

University of Delaware
Disaster Research Center

PRELIMINARY PAPER
#83

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION IN THE CASE OF
EMERGENT CITIZEN GROUPS IN DISASTER:
SOME NEEDED MODIFICATIONS OF THE EXISTING
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE*

David M. Neal

January 1983

*This paper is to be presented at the Midwestern Sociological Society's annual meeting held in Kansas City, Missouri, April 1983. The data in this paper were obtained through National Science Foundation Grant Number CEF-8113191 to the Disaster Research Center; however, any opinions, findings, or conclusions are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation. The author would like to thank E. L. Quarantelli and Jennifer Groce Welch for their valuable comments on this paper.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we look at the sources from which a type of social movement organization (SMO), emergent groups in disaster, obtain resources. Drawing upon field data from a larger nationwide study of emergent citizen groups (ECG's) in disaster, we compare our findings with those described by McCarthy and Zald (1973; 1977).

A number of approaches have existed for studying types of collective behavior and social movements. The earliest work was dominated by a psychological perspective in which it was argued that group emergence and formation occurred through an irrational decision-making process of the individual (e.g., LeBon, 1960).

During the 1950's and 1960's, two themes were dominant. One was the symbolic interactionist perspective, which included work by Blumer (1957) and Turner and Killian (1957). The processual and symbolic natures of collective behavior were the key points of analysis from this perspective. Also dominant was a social psychological approach with an attempt to ascertain what types of attitudes may preclude participation or membership in a social movement (Lipset, 1971).

Since the early 1970's, a social organizational approach, as suggested by Turner (1964) and Weller and Quarantelli (1973), has been utilized by many to study forms of collective behavior and social movements. As Marx and Woods observe (1975:366), one reason for the utilization of this approach is that "There is probably a greater affinity between social movements and organizations than among other forms of collective behavior."

One effort using a structural and organizational perspective to study social movements and social movement organizations is McCarthy and Zald's (1973; 1977) resource mobilization approach. There are many facets to the authors' presentation, but we will briefly summarize the part of their argument which is most germane to this paper.

Specifically, McCarthy and Zald are concerned with determining where and how social movement organizations obtain resources, and how the amount of resources obtained is related to the movement's success. They conclude that the individual's time and money are the important resources for a social movement. These two resources become more available under certain societal conditions: an increase in per capita income which increases the likelihood of individual support and contributions to social movements; students of an affluent society having salient networks; and people in managerial positions having flexible time schedules (McCarthy and Zald, 1973:11). A major assumption of the resource mobilization approach is that, "Explaining collective behavior requires detailed attention to the selection of incentives, cost-reducing mechanisms or structures, and career benefits that lead to collective behavior." (McCarthy and Zald, 1977:1216)

EMERGENT CITIZEN GROUPS AS SOCIAL MOVEMENT ORGANIZATIONS

The work of Zald and Ash (1966) was an early attempt to implicitly utilize the resource mobilization perspective. In their study, SMO's were analyzed from an organizational perspective. It is in this study that the concepts of a social movement and SMO are first differentiated (Zald and Ash, 1966:329). From within the resource mobilization approach, a social movement is defined as "a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society." (McCarthy and Zald, 1977:1217-1218) Under the conditions of related populations which are either communally or associationally organized internally, SMO's are more likely to appear (McCarthy and Zald, 1977: 1218). SMO is defined as "a complex, or formal organization which identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement or countermovement and attempts to implement those goals." (McCarthy and Zald, 1977:1218)

The resource mobilization approach can be used in our study of ECG's in disaster. ECG's are conceptualized as groups recently formed by private citizens regarding a particular disaster issue. Activities by members associated with formal organizations or well-established social movements are excluded from our study. Only local ECG's are studied; groups whose existence is based upon other regional, state, or national level organizations are not included. Only those ECG's that are formed before or after a disaster are included in the study; emergency time period groups are not included.

