connectors – local

**Figure 8.1** A Typology of Local Anti-Water Privatization Movements
movement actors that are connected to global social movements – facilitate the use of global risk frames and disruptive tactics that resonate with political authorities and create local solidarity and shared collective identity.

Towards a Theory of Localized Resistance to Globalization

Taken together, each chapter in this study represents one part of a more comprehensive explanation of contention. The main goal is to understand what factors shape the outcomes of anti-water privatization movements. Yet the findings of the study also can also be applied more generally, particularly for understanding the role of local social movements in the context of increased economic globalization.

My study advances the understanding of globalization and social movements by identifying the critical pathways by which global processes shape local movements. While there is considerable research on transnational movements and significant theoretical debates about the importance of transnational contention, there is a lack of empirical evidence demonstrating how globalization causally shapes movements on the ground (Tarrow 2002).

Further, most of the research examining the effects of neoliberal globalization locally, including organized forms of resistance, lacks a rigorous analysis of the mechanisms and processes of contention identified in the literature on social movements. My research brings a social movements perspective to the understanding of situated resistance to neoliberal globalization and identifies the concrete and specific ways that globalization shapes local mechanisms of contention by transforming framing strategies, providing new targets and opportunities for movements to mobilize against and facilitating cross-movement coalitions.
My research on anti-water privatization movements demonstrates that global processes affect local level policies and mobilization in different ways than those occurring at the national or transnational levels and suggests that more attention should be paid to how globalization is constituted and reconstituted at the local level.\textsuperscript{10} Global processes reshape power at the local level by bringing together previously disconnected movements and creating important alliances between activists and elites under a shared sense of fate. The creation of local solidarity – achieved through the presence of global connectors and the synthesizing of transnational and situated frames – demonstrates the potential for social movements to move beyond identity or class-based politics to a more broad-based and inclusive counter-hegemonic movement.

While much of the research on globalization reinforces the hegemonic power of global capital to transform societies, whether at the national, regional or local levels, my research points to the power of communities to resist global economic hegemony and create alternatives to the deleterious consequences of neoliberal globalization. Unlike movements operating in transnational spaces, local resistance to globalization has the ability to generate long-term movements because of the presence of rooted networks, resources and clear and tangible targets.\textsuperscript{11}

At the same time, these movements are connected to wider global movements and processes, allowing them to create new opportunities and draw on critical transnational networks and resources that help restructure power on the ground. As Castells (2007) notes, with the rise

\textsuperscript{10} Gould et al. (1996) suggest that examining local movements in the context of globalization is particularly salient for environmental movements because ecological problems are increasingly tied to global economic institutions that impact the ability of local governments to regulate environmental resources.

\textsuperscript{11} Tarrow (2005b) argues that transnational movements that are not linked to domestic institutions and networks are unlikely to result in sustained mobilization. He points to the importance of “rooted cosmopolitans”, social movement actors whose mobilize for global causes, but remain connected to networks and resources in their own communities as being the face of the new transnational activism.
of transnationalism and information technology, social movements are shaped by and dependent on local culture and values but are also connected globally through technologically mediated networks, which allow social movements to create new forms of resistance – what he calls counter-power – to global institutionalized power. Other scholars argue that without support from transnational networks local movements that resist neo-liberal globalization are “out-matched” by global corporate power and institutions (Evans 2008). So perhaps what Mike O’Brian, global water campaigner and social justice activist suggests is true,

Communities have the power to fight back against globalization and corporate control. But I think it needs to work on two levels. Local communities need to be tapped into global networks as much as the international community needs the knowledge that comes from local communities. Locally, it makes the communities stronger to be plugged in to this global network in terms strengthening their claims and creating solidarity. But these connections also make mobilization much more effective internationally. To actually bring stories from those communities, and not just from developing communities, but from communities all over the world where these things have been happening, to directly intervene in discussions between governments, NGOs and international institutions is very important. When these things are happening by international consensus and you are trying to fight it off at the local level, it is very important to have that kind of international intervention as well, to undermine the kind of schemes playing out at the community level. When you get the communities showing up, it becomes very hard for the parties making the deal to not feel uncomfortable about it. And they get very angry actually. You need people speaking for the communities, for the people living in those places. Just as you need to bring the global stories to the local communities in order to create more leverage for people facing these struggles. So the connection between the local and global is extremely important.

Mike O’Brian’s comments reflect what many of the activists interviewed for this study argued: that globalization is not inevitable and that local democracy and autonomy can be a powerful force in the face of global flows of capital and regulatory institutions. Yet for communities to successfully overcome the entrenchment of neoliberal globalization in local policy making and offer viable alternatives, global issues need to be brought down to local level in ways that make sense on the ground.
While local movements need to reframe the issues in terms of global risks, they also need to strategically connect global issues to local opportunity structures in order for them to resonate within the context of the local political process. Transnational frames and networks provide symbolic support in the form of narratives and solidarity for local movements, but ultimately what matters is creation of locally-rooted networks of activists targeting domestic opportunities. While many social movement scholars point to the fundamental shift from domestic to transnational movements, my research demonstrates that successful challenges and alternatives to neoliberal globalization will not necessarily come from movements operating at the transnational level, but rather from locally-situated counter-hegemonic movements that are connected globally but rooted in local communities.

**Directions for Future Research**

My research on anti-water privatization movements reveals important insights about the mechanisms that shape local movements in a global context, and highlights the need for future research on these types of movements to increase our understanding of how global processes play out in specific contexts. My study is one of the first in-depth examinations of anti-water privatization movements. Investigating other similar movements against the commodification of water would be useful for shedding light on the differential impact of globalizing forces and revealing whether global forces are more salient in different contexts. While my research compares two cases in advanced industrialized countries, anti-water privatization movements have occurred in many countries in the Global South, including Bolivia (Olivera and Lewis 2004), South Africa and Argentina (Goldman 2007). Comparing anti-water privatization movements in the Global South would expand our understanding of how globalization shapes the
outcomes of local movements by examining its differential effects across development contexts. Investigating anti-water privatization movements in other economic and geographical contexts is also useful for understanding the role of racial and class inequalities in shaping anti-water privatization movements, including examining the hegemonic power of multinational water firms as a form of neo-colonialism.¹²

Second, my research demonstrates the critical role of both labour union culture and bridge-building organizations for shaping labour-environmental coalitions in anti-water privatization movements. These findings raise broader questions about the potential for building and strengthening labour-environmental coalitions – as a long-term political movement – in the context of countering the negative consequences of globalization. In an era of economic globalization, social movement actors need to build strong cross-movement (and cross-border) coalitions that unite previously disconnected sectors, such as labour and environmental movements in order to offer alternatives to the neoliberal project (Rose 2000, Evans 2008, Brulle and Jenkins 2008). While there has been increasing attention on transnational movement coalitions in response to globalization (Kay 2005, Evans 2000, Pellow 2007), my research demonstrates that there is a need for more research into how local movement coalitions – including labour-environmental coalitions – offer possibilities for the creation of a long-term viable counter-hegemonic movement.

¹² Pellow (2007) argues that global environmental inequality is linked to the rise of transnational corporations (TNCs), particularly those that manufacture and sell toxic chemicals, because poor communities and communities of colour are often the target of toxic dumping. He contends that TNCs engage in corporate neo-colonialism as they “contribute to, produce, and benefit from racial and class inequalities.” (2007:232). At the same time, he argues that corporate neo-colonialism provides the opportunity for resistance movements by bringing together organizations and individuals from diverse movement sectors, including human rights and environmental movements.
One issue with clear potential to create long-term, politically powerful labour-environmental coalitions is the transition to a green economy. One of the most pressing challenges facing the world today is mitigating the social, economic and ecological consequences of accelerating climate change, including increased inequality and ecological degradation (Roberts 2001, Giddens 2009). While these two consequences of the carbon-intensive economy have traditionally been considered as separate problems, there is growing scholarly and public attention on the connections between socio-economic inequality and environmental destruction (Burkett 2007, Carlson 2009). Yet climate justice and equity are often excluded from mainstream policy discourse about climate change and its effects. Recently social movement actors, including labour and environmental activists, have begun to advocate for policies that will create a socially and environmentally just transition to a post-carbon economy (Hoerner and Robinson 2008). The new politics of climate change that stresses climate justice makes coalitions possible between traditionally opposed movements, including labour and environmental movements.

