Author comments

Community development and social actor theories: A case study in Montréal Canada

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To define the concept of social actor, I conducted a brief literature review of the most widely known papers published on the topic. My goal is not to establish a theory of collective action, or even to provide a critical reading. Rather, my goal is to identify the characteristics, the functions and the actions taken up by so-called social actors. While drawing on several theories, my intention was to show that the actor is not one-dimensional. Indeed, the same individual or representative of an organisation will alter their actions according to the context and the position taken within the context. It was apparent to me that, while observing contexts of collective action, as the one found in the Villeray district in Montréal, that the individuals, groups, networks, and anyone that can be linked in one way or another to the concept of actor, define themselves essentially by the various postures taken according to the context. By posture, I refer to Pierre Bourdieu's proposal to connect the methods used by social actors in their intervention and their position taken in the context. In other words, the posture evolves simultaneously with the situation. I then proceeded in classifying the various theories compiled on the definition of the concept of actors. These are shown in Table I.

What I try to show in the paper are the various postures of actors in the different positions taken. The same actor is able to adopt any of these postures simultaneously or successively. In response to Referee 2 who writes, "Part of the problem here lies in the number of theories the author introduces; part of it lies from the opaqueness with which the arguments", I intend to reconsider the way I framed the initial objective, which consists of establishing a classification of the postures. I make explicit the limited reach of the proposal in order to avoid any ambiguity. The proposed link between the different theories placed within a model does not signify that these six big theories are merged. An actor, who is not one-dimensional, applies strategic, communicational and reflexive skills, etc. Combining practices, interventions and positions – which I call the postures of the actor – enables me to carryout an in depth analysis of the sphere of practices. This is the reason why I chose to combine several postures in a flexible model (that can consider the complexity of different types of actors). Besides, I emphasize how I was able to observe every posture of the actor in the case study presented in the second part of the paper. In order to avoid any risk of giving an all-encompassing definition of the actor, I offer instead expanded definitions in the theoretical section. This is done in response to the Referee who writes, "The notion of social actor refers to all stakeholders, individuals or groups, within civil society or public institutions involved in processes and carrying

out initiatives in support of community development or urban revitalization". In the revised text, the concept must be widened to include such notions as social interactions, networking, and public communication. Likewise, it will be necessary to distinguish between individuals and organizations that embody real actors or collective actors that are considered as global actors (a social movement for example). It is important to specify that the observed actors in the context (i.e. in the Villeray district) are building a collective project. Offering a more precise understanding should remove the ambiguities mentioned by Referee 2.

Another critical point raised calls into question the relation I establish between the theoretical and empirical sections. Referee 1 writes "The fundamental problem with the paper is the disconnect between the theoretical discussion and the case study". I am aware that improvements can be made in linking the two parts together. I intend to add for each of the phases of the Social Forum shown in Table 3 a comment that draws parallels between the context, the types of actors present, and the adopted postures. In doing so, I will show that the evolution of the Forum Social (FS), which should perhaps be better documented, testifies that actors modify the ways in which they intervene and interact according to the scene on which they act and the resulting posture. Moreover, it is necessary to show that the situated actors (individuals and organizations), during the course of the FS process, have taken the appearance of a collective actor. In a way, they have constructed a common discourse and project. By shedding more light on the progress and the sequence of the situations, and by drawing on the notion of posture, I intend to show that the FS actors have constructed actions and achieved results. Table 2 provides some examples. During the preliminary phases, actors adopt a strategic posture of negotiation in order to influence the topic being addressed in the plan under development. The organizers of the Social Forum try to extend the network of participating actors, by informal agreements, and broadcast the initial documents across a public communication space (such as a local community newspaper). Their goal is therefore to reach out to the neighbourhood's residents (by conducting local visits and organizing focus groups), then convene in a subcommittee (that are confined spaces of deliberation) to examine the issues once more that will be addressed at the public forum. Thus is created a space of deliberation. Its aim is to facilitate a process of discursive consensus-building that centres largely on the urban and the living environments. Reconvening in a feedback committee, once the action plan is made public, offers an opportunity for reflexivity, which places on the agenda the proposed social claims and the defence of rights that foreshadow a project for social change (the manifesto). Actions stemming from the FS take the form of concrete proposals that are the focus of debase in local media, notably on the urban environment on the one hand, and on a utopian urban project whose goals are to improve accessibility to services, life conditions and social justice, on the other hand. The process of setting in motion priority actions takes the form of an experience in technical democracy. In the end, the FS became a social and

community development experience, which took place on several scenes (committee, networks, media, public forum, etc.) and required that participants have multiple skills. Using the proposed model, the dynamics of the FS were closely followed, and assessments of both procedural and substantive effects were carried-out.

The third point I intend to clarify is the methodological approach that I pursued. Throughout the process, discourses were compiled (which I collected from documents, meeting minutes, reports, statements on deliberations) that were produced on the different scenes of the FS (negotiation committee, networked discussions, action feedback committee, focus groups, public forum, coverage in the media, action plans). I then proceeded in encoding them following a standard approach by topic category. I thus was able to follow the evolution of the contents of the action plan step by step.