The ECG's in this study have a very definite organizational structure including elected officers, horizontal and vertical division of labor, and goal orientation. Quite easily, ECG's fit within the rubric of an SMO. Not only are these grass root entities considered in our analysis, but so are community and regional SMO's. These organizations, called "umbrella groups" by ECG members and others, cover a wide range of issues or give various types of resources to a number of different issue-oriented neighborhood groups. The important difference between grassroots SMO's and community/regional SMO's is discussed later in this analysis.

The data used in this study is from a much broader study of ECG's in disaster. For this paper, 17 ECG's are studied from six geographical regions in the United States. These sites were selected, among other reasons, because of their high risk and vulnerability to hazards. Such threats in these areas include earthquakes, mud- and landslides, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, toxic wastes, severe pollution, and massive explosions. Specific names of places, groups, and individuals are not given in order to protect the promised confidentiality of our respondents.

Over 140 interviews were conducted to gather data pertaining to this paper. Some of those interviewed had knowledge of more than one ECG situation. In addition to the interviews, a plethora of documents were

analyzed including newspaper articles, correspondence between ECG members and various organizations, internal organizational memos, private notes and memos, newsletters, community data, and videotapes. Observations from the field sites were also utilized.

DISCUSSION

As briefly mentioned in the introduction, we are to determine whether in this case, increased contributions due to a good economy, students, and white collar professionals are the primary source of time and money for ECG's and their success. Generally, we conclude that the resource mobilization approach has great utility. Specifically, however, many of the points are probably overstated and not qualified enough. We believe that the three factors McCarthy and Zald argue contribute to an SMO's money and time are a reflection of the social conditions and issues of the 1960's. We now turn to look at these three factors in more detail.

Affluence

Since McCarthy and Zald support the notion that availability of money is important for an SMO to organize and succeed, it is no wonder they stress the importance of an affluent society to spawn SMO's. They conclude that "affluence gives people resources to support their civic values; they can join and contribute widely to organizations." (McCarthy and Zald, 1973:9)

Even though the current state of the economy is considered a "repression" and unemployment in the United States is at a Post World War II high, locating ECG's throughout the country has not been a difficult task. We find that ECG's exist in all socio-economic strata, that most operate on a marginal income, and that most are able to accomplish some major goal and claim some degree of success. Although financial contributions from members and bystanders can greatly aid in an ECG's ability to achieve success, quite often tasks can be accomplished on minimal budgets. Most ECG's obtain and spend their economical resources during the first three to six months of existence. Afterwards core members use their own money to finance the group.

Students

Student membership in ECG's is non-existent. Students have been involved with two ECG's in only one area--a severely economically depressed region. In this case, the students were not members of the groups; rather they were activists/researchers for a larger regional network involved in aiding grassroots movements in the area.

The category which replaces the role of students in this case is "housewives." Women (perceived as "housewives" by both themselves and outsiders) are most active in both leadership and membership roles of

ECG's. They perceive themselves as having more spare time than their husbands (a perception we suggest is not accurate), hence they feel that they have more of an opportunity than their husbands to become involved with the ECG.

Professionals

Professionals, as McCarthy and Zald suggest, do play an important role in SMO's (specifically ECG's). In our study, female professionals play an active role, much more than male professionals. Of the seventeen groups studied in this analysis, eleven are headed by women and four of those women are professionals. In addition, a number of other professional women are active in group leadership or activities. Whether "professional" or "housewife," the job can demand many hours, but there does exist discretionary time (or it is at least perceived as such) which allows participation in certain group activities.

We suggest that changes in the social structure since McCarthy and Zald's (1973) initial statement have altered what may be important sources of money and time for SMO's today. Walsh (1981) holds a similar view. Our data would suggest that a good economy may not be as important the the formation of SMO's. Perhaps the economy may influence the type (both issue-orientation and size) of SMO's. With a recession and high unemployment, ECG's are easy to find; yet, we see a reluctance by many to participate in ECG's since such a political activity may put a person's job in jeopardy. This is especially true when a major disaster threat is associated with a prominent industry in the community. It is also ironic to note that in areas of extreme economic deprivation, the unemployed (in many cases), due to their spare time, take active if not leadership roles in ECG's.