While the transition to a green economy and its impact on ecological and economic well-being is the focus of a growing body of research (Pinderhughes 2006), there has been little research on the social processes by which this transition will occur, including the role of non-state actors and social movement coalitions in shaping policy change. Because investing in green jobs opens up opportunities for traditionally disadvantaged groups to secure relatively high quality, well-paid employment (Hoerner and Robinson 2008, Pinderhughes 2006), while simultaneously reducing dependence on fossil fuels, the shift to a green economy should be a key focus for labour and environmental movements. Despite historic cleavages between these two movements, sociologists have demonstrated the growing credibility of labour-environmental
alliances, pointing to economic globalization and capitalist economies as the common cause of both labour injustice and environmental degradation (Rose 2000, Gould et al. 2008). My research on anti-water privatization movements demonstrates the potential of these types of coalitions to emerge at the local level because of the presence of locally-rooted networks that unite around issues of community well-being.

The findings of my study also highlight the importance of studying other forms of resistance to neoliberalism at the local level. For example, the shift to neoliberal policies at the local level often results in the outsourcing of service and manufacturing work (Peck and Tickell 2003). These economic shifts have also been the target of resistance by labour unions and other social movement organizations (Chun 2009). Investigating other types of neoliberal outcomes, including outsourcing, and the forms of resistance they produce, is useful for shedding light on whether the findings of my research on anti-water privatization movements are replicated. The findings of my research reveal the critical importance of global processes – including global economic institutions, transnational networks and global frames – for shaping movement trajectories and outcomes at the local level. Do these global processes matter in the case of social movements targeting privatization and outsourcing in other economic sectors as much as they do for water privatization? If so, does the interplay between global and local processes play out in similar ways?

New research examining anti-water privatization movements in other contexts, investigating the potential for building strong labour-environmental coalitions around climate change.  

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13 Some scholars suggest that long-term viable labour-environmental coalitions are more likely to succeed if they bring together labour and environmental justice movements because they have similar political economic conceptions and critiques of capitalism and thus are more likely to share common tactics and frames (Pellow and Park 2002, Gould et al. 2004).
justice and studying other forms of localized resistance to neoliberal globalization would greatly
enhance our understanding of the complex structural, relational and cultural processes that shape
resistance to globalization and shed light on alternatives to the deleterious consequences of
neoliberalism.

Conclusion

In this study, I have examined two movements opposed to water privatization in
Vancouver, British Columbia and Stockton California. While these movements faced similar
global and institutional threats, their emergence and development took diverse forms, resulting in
divergent outcomes. I have drawn upon qualitative comparative study to investigate the
complexity and richness of movements on the ground. Through a holistic examination of the
dynamic processes that shape contention, I provide evidence of how multiple mechanisms
combined together shape these movements, including ideology and frames, multi-level
opportunities and cross-movement coalitions. My analysis also illuminates how each of these
mechanisms is in turn altered by the interplay between global and local processes, including
international institutions and economic opportunity structures.

The qualitative comparative research design of my study of two local social movements
with similar global contexts adds a potentially valuable new methodological approach to the
study of social movements. While previous comparative studies of social movements are either
based on quantitative design or use case studies to compare macro-level institutional structures,
my study goes beyond generating causal correlations or structural analyses to examine the
complex and dynamic multi-level processes that shape contention. By engaging multiple levels
simultaneously I am able to explicate the specific underlying pathways that explain how
structural, relational and cognitive mechanisms combine to shape mobilization and outcomes, including how activists negotiate obstacles, respond to opportunities and utilize social networks and discursive strategies to achieve their goals. The qualitative comparative research design is also useful for illuminating how global processes shape contention on the ground, by revealing the interplay between global forces and local movement dynamics from the perspective of social movement actors themselves.

This study has provided a framework for understanding the dynamics of localized resistance to globalization. Examining local-global linkages that shape movements at the community-level is fundamental for advancing our understanding of the processes and mechanisms that shape contentious politics in a globalized world. While movements resisting neoliberal globalization have not yet succeeded in reversing the entrenchment of global economic hegemonic policies and practices, their continued presence, sustained mobilization and alternative visions for more equitable and sustainable policies challenge the inevitability of globalization and offer hope for the future. The challenge for these kinds of movements is to recognize the power of globalization and seize opportunities presented by transnational institutions, networks, and frames, while at the same time draw upon locally-rooted networks and resources in order to build solidarity on the ground and create viable alternatives to global economic hegemony.

While the forces that are impinging on local communities are increasingly global, we should not assume that the most important scale of resistance must then necessarily be at the global level. What happens at the local level matters for the outcomes of globalization. Indeed, some of the most consequential campaigns occur at the local level, where activists have successfully resisted neoliberal policies, from preventing water privatization to stopping the
construction of Walmarts, to enacting living wage ordinances. Understanding these local
campaigns and their effects is critical for understanding social change in a global era.
References


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Greater Vancouver Water District (GVWD). In-Camera Meeting Minutes of the Administration Board, June 28, 2001.


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Appendix A

Methodology Background and Personal Reflection

This methodology appendix presents additional details about the research design, methodology, interview recruitment and data analysis, as well as personal reflections about the field work experience and some of the inspiration behind the research project. I begin with a discussion of how and why I chose to compare the Vancouver and Stockton anti-water privatization movements. Then, I describe how I recruited participants for the study and some of the challenges I encountered in the field. Next, I provide detailed information about the interview protocol and interview process. Then, I describe the process used to analyze the data. Finally, I present some background on my interest in social movements and public sociology and discuss some of the reasons why I decided to study anti-water privatization movements.

The Study Design

I became interested in social movements against water privatization before beginning my post-graduate studies. My interest grew out of my own experiences as an activist and environmentalist, and my involvement in anti-globalization movements. While living in Montreal and then after moving to Vancouver, I became engaged in environmental and social justice movements, first as a volunteer for several organizations and subsequently as an employee of a local environmental organization. My desire to return to academia and begin my graduate studies at the University of British Columbia grew out of my interest in understanding the dynamics behind anti-water privatization movements, and even more specifically in a desire to explain the divergent outcomes between local organizing against water privatization. Why was it that in some places, such as Atlanta, Georgia, opposition to water privatization only emerged after municipal water privatization occurred, while in other places, mobilization transpired prior
to privatization, with movements successfully preventing the privatization of water services and even capitalizing on these successes to force governments to enact a host of reforms? I was interested in studying the case of Vancouver because I recognized that while many municipalities had reversed water privatization, only a few had successfully prevented it.

The anti-water privatization movement in Vancouver was also particularly interesting for me because the proposed contract was the largest public-private partnership contract ever proposed in North America. For this reason, the successful outcome of the movement in Vancouver was considered an important win for the social movement activists involved and set the precedent for future success in mobilizing against water privatization across British Columbia, including the overturning of proposed outsourcing plans in Kelowna, Nanaimo and Whistler in the months and years following the Vancouver movement’s success.

As I began to think about my research design, I was inspired by many comparative research studies that I read while completing my doctoral courses and comprehensive exams. Using these comparative studies as models, I decided that I should complete a comparative analysis of anti-water privatization movements and compare a successful case – Vancouver – with one that failed – Stockton – in order to advance the understanding of social movement dynamics.

While many studies of social movements examining single case studies have generated important empirical and theoretical findings that have advanced the field of social movements, I thought that a qualitative comparative study would add a more rigorous dimension to the analysis by providing an in-depth understanding of the mechanisms and processes of contention as well as increasing explanatory power through the comparative leverage. I was particularly interested in studying a case where mobilization against water privatization had been successful with one
that had failed in order to shed light on the factors that explain outcome divergence between similar movements. I decided that comparing one case that failed with one that succeeded, would help explain how the institutional and structural context, as well how cultural processes impact movement outcomes.

Prior to beginning the PhD program in Sociology at UBC, while involved in helping to organize a meeting with a coalition of water activists from across Canada and the United States, I heard about the effort of a group of citizens in Stockton, California to stop the proposed plans to privatize the municipal wastewater treatment plant to a private corporation. In the Stockton case, the shortlisted company was a U.S. subsidiary of OMI-Thames Water, one of the major multinational water companies with municipal water service contracts around the world. Despite the efforts of the citizen’s coalition, the movement was unable to prevent privatization of the city’s water services and the City of Stockton signed a 20 year contract with OMI-Thames Water in February 2003. Although I was disappointed that activists in Stockton were unsuccessful, the movement provided a negative case for me to include in my comparison.

I felt there were enough similarities between the two contexts, including a strong history of social movement activism and a similar external context – in the form of global forces acting on the local municipality – that I could isolate the differences that explain why these two movements took different trajectories and had divergent outcomes. Comparing the cases of Vancouver and Stockton is useful to advancing our understanding of what causal mechanisms relate to movement success and failure because the two episodes share many similarities, but have divergent outcomes.

At first, I thought of the comparison in terms of the following research puzzle: The outcomes in these two cases are unexpected in light of prevailing social movement theories
which I would argue would suggest the opponents to privatization should have been more likely to succeed in Stockton than in Vancouver. Why? The history of ballot initiatives in California should have created favourable political opportunities for a successful outcome in Stockton. Previous research suggests that direct democracy is an effective strategy for policy change (Matsusaka 2004). Citizens groups use the initiative process to bypass traditional representative institutions – city councils, state legislatures – and propose and vote on new legislation. Citizens groups in California, in the context of the history of direct democracy in the state, have been particularly successful at passing voter-initiated legislation (Gerber and Phillips 2005).

Other cross-national comparative social movement research has demonstrated that the United States – with its multiple legal venues and access to resources – creates the opportunities for movement claims to be heard (see Joppke 1993 and Ferree et al. 2002). Given the implications of social movement theory and previous research studies, why did the movement in Stockton fail and the Vancouver movement succeed, when prevailing social movement theories of political process suggest that the movement in Stockton was more likely to prevail?

As political process theory contends that political structures and institutions are instrumental in defining a movement’s emergence and success, the movement to block privatization in Stockton should have been more likely to succeed than the similar movement in Vancouver, if everything else was similar. California, with its history direct democracy – in the form of ballot initiatives – should theoretically have provided the political opportunity for successful mobilization and movement outcomes. Initially, I thought that the quasi-experimental comparative research design would allow for the identification of the causal mechanisms that explain the differences in these two cases. I felt that selecting the least likely case to fail to include in the comparison increased the plausibility of alternative theoretical explanations that
would emerge from the research. The research puzzle suggested to me the presence of other necessary conditions – including framing strategies, networks and transnational forces – that explained the outcomes of the Vancouver and Stockton cases, and provided fertile ground for a qualitative comparative study of the two cases to uncover these causal conditions.

Shortly before I began my fieldwork, I learned of a lawsuit that the citizen’s coalition in Stockton had filed against the City of Stockton in 2003, arguing that, under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the city should have completed an environmental impact assessment before signing the contract with OMI Thames. Over the next five years the lawsuit went through various stages of appeal before a California Superior Court ruled in favour of the citizen’s coalition in 2008 and the City decided not to appeal. The water treatment plant was returned to public control in March 2008, two months before I began my fieldwork in California.

Despite initially being unable to stop privatization, the coalition in Stockton – using legal channels – was ultimately able to overturn the private contract. The successful ballot initiative passed by the movement, although too late to prevent privatization, created the long term conditions that would prevent any future attempt to privatize the system without seeking voter approval through a referendum. This surprising turn of events changed my research puzzle and forced me to re-consider my comparison.

After rethinking the rationale for the comparison, I came to realize that what made the comparative design interesting was not the similarity in long-run outcome (reversal of privatization), but rather the divergence in movement building between the two movements, in light of the global context. What was more interesting was to investigate what made the development of the two movements different – despite responding to similar threats – including the contextual conditions that shaped the diverse trajectories and outcomes of the movements in
Vancouver and Stockton. I realized that despite the apparent long-run success in Stockton in terms of bringing water back under public control, differences in movement trajectories as well as the initial divergence in outcomes in terms of success or failure to prevent water privatization in the first place would be useful in shedding light on the interplay between global processes and context-dependent mechanisms of contention, including opportunity structures, organizational culture, networks and framing strategies.

**Getting Access**

After obtaining ethics approval for the research project from the University of British Columbia, I headed out to the field to recruit social movement actors to be interviewed. I arrived in California in May 2008 and began to contact potential respondents in Stockton. At first, this proved more difficult than I had anticipated. Whereas in Vancouver I had personal networks I could draw upon to recruit respondents, in Stockton I had no existing connection with any of the organizations or people involved (although I did have some contacts in the broader environmental community, mostly based in the San Francisco area).

In 2002, I had met one of the water campaigners for a national organization focused on social and environmental justice who mentioned being involved in the Stockton movement. Unfortunately, by the time I arrived in California, she was no longer with the organization and had moved to abroad to work with environmental justice movements. Fortunately, I was able to interview her colleague who was based in San Francisco and had worked extensively with the anti-water privatization activists in Stockton, although he was not involved from the beginning.

In the absence of strong social networks, I used web searches to locate organizations and individuals from media stories and organizational websites. Finding people’s contact information

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1 A copy of the Certificate of Approval from the Behavioural Research Ethics Board at the University of British Columbia is included at the end of the Methodology Appendix
proved relatively easy, although getting them to agree to an interview was another story. Because the fight to prevent and then subsequently overturn privatization in Stockton had been such a long, drawn out and contentious process, there was an initial reluctance on the part of some of the activists involved in the movement to be interviewed. Just prior to my arrival, many of the people involved in the movement had been interviewed for an article in *Business Week* that some of them felt had unfairly portrayed their position, and this may have contributed to their initial hesitation. I sensed from some people’s responses to my request for an interview that the members of the steering committee of the citizen’s coalition that was at the centre of the mobilization effort were very protective of each other. As they did not know who I was, there was hesitation to respond favorably to my request for interviews.

In order to request an interview, I sent several of the people that I identified as being involved in the movement a letter of introduction, with details about the research project and a request for a face-to-face interview. Included with the letter was a consent form for participation in the study, with details about the interview process, including the content and the approximate length of time it would take and explaining that their information and identity would be protected.

Although I had contacted potential respondents separately, one of them, who was particularly suspicious of my intentions, replied by email to my letter requesting an interview and copied several others on the steering committee. He wanted to know more about what I wanted, and also suggested that I need not complete individual interviews with the coalition.

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2 The consent form is included at the end of the Methodology Appendix. The consent form states that the participant is under no obligation to participate in the study and can decline to answer any question or stop the interview at any time without penalty. In addition, the consent form states that the respondent’s personal information will be protected and stored in a secure location and that their name will not be used on any reports or publications emerging from the study. Respondents were warned, however, that despite the fact that their identities would not be revealed by the researcher, they may be identifiable to people familiar with the issues by the context of their answers, given the public nature of the topic. Before I began each interview I reviewed the consent form again with each participant and asked them if they had any questions.
members, but rather interview all of them together. At first I was discouraged because of the forceful tone of this response, and was unsure of how to respond. Luckily, the other members of the steering committee were extremely nice, and enthusiastic about participating in the study, and wrote that they would be happy to be interviewed separately, and even agreed to come to my hotel to be interviewed! As it turns out, when I finally did meet and interview the person who initially requested a group interview, he too, proved to be very pleasant and helpful. I realized that I had overcome my first potential fieldwork obstacle. Once I gained the trust of some of the committee members, other members of the coalition began contacting me, excited to have the opportunity to share their stories and opinions about the movement in Stockton.

After this initial hurdle, I also experienced some other challenges recruiting potential respondents, in terms of getting union members to agree to be interviewed. Because there was strong involvement on the part of UW5, the union representing the plant workers, I was interested in interviewing several members in order to get the perspective of the labour movement in Stockton. While I was able to find contact information for several union members and labour leaders, many of them were initially reluctant to be interviewed. Several times I had potential union respondents cancel their interviews at the last minute, and at least one person outright refused to be interviewed. When trying to reschedule with two of the union respondents that had previously cancelled, it became clear that one of the union managers that I had already interviewed had discouraged them from participating in the study. Eventually one of them changed his mind and agreed to participate in the study. The interview turned out to be interesting and thought-provoking.

The initial reluctance on the part of some union members involved most likely reflects on the long and difficult ordeal that plant employees had been through over the previous seven
years. First they fought privatization, then they negotiated new collective agreements, initially with OMI-Thames and then again with the City of Stockton, once the plant was returned to public sector control in 2008. Many of the respondents in Stockton spoke about the long term negative consequences of the privatization fight on worker morale at the water treatment plant, with one respondent describing how at least one person’s life had been ruined due to the stress and loss of employment due to privatization.

This hesitation on the part of union employees and managers in Stockton contrasted sharply with the willingness on the part of union members in Vancouver, who were eager to share their story of success and went out of their way to connect me to other respondents and provide me with hundreds of archival documents related to the case. Part of the reason for this difference is due to the successful outcome of the Vancouver movement, but is also likely related to fact that the union in Vancouver did not represent the workers at the plant and thus their financial and job security were not directly tied to the outcome of the movement.