College students, once a vast resource for SMO's, are not active today—at least not with ECG's in disasters. Nor do we find a large number of college students involved with the social movement industry (this could be attriucted to federal budget cuts and other social and economic factors). Rather, there exists "housewives" who perceive themselves as having spare time and economic resources to become active in an ECG. These data suggest that there are groups of people who perceive themselves as having extra time, but these groups of people may change over time. Secondly, the issue itself may determine what specific group with spare time becomes involved with the SMO. If an 18 year old knows he may be drafted, he and his friends (who may be college students) may become involved in a related SMO to stop the draft. If a "housewife" (whose domain is the home and children) fears her home and children are in danger due to a disaster, she and her friends may take action to lessen or eliminate the potential hazard.

Also another social category has been active in ECG's, more with membership than leadership, but it has made a significant contribution to groups. Retired people have contributed time, some money, and knowledge. Only research of other SMO's can demonstrate if this is due to a specific type of issue affecting a particular area, the social structure at the moment, or other factors.

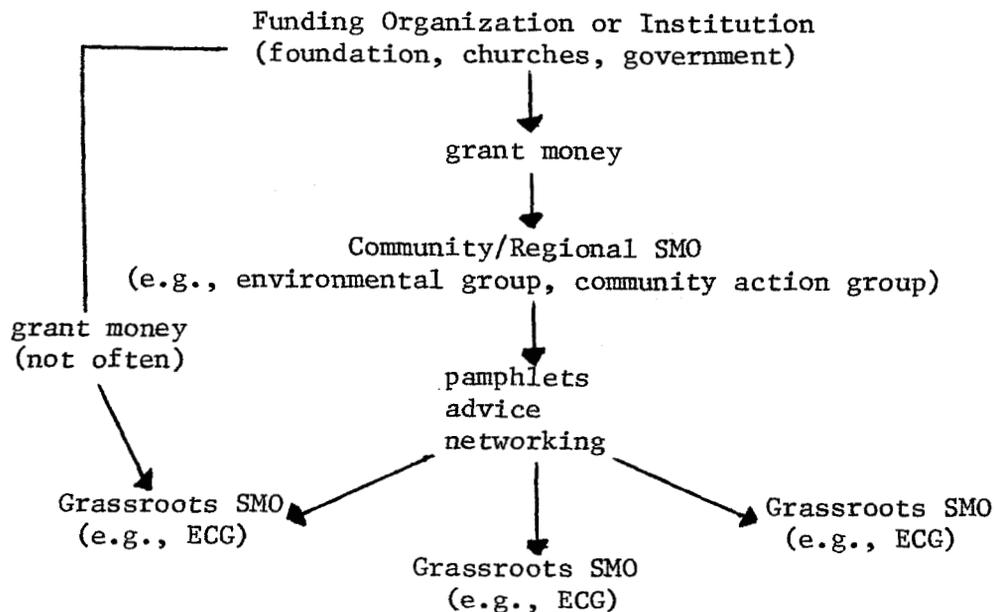
Both professional women and men are involved in ECG's, although women predominate. The change of social roles and attitudes creating a greater acceptance of women in leadership and political activities over the last decade add at least a partial explanation of the large numbers of women involved in ECG's. Clearly, over the last ten years, sources of time and money for SMO's has existed. These contributors of resources have changed over the past decade due to structural changes in our society. Professionals, however, still play an important role in the mobilization of resources.

Foundation, Church, and Government Funding of ECG's

Of the 17 ECG's in this analysis, only four have directly received any type of grant money from a foundation, church, or government agency. Rather, we see grants going to community or regional SMO's. In turn, non-economic resources (e.g., organizing advice, strategy, contacts and legitimizing, pamphlets) from the community/regional SMO are distributed to the grassroots ECG's. The community/regional SMO's are involved with a large number of social issues. Along with disaster, they are involved with issues pertaining to conservation, crime-watchers, voting, consumer rights, and a host of others.