In Stockton, others refused or were reluctant to participate because of conflict between those opposed to and proponents of water privatization, a division that had pitted long time friends and colleagues against each other overnight. This situation was sometimes difficult to negotiate because often potential respondents wanted to know whom I had previously interviewed and what they had told me. Obviously for ethical reasons I could neither reveal the names of my respondents, nor what they revealed during the interviews. Most of the time people agreed to be interviewed anyways, although some people remained entrenched in their decision not to participate.

In Vancouver, I faced fewer initial challenges and barriers in recruiting participants for the study. Having personal networks that linked me to key people involved in the movement
definitely helped, while the successful outcome was also beneficial to the recruitment process as people involved in the movement enjoyed discussing their perceptions around the reasons for their success. I found that the victory in preventing water privatization in the region was considered an important win for social movement organizations in Vancouver, and the success of the movement was frequently held up as a model for future mobilization efforts. As a result, respondents were very willing to share their stories and talk about their participation in the anti-water privatization movement. The fact that the successful mobilization was used as a model for future organizing efforts both locally and across the province was also important because it meant that the movement remained prominent in people’s minds, which helped them remember details they otherwise might have forgotten over the years. One of the other factors that helped facilitate access to respondents was the high number of people who were formally employed with the organizations involved in the movement. Respondents saw sharing their stories as part of the work they do on a daily basis, and hence were more often than not enthusiastic about being interviewed.

Even with the benefit of my connections to organizations and activists involved in the anti-water privatization movement in Vancouver and their willingness to be interviewed, one of the challenges was fitting the interview into their busy schedules. Many of the people who had been involved had since moved into political leadership positions and were thus very busy. Often I had to wait weeks, sometimes months to interview people. As a result, my fieldwork in Vancouver took significantly longer to complete than I had originally hoped, although in the end, I did end up interviewing most of the people I set out to interview.

Despite the challenges experienced in Stockton and Vancouver, which were sometimes discouraging and demoralizing, overall I thoroughly enjoyed interviewing people and hearing
their stories about why they participated in the anti-water privatization movements in their communities. I was inspired by the dedication and commitment on the part of many of my respondents to building better and stronger communities. Despite the initial reluctance of some of the respondents, I felt that after the interviews people were happy to have shared their stories with me. I am grateful to my respondents for taking time out of their busy lives to share their experiences as social movement activists with me and help me understand the processes that underlie mobilization.

The Interview Process

I began each interview with an explanation of the research study and a review of the ethical considerations, including a review of the consent form and an explanation that the respondent could decline to answer any question and could stop the interview at any time. I also explained that I would record the interview with a digital recorder. After the respondent signed the consent form and was given a copy to keep, I began the interview.

Each section of the interview protocol built around the broader research questions and was designed to shed light on the importance of different mechanisms and processes of contention, including opportunities, frames and networks. I also included a section on respondent’s personal background and information. At the end of the interview, respondents were given the opportunity to ask me any questions about the interview or the research or provide any additional information. Most respondents took this opportunity to ask why I chose to study anti-water privatization movements and why I chose to focus on Stockton or Vancouver. People were also curious to know when I was going to finish my dissertation and what I planned to do with the findings of the research. I found that being upfront about my experiences and
interest in these issues generally helped encourage a similar openness on the part of most respondents.

*The Interview Protocol*³

The interview questions were designed to address the following research questions related to social movements and outcomes:

1. How do differences in political institutions and their capacity to create or constrain opportunities influence the emergence and outcomes of these movements?

2. What is the role of social movement coalitions, particularly cross-sector alliances, in explaining the emergence and outcomes of anti-water privatization movements?

3. How do socially constructed and situated meanings of water shape mobilization and participation in anti-water privatization movements?

4. How do differences in collective action frames influence the development and outcomes of these movements?

5. How do transnational forces shape mechanisms of contention on the ground, including opportunity structures, networks and framing strategies? What is the capacity of social movements to adapt to changes in institutional power and respond to global opportunities?

6. How do the mechanisms and processes of contention interact to influence the emergence, trajectories and outcomes of these movements?

The goal of the research study was to compare similar movements with different outcomes in order to understand how differences in mechanisms and processes across the two cases matter for explaining their divergent outcomes and to clarify and broaden the understanding of what factors shape local movements in the context of globalization.

I began each interview with the section on demographics, which includes structured questions about respondents’ personal background information, including education, family, family,

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³ A copy of the interview protocol used for the interviews with anti-privatization activists in Stockton and Vancouver is included at the end of the Methodology Appendix.
ethnicity, personal and household income, employment, marital status and household data. These questions were included in order to solicit critical information for understanding how people’s social and economic backgrounds relate to mobilization as well as to be able to generate a respondent profile in order to compare the interview sample across the two cases.\(^4\)

Then, I asked a series of closed ended survey questions about social and environmental values. These questions were designed to generate data on people’s values and opinions on social, political, economic and environmental issues in order to provide information on how they are related to participation in anti-water privatization movements, and how they shape individual understandings of water and nature. For example, how does a person’s perceptions of socio-natural relationships (in terms of their positioning on the HEP/NEP scale) relate to participation in the movement or to their understandings of water and broader environmental issues?

The next section includes a series of open-ended questions designed to generate data on people’s participation in the movement in their community, including why they joined the movement, what they thought the main arguments and tactics of the movement were, who their social networks were and who were the key organizations involved. This section also shed light on why movements engage in coalition work and what factors – including organizational culture, networks, resources and opportunities – are causally relevant to cross-movement coalition-building. Additionally, this section included questions about the role of political institutions and elites in order to understand the opportunities or constraints facing activists, including the role of global movements and transnational opportunities. This section included questions designed to understand people’s perceptions of the movements and their outcomes as well as how they construct meanings about the mobilization process. This section was critical for generating data

\(^4\) There has been considerable research on the role of biographical characteristics such as gender, education, occupation and parental responsibilities on individual participation in social movements (see McAdam 1986), suggesting that these characteristics can act as barriers to participation.
on the role of frames, networks, opportunities and global processes in shaping differences between the movements in terms of their development and outcomes.

Next, I asked a series of questions about people’s values and attitudes about water and privatization and other environmental issues in order to illuminate how individual values and meaning constructions relate to participation in the movement as well as how these values shape movement trajectories and outcomes. In this section, I also asked respondents a series of questions about their involvement in environmental and community organizations beyond the anti-water privatization movement in order to understand how participation in other social movement organizations is related to participation in the anti-water privatization movement. I concluded this section with a series of questions about connections between the labour and environmental movement in order to shed light on the opportunities and barriers to movement coalition building.

At the end of each interview, after giving each respondent a chance to ask me any questions or provide any additional information, I asked them if they knew of anyone else that they felt I should interview and if so, if they would be willing to contact them on my behalf. This proved to be very useful in gaining access to respondents as most people agreed to contact at least two or three potential respondents. This snowball sampling strategy was also useful for providing insight about the central actors involved in the movements in both places. I was particularly interested in interviewing people whose names had been mentioned by at least five people as this was indicative to me of their centrality in the movement.
Analysis

The thematic analysis and case comparison I utilized to analyze the data, including the transcripts of 70 interviews\(^5\), reflection notes and archival documents, were based on current theoretical debates in the social movements literature. The analysis was guided by recent calls for a more dynamic model of contention that examines mechanisms of mobilization holistically – including external threats or opportunities, relational mechanisms, ideational work and movement framing strategies – in order to clarify how they combine together to shape social movements across different stages of contention (McAdam et al. 2001).

The coding procedure that I utilized followed standard practice for analyzing qualitative data. I began by uploading the transcribed interviews, reflection notes and textual documents into Qualitative Social Research’s Nivo8. Then, I read through each transcript and assigned provisional codes to the data based on theories of contention, the research questions and hypotheses (theoretical codes), and context-sensitive themes that emerged from the fieldwork (grounded codes) (Weston et al. 2001, Strauss and Corbin 1998). I marked similar passages of text with a code label so that they could easily be retrieved at later stages of analysis. Coding the data in this way made it easier to search the data, to make comparisons and to identify any patterns that required further investigation (Miles and Huberman 1994). The NVivo8 search function allowed me to search the codes and the text of the documents to verify whether the passages coded with the same code actually reflected the meaning assigned to the code, in order to ensure coding consistency as well as to identify the frequency of the code.

\(^5\) The goal of the study was to complete 80 interviews; 40 in each place. In the end, I completed 70 interviews because at that point I reached saturation (Small 2009). Following the logic of case studies (see Yin 2008), each interview (or case) in a study should increase the understanding of the research questions. A researcher reaches saturation when the last case examined provides little new information about the phenomena under investigation (Small 2009).
During the initial coding stage, I assigned descriptive codes to the data to identify salient themes. As the analysis progressed, the codes were refined and included more interpretive or abstract codes.6 The codes were broken down into sub-codes representing more specific themes (Berg 2007). These sub-codes were written up in the form of memos that provided more detailed accounts of the significance of the themes or patterns observed, including information about why the code was created, what the coded text revealed and any further observations or questions about the theme or analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994). The sub-codes were then linked together into node-trees that organized the codes hierarchically into categories, representing emerging patterns in the data, making it easier to retrieve related data (Richards 1999). Pattern coding was useful for generating a “cognitive map” or “coding paradigm” of the data that allowed me to uncover interactions between mechanisms and processes of contention to generate common themes for cross-case comparison (Miles and Huberman 1994, Creswell 2007).

For example, I was interested in the role of “globalization” in shaping local movements as a primary research question. So I designed the semi-structured interview protocol to include questions about the importance of global processes (including transnational movements and networks) for the two movements. Table A.1 presents the thematic codes and sub-codes in the node-tree representing the theoretical concepts of globalization. Passages from the interview transcripts reflecting “globalization” were initially coded with the descriptive code “global” and after further analysis were then categorized into sub-codes that represented more specific

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6 This stage of coding is often called axial or focused coding (Creswell 2007). For example in the case of labour-environmental coalitions, I initially coded all instances of this phenomenon with the descriptive code “labour-environmental coalitions”. As I analyzed the data corresponding to this code, I was able to refine the codes to reflect more interpretive or analytic understandings of the processes that shape labour-environmental coalitions, including “social movement unionism”, “workplace-centered unionism”, “class-based divisions between labour and environmental organizations” and “brokerage between labour-environmental movements”. These more refined codes reflected the differences between labour-environmental coalitions in Vancouver and Stockton as well as the theoretical understandings of what shapes these types of movement alliances.
mechanisms of globalization, including global frames, global networks and global opportunities. These sub-codes were then organized hierarchically in a node-tree representing globalization.

**Table A.1** Coding Node-Tree for “Globalization”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad Thematic Code</th>
<th>Sub Thematic Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Global Frames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Global Environmental Risk frames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anti-globalization frames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Global Water Privatization narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Global-Local Frames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Global Opportunity Structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multinational Corporations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Global Economic Institutions (Trade and Investment Treaties)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Global Events (movements, conferences, forums)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linking Global-Local Opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Global Networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transnational Movement Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local-Global Movement Ties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participation in Anti-Globalization Movement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The conceptual tree-nodes were then re-organized and grouped together into tree-nodes representing the theoretical mechanisms of contention identified in the literature on social movements, including external mechanisms (opportunity structures), relational mechanisms (networks, alliances and coalitions), ideological mechanisms (socially constructed meanings) and cognitive mechanisms (frames). Table A.2 presents the mechanistic themes created from the pattern tree-nodes.

Table A.2 NVivo8 Analytic Coding Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad Thematic Nodes</th>
<th>OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES</th>
<th>RELATIONAL MECHANISMS</th>
<th>MEANINGS OF WATER</th>
<th>FRAMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-thematic Nodes</td>
<td>Institutional Openings</td>
<td>Labour/Environmental Coalitions</td>
<td>Water as Part of the Commons</td>
<td>Public Control/Commons Frames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Institutional Closure</td>
<td>Problems with Labour/Environmental Coalitions</td>
<td>Water as a Human Right</td>
<td>Social Justice Frames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alliances with Elites</td>
<td>Other Organizational Ties</td>
<td>Global Concerns about Water</td>
<td>Human Rights Frames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responses to Opportunities/Tactics</td>
<td>Social Justice Organizational Ties</td>
<td>Local Concerns about Water</td>
<td>Democracy/Accountability Frames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-existing Movements</td>
<td>Alliances with Elites</td>
<td>Commodification of Water</td>
<td>Job Protection/Worker’s Rights Frames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local Opportunity Structures</td>
<td>Transnational Network Ties</td>
<td>Human Exemptionalism</td>
<td>Local Frames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Global Opportunity Structures</td>
<td>Future Possibilities</td>
<td>New Environmental Paradigm</td>
<td>Global Frames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic Opportunity Structures</td>
<td></td>
<td>Perceptions of Risk/Trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These mechanistic tree-nodes were compared across the Vancouver and Stockton cases to identify interactions between mechanisms as well as similarities and differences between the two cases in order to identify the specific mechanisms that shaped movement emergence, development and outcomes in each context. Analysis was considered complete when the categories were “saturated”; when all of the “incidents” were classified and regular patterns emerged (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

**Study Rigour**

Achieving rigour in the study was addressed by following the criteria for dealing with issues of trustworthiness outlined by Guba (1985) and Lincoln and Guba (1985), including credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability.\(^7\) Credibility was addressed through the use of triangulation and member checks. I analyzed textual documents related to the two cases in order to cross-check the patterns and interpretations from the interview data to verify similarities and identify any contradictions. Guba (1985) suggests that using “member checks” in qualitative research is important for achieving credibility as feedback from the groups from which the data are solicited can alter the inquiry. While I did not explicitly ask respondents to “check” my data, during the open-ended interviews, respondents were given an opportunity to provide feedback on the interview protocol and ask questions about the study, which often helped clarify concepts and provided me with new directions to investigate and modifications to the questions asked.

Qualitative interviews are a mode of interaction between the researcher and the respondent (Shuy

\(^7\) Qualitative and ethnographic researchers have questioned the applicability of classic statistical validity and reliability measures to qualitative research (see Goodwin and Horowitz 2002, Small 2005; 2009). For example, Small (2009) argues that qualitative researchers need to adopt a new language of inquiry that is more suitable to qualitative methods than the language of classical statistics. And Guba (1985) cautions that the “trustworthiness” criteria he outlines “should not be reconstituted into an orthodoxy”, but rather should be used to increase communication among researchers and to “provide checkpoints against which inquirers can test themselves” (1986:90).
Holstein and Gubrium (2003) argue that interview respondents are important sources of knowledge who offer detailed accounts of the experiences and events under investigation. Qualitative Interviews also provide the opportunity for respondents to explain their answers, give examples and asks questions of the researcher (Rubin and Rubin 2005, Shuy 2003).

The interview respondents also helped guide the sample selection process. By providing information about who participated in the movements in each place, and what organizations were central players, respondents helped me identify new respondents and organizations of theoretical interest. One of the sampling strategies I used was sampling for range, which involves identifying sub-categories of the group under study and selecting people to interview based on membership in one of the sub-categories (Small 2009). These categories can often emerge from the field (Small 2009). For example, during the interviews in both Stockton and Vancouver, respondents consistently referred to the involvement of labour unions and environmental organizations in the anti-water privatization movements in their communities, and provided specific information about the key people and organizations involved. This data emerging from the interviews was important for helping me interview as many people as possible from these two types of organizations in order to understand the role of these movement sectors in shaping the trajectories and outcomes of the movements and to generate theoretical hypotheses that could explain these types of movements (Small 2009).

Transferability was addressed by providing in-depth and contextualized accounts of the two cases under investigation – throughout the dissertation – in order to reflect the life-experiences of the individuals studied as well as to develop working hypotheses that can be transferred from one research context to another depending on the degree of fit between the sites.

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8 Guba (1985) calls this theoretical sampling. And Small (2009) contends that allowing information from the interviews to guide the sample selection is one of the strengths of qualitative methods as it gives the researcher the opportunity to interview respondents that are of theoretical interest.
Thick description also allows other researchers and readers of the study to assess the conclusions of the study (Guba 1985, Patton 2002). Engaging in theoretical sampling as described above is also useful for ensuring transferability because it generates a full-range of information about the two cases and thus allowed for a more complete explanation of the mechanisms behind anti-water privatization movements (Guba 1985).

Dependability was addressed by providing detailed information about the data collection and analysis, including the interview protocol, the sampling strategy, the interview process, and the coding and analysis procedures. The use of overlap methods (Guba 1985) – using document analysis to complement the interview data – was also key to ensuring dependability by demonstrating that similar patterns emerged from both types of data source. Finally, confirmability was addressed through both triangulation of data sources and by practicing reflexivity (Lincoln and 1985). The following section provides a personal account of my background and interest in the study in order to make clear any biases or epistemological assumptions that may have shaped the research process (Guba 1985).