In essence, what exists in this case is a "trickle down" effect of resources going from grant giving institutions, to community/regional SMO's, to grassroots SMO's (in this case ECG's in disaster). Figure I illustrates this process.

Figure I SMO Funding Sources



In other words, such institutions award grants to regional or community SMO's for staffing, offices, printing costs, and other necessities. The grassroots SMO's, such as ECG's, receive mostly non-material resources from the community/regional SMO's. In the four cases where ECG's did receive grant money, it was aided by the community or regional SMO.

McCarthy and Zald (1973:12) anticipated the potential importance of churches and foundations for funding SMO's. The current federal budget cuts are diminishing the government's role of funding SMO's, hence these other institutions are attempting to fill the gap. What is most interesting is that the material resources, especially money, essentially do not reach the grassroots level.

CONCLUSION

We concur with the resource mobilization approach of McCarthy and Zald that money and time are important factors for organizing and maintaining SMO's. We suggest, however, that structural changes in society, different issue involvement by SMO's, or a combination of both may be responsible for different sources of time and money from what McCarthy and Zald suggest. With ECG's, we find women (both "professionals" and "housewives") most active in contributing money and time to this type of SMO. Although the economy during the time of this study was weak, we had no trouble locating ECG's. Foundations, churches, and the government have been responsible for contributing grant money to regional or community SMO's. Most of this money, however, does not reach the grassroots neighborhood level of SMO's. Except in the cases where a major disaster has occurred, the role of the government (at various levels) providing grant money to community/regional and grassroots SMO's is dwindling due to recent federal budget cuts. As noted in other studies (Gerlach and Hine, 1970:56-63; Curtis and Zurcher, 1973; Aveni, 1978), there exists an important relationship between SMO's and institutional support which aids an SMO's emergence and existence. The data from this study to a degree support this pattern.

One analytic problem of the resource mobilization approach, which becomes clear in this study, is that it ignores neighborhood grassroots SMO's (such as ECG's). Due to this neglect, we believe that the importance of money for an SMO existing at the grassroots level is over-emphasized. Criticism of the necessity for sums of money for SMO's is located elsewhere (Gambrell, 1980; Luebke, 1981; Walsh, 1981) as is the difficulty of studying grassroots SMO's from the resource mobilization approach. This study further confirms what was suspected from the above mentioned analyses of eight other SMO's.

We do not concur, however, with Gambrell's (1980:188) conclusion that the resource mobilization approach is not applicable for multi-purpose groups. The community and regional SMO's that we have found must deal with multi-issues in order to obtain operating costs for the

organization. The more issues concerning the public that the SMO addresses (e.g., crime watchers, feeding the elderly, flood or tornado warnings), the more likely the SMO will obtain operating funds from either private or public sector. Actually, we find the resource mobilization approach noteworthy in explaining community and regional SMO's.

Additionally, from an analytic viewpoint, we suggest that the community/regional SMO's must be differentiated from grassroot SMO's (as in this case, ECG's). Our data suggest that the community/regional SMO's birth and existence relies upon large sums of money from institutional grants and individual contributions. The money is necessary for offices, staffing, and equipment. Conversely, the grassroot SMO's existence relies upon members who have a lot of (perceived) spare or discretionary time rather than large sums of money. The ECG's in this study relied upon many non-material resources (e.g., the use of copying machines for free, the use of buildings for meetings for free) which aided in the groups' success. Similar non-monetary resources also have aided the community/regional SMO's. It should be noted that those ECG's with more money available to them have generally been able to achieve a greater degree of success. We believe, however, that much of this function of success is due to contacts in the political arena. Those in a higher socio-economic status are more likely to know what political strings to pull because they have these contacts as friends, neighbors, or business associates.