**Personal Reflexivity: Why I Decided to Study Anti-Water Privatization Movements**

In my research, I am guided by Dorothy Smith’s standpoint theory, which states that a researcher must reveal his or her standpoint of experience and connect it to the framework of evidence (Smith 1987). My standpoint as researcher is that of environmentalist and social

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9 Guba (1985) refers to this detailed accounting as an “audit trail” and contends that this increases the dependability of the research study by making clear to other researchers the data collection and analysis process.

10 Feminist researchers such as Michelle Fine and Lois Weis (1996) and Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1983) argue for the use of reflexivity in fieldwork methodology and writing, whereby a researcher identifies his or her role, or what Hughes calls the “cultural self”, as well as any biases he or she might have. Oleson (2000) acknowledges that this can actually become a resource rather than a hindrance to the researcher, claiming that “the utilization of the self is fundamental to qualitative work. If researchers are sufficiently reflexive about their projects, they can evoke these resources to guide the gathering, creation, and interpretation of data as well as their own behavior” (2000: 229).
justice advocate. I have a long standing interest in issues of water privatization and the impact of neoliberal globalization on individuals and communities. I have been involved for many years in social movements that work to promote local and global environmental sustainability and social and economic justice and have held leadership positions in several social movement organizations and campaigns.

Although I appreciate the experiences of being both a social scientist and an activist, I have always been uncomfortable with the divide that exists between academic research on social movements and social movements themselves. I believe that research on social movements has much to offer social movement organizations and actors in their advocacy work and am constantly surprised at how rarely this research reaches audiences beyond academic circles. It is my hope as someone who studies movements for social change that my research will contribute to broader public debates and understandings of the role of civil society in shaping social change.

My desire to reach audiences beyond academia informed my decision to pursue research informed by the idea of “public sociology”; that sociological research should be utilized to stimulate public policy debates as well as to engage with, learn from and support civil society movements in building more just, sustainable and democratic societies. This ‘standpoint of experience’ and belief in the importance of public sociology has guided my choice of research on anti-water privatization movements, while at the same time been a useful resource to draw upon.

11 In his 2004 ASA Presidential Address, Michael Burawoy presented a call for a “public sociology” that utilizes the reflexive knowledge of sociological research to engage with broader audiences and movements beyond the discipline in order to provide viable solutions to problems created by increased inequality, environmental degradation and the spread of neoliberal capitalism (2005). Burawoy’s plea for a public sociology sparked intense debate globally and since then scholars of sociology have offered their own conceptualizations of public sociology. For example, Alain Touraine (2007) argues that sociological research should be bound to civil society rather than to political or economic systems and conceptualizes public sociology as a way of defending individuals against the domination of social institutions. And David Pellow (2007) calls this kind of sociology “critical advocacy research” whereby social scientists engage in research that contributes to broader movements for social change.
during the course of the study, both in terms of grounding the research in existing theory and in understanding the issues raised.

My interest in water and sustainability and my concern about global threats to local control of resources, inspired my interest in understanding the processes and mechanisms that shape local water movements. Specifically, two personal experiences shaped my choice of research which I feel are important to describe in greater detail. In 2001, I attended the public meeting in North Vancouver on the proposal by the GVRD to privatize the Seymour water filtration plant. And in 2002, I helped organize a water activist camp that brought together activists from communities around the world to discuss strategies for protecting water as part of the global commons.

P

ublic Meeting on Privatizing Vancouver’s Water: June 28, 2001 North Vancouver, BC

Part of my desire to study anti-water privatization movements stems from my participation in the public meeting in North Vancouver in 2001, where hundreds of activists and members of the public turned out to voice their opposition to a proposal by the Greater Vancouver Regional District to privatize the Seymour water filtration plant. In June of 2001, while waiting for the sea bus that would take me from North Vancouver to downtown Vancouver, I noticed a flyer advertising a public meeting of the GVRD to discuss the proposal for privatizing the Seymour water filtration plant, one of the main plants that cleans and supplies water for the population of the Lower Mainland. I was shocked.

Although I knew that there was enormous pressure on municipalities across Canada – indeed all over the world – to outsource services to the private sector, I never considered that the Greater Vancouver Regional District would pursue this option. After all, there were so many stories about the negative consequences of water privatization from Cochabamba, Bolivia to
Atlanta, Georgia, including escalating prices and infrastructure failures, and even people being cut off when they could not afford to pay the steep fee increases.\textsuperscript{12} I had recently moved to Vancouver from Montreal, where the city had opted against a private contract for water treatment and was dismayed that the GVRD was considering contracting to a private firm to run the water system. I decided to attend the meeting in North Vancouver, where I was living at the time, in order to gain a better understanding of the political decision-making process in my new hometown. What I encountered was not what I expected.

When I arrived, there were literally hundreds of people pouring into the theatre. Many were dressed up in costume, while others were holding banners and handing out pamphlets about the dangers of water privatization. Just outside the theatre doors, a group of women called the Raging Grannies were singing songs chastising the GVRD for selling our water to the highest bidder. The atmosphere was festive, while at the same time I could sense a rising anger amongst the crowd as people filed into the theatre, greeting each other and exchanging information. Soon most of the seats were full, and the meeting began.

The presenters – including senior GVRD bureaucrats and one elected official – attempted to present a power point presentation justifying their decision to privatize the Seymour water filtration plant, but were soon drowned out by a chorus of boos and shouts of “liars!” from the audience. Many people began demanding a chance for public input, calling out “Let us speak!” When the time came for comments from the public, several dozen, perhaps hundreds of people lined up to speak, forming a line that snaked out the door.

Almost all of the speakers were opposed to privatization. Their comments ranged from impassioned pleas to keep water part of the commons and angry derisions about the lack of public input, to comments on the legal risks under international trade agreements. After each

\textsuperscript{12} See Shiva 2002, Barlow and Clarke 2002 and Olivera and Lewis 2003
public comment, the audience erupted in loud shouts of approval and intense applauding. As the two hour meeting stretched to four and then five hours, with people still lined up to speak, the GVRD officials at the front of the room looked increasingly weary and uncomfortable.

Well past midnight, as the last comment was made and the meeting came to a close, with the GVRD officials still seemingly entrenched in their position, the audience made its way out of the theatre and into the warm summer night, prepared for the next public meeting in Vancouver, scheduled for two weeks later. Although I was awed by the number of people who turned out for the meeting, and by their level of passion and commitment to keeping the water system public, I was still surprised when, the next morning, while listening to CBC, I heard that the GVRD had reversed their decision to privatize the Seymour plant, citing public opposition and the risks of trade agreements. The fact that in such a short time, anti-water privatization activists had managed to mobilize so many people and present a powerful common message to present to political elites that reversed a major policy decision made me want to know more about how this happened and why the movement was so successful.

*Water Activist Camp: November 2002 Evan’s Lake, BC*

As we huddled together around the fire to keep warm on a clear cold November evening, Richard DeerTrack, a native leader from Taos Pueblo, began the opening blessing, slowly moving around the circle, touching each of us with a drop of water taken from the stream crossing his homestead, and asking us to share our connections to water. It was the first night of a week-long water activist camp that I helped organize for a social justice organization in 2002 that brought together people from around the world with the common goal of creating just and sustainable policies for protecting water. Many people in the circle spoke of water as sacred – a source of life – while others spoke of fears about pollution and scarcity. A woman from the
Musqueam Nation described her experiences as a child, drinking directly from the streams and rivers that crossed her reserve, while other First Nations activists told of their struggles to protect precious watersheds from logging and development.

The Water Activist camp crystallized for me that the social movements to protect and ensure fair access to water will be among the most important events in human history. We all need water to survive. Many communities, particularly in developing countries, are experiencing severe water scarcity, while others are dealing with problems of pollution and failing infrastructure as is so often seen in poor communities globally and – closer to home – all too often on First Nations reserves in Canada. A scarce resource, the ownership of water – who owns, manages and has access to clean drinking water – will be critical for the lives of billions.

Governments, on the one hand, are increasingly under pressure to turn public services and resources over to the private sector in order to fix failing infrastructure and regulate water scarcity. On the other hand, there is a growing civil society movement, which claims that water is part of the global commons – a public trust that cannot be owned. Water struggles are rooted in issues of social and environmental justice and new global water movements have increasing influence in domestic and international politics as they respond to global issues with new ways of organizing, and new ways of framing and interpreting social reality.

These experiences guided my desire to learn more about social movements to protect water and ensure it remains part of the commons. In particular, I was interested in understanding the global nature of water privatization and how this transforms resistance at the local level. Over the next few years, as I thought about returning to school to complete a graduate degree, I kept these experiences in the back of my head as a potential research study. In 2004, I decided to build on my academic background, activist experiences, and desire to promote social justice and
environmental conservation by pursuing my Ph.D. degree and studying anti-water privatization movements.

During the course of my field work, I have been fortunate to meet and interview many passionate activists whose desire to create better communities and safeguard environmental resources is an inspiration to me as a researcher and activist. As I heard their stories I was consistently struck by their sense of hope for a better world. I only hope that my current and future research on social movements can contribute to building the kind of just, sustainable and democratic world advocated by my respondents.
Contested Water: Interview Consent Form

Department of Sociology
The University of British Columbia
6303 NW Marine Drive
Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z1

March 19, 2008

Consent Form for Participation

If you agree, you will be interviewed as part of a research project being completed by Joanna Robinson, PhD student in Sociology at the University of British Columbia (UBC). The principal investigator is Dr. David Tindall, Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of British Columbia (UBC). The project title is “Contested Water: A Comparative Analysis of Two Anti-Water Privatization Movements in Canada and the United States”. You are being invited to participate in this study because of your involvement with the anti-water privatization movement in your community.

The interview will take approximately 1 hour to complete. Part of the interview will include personal demographic questions. Part of the interview will be recorded with a digital audio recorder. Any identifiable information you provide will be kept confidential. Only myself, and the principal investigator Dr. David Tindall (my research supervisor) will have access to the data collected as part of this study. That means I will not ever tell anyone your name and your name will never be used in any publications that may result from this research. The information will be archived (stored) securely at the University of British Columbia, but all information that might identify you will have been removed beforehand. However, while the researchers will not reveal your identity, you may be identifiable to people familiar with the issues by the context of your answers, given the public nature of the topic.

You are free to choose whether or not to participate in this study. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate or if you start the interview and then change your mind. Additionally, you may stop the interview anytime or choose not to answer any questions that you are not comfortable with. Do you have any questions?

If you have any additional questions or concerns at a later date about this study, you may contact Joanna Robinson, Dr. David Tindall or the Behavioural Review Ethics Board at UBC by phone at (604) 827-5114 or e-mail: breb.rise@ors.ubc.ca.

I have read and understand the above consent form, and have been given a copy to keep.

Respondent Signature: ______________________________ Date: __________

Printed Name: __________________________________
I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. The purpose of this interview is to obtain information on people’s participation in social movements related to the privatization of water services. I am interested in obtaining information on people’s attitudes, values, organizational activities, backgrounds, and social networks. You have been asked to participate because of your participation in efforts to block the privatization of the water filtration plant in your community.

This project is supported by a fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

The data collected through this questionnaire is intended for academic research at the University of British Columbia and will be used to complete the thesis requirements for my doctoral degree. I hope the results of this research will enable me to better understand the factors that explain people’s participation in anti-water privatization movements. The information gathered from this interview will be used in writing scholarly journal articles and reports.

I wish to remind you that your identity will remain completely confidential, and the answers you provide will remain anonymous. I will not record your name or any information that can identify you personally. You understand that you are under no obligation to participate in the interview. If you feel uncomfortable with any questions you do not need to answer them. Your participation is purely voluntary. I want to remind you that you can decline to answer any question or stop this interview at any time.

If you have any concerns about your rights or treatment as a research subject you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598.

At this time, we will review the consent form for participation, and I will provide a copy for you to keep.

Do you have any questions? Are you ready to start?
I. Demographics

1. What is your age? __________

2. Visible Minority? □Yes □ No

3. Gender □ Male □ Female

4. Where were you born? __________________________
   
   4a) If not in Canada/US, what year did you come to Canada/US? __________
   4b) Where did you spend your teenage years? __________

5. What is your Ethnic Origin?
   
   a) South East Asian (including East Indian, Pakistani, Punjabi, Sri Lankan)
   b) African American/Afro-Canadian
   c) Canadian
   d) American
   e) Chinese
   f) Filipino
   g) Other (please specify) __________________________

6. What is your Current Marital Status:
   
   a) Single
   b) Married/Common Law
   c) Divorced/Separated
   d) Widowed

7. Do you currently work:
   
   a) Full-time
   b) Part-time
   c) Unemployed
   d) Other (please specify) __________________________
8. Do you have any children? □ Yes □ No ➞ If yes, how many? ______

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Living with you now?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1)</td>
<td>□ Yes □ No</td>
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<tr>
<td>2)</td>
<td>□ Yes □ No</td>
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<td>3)</td>
<td>□ Yes □ No</td>
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<tr>
<td>4)</td>
<td>□ Yes □ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5)</td>
<td>□ Yes □ No</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

9. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

   a) Grade School (please specify which grade)
   b) High School (please specify which grade)
   c) Community College Certificate (please specify which certificate)
   d) University undergraduate degree (please specify which discipline)
   e) Graduate degree (please specify which discipline)
   f) Other (please specify) _______________

10. What is your occupation?

    Occupation ____________________________

11. Please describe your position and the paid work you do in detail.

12. Do you manage or supervise anyone in your job?

13. How long have you been doing this kind of work?

14. Would you say that you are:

   a) Business owner
   b) A manager
   c) A supervisor
   d) An employee in a non-management position
   e) Other (please specify) __________________

15. How many hours did you work last week? Number of hours __________

16. Do you work in the public or private sector?

   a) Public sector
   b) Private sector
   c) Non-profit sector
17. Have you ever been employed in the environmental field?

18. Are you a member of a union?

    Please list ________________

19. About how many hours last week did you spend doing housework and non-paid work that benefits the household? For example, general cleaning, laundry, cooking, yard work, buying groceries, etc. (Do not include child supervision as part of calculation).

    Number of hours ________________

20. Of all the non-paid house work done for your household last week, about what percentage of it did you do -- relative to other members of your household? (Do not include child supervision as part of calculation.)

    ________________ %

21. About how many hours last week did you spend doing child care?

    Number of hours ________________

22. Of all the child care done for your household last week, about what percentage of it did you do -- relative to other members of your household?

    ________________ %

23. Could you please give an estimate of your personal income before taxes?

    a. no personal income
    b. under $9,999
    c. $10,000 to $19,999
    d. $20,000 to $29,999
    e. $30,000 to $39,999
    f. $40,000 to $49,999
    g. $50,000 to $69,999
    h. $70,000 to $89,999
    i. $90,000 to $110,000
    j. over $100,000

24. Could you please give an estimate of your household income before taxes?

    a. no personal income
    b. under $9,999
    c. $10,000 to $19,999
    d. $20,000 to $29,999
    e. $30,000 to $39,999
    f. $40,000 to $49,999
    g. $50,000 to $69,999
    h. $70,000 to $89,999
    i. $90,000 to $110,000
    j. over $100,000
II. Social Values

25. I am going to read you a list of statements about the relationship between humans and the environment. For each statement, please indicate whether you **strongly agree, mostly agree, partly agree/disagree, mostly disagree, strongly disagree**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree (1)</th>
<th>Mostly agree (2)</th>
<th>Partly agree/disagree (3)</th>
<th>Mostly disagree (4)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree (5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Human Activity is seriously harming the environment</td>
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<td>2. Technology will save the world from ecological collapse</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Animals and plants have as much right as humans to exist</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Environmental harm caused by economic activity has been greatly exaggerated</td>
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<td>5. The earth is reaching its limit to support human populations</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Environmental protection is a threat to jobs and economic security</td>
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</table>

26. I am going to read you a list of statements about environmental problems. For each issue, please indicate how serious a problem you think it is in your community. Please state whether you think the problem is **extremely serious, fairly serious, not very serious, or not a problem at all**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In your community, how serious a problem do you consider the following issues to be?</th>
<th>Extremely serious (1)</th>
<th>Fairly serious (2)</th>
<th>Not very serious (3)</th>
<th>Not a problem at all (4)</th>
<th>No opinion (5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. Drinking water quality</td>
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<td>10. Air pollution</td>
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<td>11. Solid waste disposal</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Liquid/Sewage waste disposal</td>
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<td>13. Ground water pollution</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Toxins in the environment</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
27. I am going to read you a list of statements about social and political values. For each statement, please indicate whether you strongly agree, mostly agree, partly agree/disagree, mostly disagree, strongly disagree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree (1)</th>
<th>Mostly agree (2)</th>
<th>Partly agree/disagree (3)</th>
<th>Mostly disagree (4)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree (5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Cutting taxes is the best way to make the economy more productive.</td>
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<td>2. Having a strong military is the best way to guarantee peace.</td>
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<td>3. The government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Business corporations such as oil companies make too much profit and the government should take steps to see that businesses don’t make unfair profits at the expense of their employees and consumers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. The government should do more to fight crime.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. People applying for jobs or to university should never receive any preference based on their race, gender, or ethnic origin.</td>
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</table>