In one aspect, we concur with Walsh's (1981) conclusion that resource mobilization theorists should treat "discontent" or "collective grievances" as variables rather than constants. Some resource mobilization theorists (e.g., Snyder and Tilly, 1972; Oberschall, 1973; Freeman, 1979) have attempted to incorporate "grievances" into their schema. This could create theoretical problems, however, since the research mobilization approach is couched in the assumptions of organizational/structural theory, whereas the notion of "grievances" is grounded in social psychological theory. This is not a new problem in collective behavior. For example, Smelser (1962) has the same general problem in his schema with the concepts of "structural strain" (from structural/organizational assumptions) and "generalized belief" (from social psychological assumptions). Researchers of collective behavior and social movements need to move carefully on this ground. We did find in all our cases of group emergence inherent structural contradictions or conflict. A notion of conflict, consistent with the theoretical assumptions of the resource mobilization approach, needs to be considered.

In addition, in some cases we found that SMO's of community, regional, or grassroots level are all working in the same geographical area on a similar issue. At times there is cross-membership by some individuals in the various SMO's. It is interesting to note, however, that each SMO maintains its own separate boundaries. Mergers are never considered. Multiple SMO's in an area actually act as other resources for those involved since they usually give the appearance of more support over an issue than what actually exists. A merger of some SMO's could actually

reflect to the public and decision-makers a decline of support over a given issue.

To conclude, we believe a differentiation of types of SMO's with their important resources, along with a consideration of the importance of other material and non-material resources can improve the resource mobilization approach to study social movements and SMO's. Although helpful, money is not a major factor for the birth, existence, and perhaps success of a grassroots ECG's.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aveni, Adrian F.
1978 "Organizational linkages and resource mobilization: the significance of linkage strength and breadth." *Sociological Quarterly* 19 (Spring): 185-202.
- Blumer, Herbert
1957 "Collective behavior." Pp. 127-158 in Gittler (ed.), *Review of Sociology, Analysis of a Decade*. New York: Wiley.
- Curtis, Russell L., Jr. and Louis A. Zurcher
1973 "Stable resources of protest movements: the multi-organizational field." *Social Forces* 52: 53-61.
- Freeman, Jo
1979 "Resource mobilization and strategy: a model for analyzing social movement organization actions." Pp. 167-189 in Zald and McCarthy (eds.), *The Dynamics of Social Movements*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Winthrop Publishers.
- Gambrell, Richard
1980 "Issue dynamics in student movements." *Social Forces* (March): 187-202.
- Gerlach, Luther and Virginia Hine
1970 *People, Power, and Change: Movements of Social Transformation*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill.
- LeBon, Gustave
1960 *The Crowd*. New York: Viking Press.
- Lipset, Seymour Martin
1971 *Rebellion in the University*. Boston, Massachusetts: Little, Brown, and Company.
- Luebke, Paul
1981 "Activists and asphalt: a successful anti-expressway movement in a 'New South City'." *Human Organization* 40(3): 256-263.
- Marx, Gary T. and J. Wood
1975 "Strands of theory and research in collective behavior." *Annual Review of Sociology* 1: 363-428.
- McCarthy, James D. and Mayer N. Zald
1973 *The Trend of Social Movements in America: Professionalization and Resource Mobilization*. Morristown, New Jersey: General Learning Press.

- McCarthy, John D. and Mayer N. Zald
1977 "Resource mobilization and social movements: a partial theory." American Journal of Sociology 82(6): 1212-1241.
- Oberschall, Anthony
1973 Social Conflict and Social Movements. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Smelser, Neil J.
1962 Theory of Collective Behavior. New York: Free Press.
- Snyder, David and Charles Tilly
1972 "Hardship and collective violence in France, 1830-1960." American Sociological Review 37: 520-532.
- Turner, Ralph
1964 "Collective behavior." In R. Farris (ed.), Handbook of Modern Sociology. Chicago, Illinois: Rand McNally.
- Turner, Ralph H. and Lewis M. Killian
1957 Collective Behavior. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Walsh, Edward J.
1981 "Resource mobilization and citizen protest in communities around Three Mile Island." Social Problems 29(1): 1-22.
- Weller, Jack and E. L. Quarantelli
1973 "Neglected characteristics of collective behavior." American Journal of Sociology 79(3): 665-685.
- Zald, Mayer N. and Roberta Ash
1966 "Social movement organizations: growth, decline, and change." Social Forces 44 (March): 327-340.