28. With which political party in Canada/US do you most identify?

Canada:  
___ Liberal Party  
___ Conservative Party  
___ New Democratic Party  
___ Green Party  
___ Bloc Quebecois  
___ Other __________________

United States:  
___ Republican Party  
___ Democratic Party  
___ Green Party  
___ Other __________________
PART II RECORDED OPEN ANSWERS

For the remainder of the interview, I am going to ask more open-ended questions and would like to record your answers with a digital audio recorder since it is much easier than taking notes, especially since some of these questions will probably generate answers much longer than a simple yes or no. Please speak freely and remember that you can ask to stop the interview at anytime or choose not to answer any questions you are not comfortable answering. I would also like to remind you that anything you tell me is confidential.

I have a list of questions here that I would like to ask you, but I am want you to know that there are no right or wrong answers, and what I am really interested in hearing about are some of your stories that stand out in your memory as important or relevant.

Feel free to elaborate on any point, or ask me if something seems unclear.

Is it ok for me to turn on the digital audio recorder? □ Yes □ No

III. Participation in the Anti-Water Privatization Movement

29. Can you describe your involvement in the effort to stop the privatization of the Stockton/Seymour water filtration plant in 2001/2003?

30. Why do you think there was a lot of opposition to the privatization of the water filtration plant?
31. What do you consider were the main arguments against privatization?

32. Are you familiar with the concept of framing? If yes, how do you think the arguments against privatization were “framed” by the movement?

33. What do you consider were the main tactics used by the opposition movement to protest the privatization plans?

34. Do you think that there was any organization or organizations that played a key role in the movement? In what way or ways do you see their involvement as central?

35. How closely do you think that different organizations involved in the movement worked together? (Optional: Do you think this made any difference to the success or failure of the movement?)
36. What do you think the role of local politicians and city councils was?

37. What was the main reason you became involved in the movement?

38. Do you know anyone else involved in the movement? Who?

39. Were you involved in the water privatization movement in Stockton/Vancouver as part of any formal organization?

   List organization ____________________________

40. Were you involved with this organization before the water privatization movement? How?

41. Do you consider yourself as having had a leadership role in the movement? Why or why not?

42. Do you think your actions made a difference to the movement?
43. In setting out to achieve the goals of the anti-water privatization movement, did you personally encounter any barriers? Please describe.

44. Were those barriers overcome? Why? Why not?

45. In your opinion why do you think the movement was successful/failed?

46. What did being involved in the movement mean to you personally?

47. What did the failure/success of the movement mean to you?

48. How likely are you to become involved in a similar movement in the future?
49. Are you still involved in the movement? Do you know what has happened to the movement since the privatization plans were blocked/implemented?

50. The push to privatize water services is occurring in many parts of the world outside of Canada/the US. Do you see any connection between other communities where the privatization of water services has been either recommended or implemented and the privatization attempt in your community?

51. Do you see any connection between your involvement in the movement in Vancouver/Stockton and anti-water privatization movements occurring in other cities/countries?

52. Would you consider getting involved in a similar movement in another community?

53. Do you think the goals/objective of the kind of movement that occurred in your community should be part of a wider global movement? In what ways?
IV. Values and Attitudes

Questions about water, privatization and the environment

54. Do you have any concerns about water in your community or elsewhere in BC/California? Please describe.

55. Do you have any concerns about water privatization in your community or elsewhere in BC or Canada/California or the US? Please describe.

56. Do you have any concerns with any other issues related to the environment?

57. Do you any concerns with any other issues related to privatization?

58. Who do you think should be most responsible for dealing with water conservation?

   Why?

   What should they do?
V. Community Involvement

59. I am going to read you a list of organizations involved in the anti-water privatization movement in your community. Can you please tell me if you are member of any of these organizations.

Vancouver:

___ Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA)
___ Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)
___ Council of Canadians
___ Sierra Legal Defense Fund (Ecojustice)
___ Society Promoting Environmental Conservation (SPEC)
___ Western Canada Wilderness Committee

Stockton:

___ Concerned Citizens of Stockton
___ Campaign for Common Ground
___ Democratic Women's Council
___ San Joaquin Democratic Central Committee
___ Food and Water Watch
___ Green Party
___ League of Women Voters
___ Land Utilization Alliance
___ NAACP
___ Peace and Justice Network
___ Public Citizen
___ Services Employees Industry Union (SEIU)
___ Sierra Club
___ Unitarian Church

60. Are you an active member in any of these organizations? (Do you participate in any meaningful way in their activities beyond making a financial donation?) What kinds of things do you do?
61. Are you a member of any community organizations I did not include on the previous list? (Please list)

62. How many hours per month do you engage in the activities of community organizations?
   Hours _______________

*Involvement in the Environmental Movement*

63. Do you consider yourself to be an environmentalist? Why? Or Why not?

64. How strongly do you identify as being an environmentalist?

65. Why did you first get interested in the environment?

66. What kinds of things do you to help protect the environment? (For example, do you recycle or compost, regularly walk, cycle or use public transit instead of drive a car, buy local and/or organic food, use environmentally friendly cleaning products, yard care products, etc.).

67. Do you consider yourself a member of the environmental movement? Why? Why not?
68. How long have you been involved in the environmental movement?

69. In what ways are you currently involved in the environmental movement?

70. Are you a member of any environmental organizations?
   
   Please list
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________

71. What do you consider to be the most pressing environmental issues in your community?
   
   What about the country?

   What about globally?

72. How effectively do you think that the environmental movement is addressing those issues?

73. Do you think gender matters when it comes to the environmental movement? (Prompt if asked: For example, does it affect individual participation, leadership or they type of issues addressed)
74. Do you see any connection between the environmental movement and other social justice movements, for example the labour movement?

75. Do you think the environmental movement should work more closely with other social justice organizations? Why/why not?

Those are all the questions I have. Is there anything else you would like to add or do you have any questions? Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions and share your experiences through this research project.

Can think of anyone who was involved in the movement who you think might be interested in being interviewed for this study?

Would you be willing to contact them and obtain their permission for me to contact them?

After obtaining their permission, it would be wonderful if you could provide me with their name and contact information so that I can send them a letter of invitation to participate.
ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

Interviewee ID: _______________________

Date: ________________________________

Location: _____________________________

Start Time: __________________________

End Time: ____________________________

NOTES

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________
## Certificate of Approval - Minimal Risk

**Principal Investigator:** David B. Tindall  
**Institution / Department:** UBC/Arts/Sociology  
**UBC BREB Number:** H08-00698

### Institution(s) Where Research Will Be Carried Out:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UBC</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Other locations where the research will be conducted:
While I will be based at UBC Point Grey Campus, the interviews may take place in respondents homes, offices, community centres or coffee shops in the field.

### Co-Investigator(s):
Joanna Lynn Robinson

### Sponsoring Agencies:
N/A

### Project Title:
Contested Water: A Comparative Analysis of Two Anti-Water Privatization Movements in Canada and the United States

### Certificate Expiry Date:
April 14, 2009

### Date Approved:
April 14, 2008

### Documents Included in This Approval:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Name</th>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consent Forms: Robinson Contested Water Consent Form</td>
<td>1c</td>
<td>April 7, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisements: Robinson Contested Water Letter of Initial Contact</td>
<td>1c</td>
<td>April 7, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests:</td>
<td>1c</td>
<td>April 7, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Protocol: Robinson Contested Water</td>
<td>1b</td>
<td>March 24, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter of Initial Contact: Robinson Contested Water</td>
<td>1c</td>
<td>April 7, 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

*Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board and signed electronically by one of the following:*

Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair  
Dr. Ken Craig, Chair  
Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair  
Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair  
Dr. Daniel Salhani, Associate Chair  
Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair

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**Appendix B** UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval  
The University of British Columbia  
Office of Research Services  
**Behavioural Research Ethics Board**  
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3