Pathways to Politics: New Left Movement Parties in Post-Yugoslav Space

by

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Abstract

This thesis investigates processes behind the formation of new left movement parties in post-Yugoslav space by tracing and comparing the emergence of two movement parties: *Initiative for Democratic Socialism* (Slovenia) and *Do Not Let Belgrade D(r)own* (Serbia). Its main aim is to describe mechanisms through which activist groups with long-term experience of nonelectoral activism engage in movement party formation, which is conceptualized as a core change in social movement strategy. The central argument of the thesis is that movement party formation can be explained by two key mechanisms: strategic learning, which takes place over a longer period of time, and cognitive liberation, which is provoked by the experience of eventful protest. In addition to establishing similarities across the two cases, comparative design serves to investigate to what extent and how each of the two contexts structured different movements' strategic articulations. It identifies two strategic articulations of the electoral new left in the post-Yugoslav space: *national-level democratic-socialist pathway* and *local-level green-municipalist pathway*.

Empirically, the thesis combines theory-building process tracing and cross-case analysis, outlining the movement parties' long-term origins through detailed case studies. In addition to in-depth interviews with activists from various sub-sectors of left-wing activism in Slovenia and Serbia, the case studies draw on the analysis of activists' strategic framing within protest events, media appearances and organizational documents.

The thesis aims to contribute to the body of research on stability and change in social movement strategy as well as to update the literature on left-wing movement parties with cases that remained relatively underinvestigated. At the same time, the thesis takes a novel approach to postsocialist left-wing activism, going beyond the usual analytical division between electoral and nonelectoral forms of activism. Against the backdrop of the assumptions on the static, transactional and NGO-ized nature of postsocialist activism, it shows activists' capacity for strategic change.

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List of acronyms

Acronym	Original language name	English language name
BW	Beograd na vodi	Belgrade Waterfront
DEMOS	Demokratična opozicija Slovenije	Democratic Opposition of Slovenia
DeSUS	Demokratična stranka upokojencev	Democratic Party of Pensioners
DPU	Delavsko punkerska univerza	Workers and Punks University
DS	Demokratska stranka	Democratic Party
DSD	Demokratična stranka dela	Democratic Party of Labour
DSP	Društvo slovenskih pisateljev	Slovene Writers' Association
DSS	Demokratska stranka Srbije	Democratic Party of Serbia
IDS	Iniciativa za demokratični socializem	Initiative for Democratic Socialism
IDŠ	Inštitut za delavske študije	Institute for Labour Studies
IWW	Nevidni delavci sveta	Invisibile workers of the world
KGG	Ko gradi grad?	Who builds the city?
KOKS	Koordinacijski odbor kulture Slovenije	Coordination Committee of Culture Slovenia
KUL	Koalicija ustavnega loka	Constitutional Arch Coalition
LDS	Liberalna demokracija Slovenije	Liberal Democracy of Slovenia
LS	Levica Srbije	Serbian Left
LSS	Levi samit Srbije	Left Summit of Serbia
LSV	Liga socijaldemokrata Vojvodine	League of Socialdemocrats of Vojvodina
MP	Ministarstvo prostora	Ministry of Space
MSU	Mi smo univerza	We are University
NDB	Ne da(vi)mo Beograd	Do Not Let Belgrade D(r)own
NDZ	Neposredna demokracija zdaj!	Direct democracy now!
NSi	Nova Slovenija	New Slovenia
PEL	Party of European Left	Party of European Left
PRL	Partija radikalne levice	Party of Radical Left
RLS	Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung	Rosa Luxemburg Foundation
SDS	Slovenska demokratska stranka	Slovenian Democratic Party
SDU	Socijal demokratska unija	Social Democratic Union
SKD	Slovenski krščanski demokrati	Slovene Christian Democrats
SKS	Savez komunista Srbije	League of Communists of Serbia
SLS	Slovenska ljudska stranka	Slovenian People's Party
SMC	Stranka Mire Cerara	Party of Miro Cerar
SMS-Zeleni	Stranka mladih Slovenije - Zeleni	Youth Party - Greens
SNS	Srpska napredna stranka	Serbian Progressive Party
SPS	Socijalistička partija Srbije	Socijalist Party of Serbia
SRS	Srpska radikalna stranka	Serbian Radical Party
ŠOS	Študentska organizacija Slovenije	Student Organization of Slovenia

TRS	Trajnostni razvoj Slovenije	Sustainable Development of Slovenia
URA	Ujedinjena reformska akcija	United Reform Action
VLV	Vseslovenska ljudska vstaja	Pan-Slovenian People's Uprising
ZKS	Zveza komunistov Slovenije	League of Communists of Slovenia
ZKS-SDP	Zveza komunistov Slovenije-Stranka demokratične prenove	League of Communists of Slovenia - Party of Democratic Renewal
ZL	Združena levica	United left
ZSSS	Zveza svobodnih sindikatov Slovenije	Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia
ZZB-NOB	Zveza združenj borcev za vrednote Narodnoosvobodilnega boja Slovenije	Union of the Associations for the Values of the National Liberation Movement of Slovenia

1 Introduction: "We Are the Ones We've Been Waiting For."

On 21 February 2017, I took part in the founding meeting of Zagreb is Ours, a political party established with the immediate aim of challenging the seventeen-year-long government of mayor Milan Bandić in the Croatian capital. Just like myself, a number of participants in the meeting were, at the time, activists, volunteers or employees of various left-leaning non-governmental organizations and nonformal collectives based in the city. Of around a hundred of us present, there was virtually no one with any previous experience of activism or membership within a political party. And yet, there we were, sitting in a large circle, moving step by step through the establishment procedure for the official registration of a political party. The party name was chosen, the statutes were adopted, and the necessary signatures for official party registration were collected.

"We are the ones we've been waiting for" was a phrase extensively used to describe the atmosphere among a significant portion of left-wing activists in Croatia at the beginning of 2017. Although the phrase was, for many, an expression of irony, the atmosphere was rather enthusiastic. An observer may have asked: What *exactly* makes party politics so positively exciting? After all, since the 1990s, and especially since the beginning of the Great Recession, political parties were globally among the most criticized political actors. The discussions on the crisis of representative democracy, in which political parties play the leading role, have probably never been as present as in the last decade. Political parties are perceived as culprits of the crisis, not its solution.

The fact that there was nothing absolutely certain or positive about the prospects of participation in the party competition was probably one of the reasons for the excitement. Indeed, although many were politically articulate and vocal advocates of various causes, the identity of a politician or a partisan was foreign to most of those present. This was also the reason why Zagreb is Ours, while legally registered as a political party, branded itself as a political *platform*. This ambiguous branding was only one of the examples of subtle but continuous renegotiation between activist and partisan identity that has been taking place ever since.

The contradictions that I noted have immediately made me think about the relationship between nonelectoral and electoral activism and, in particular, the way in which activists on the left change their framework of what is the best political strategy. In the same period, I was

becoming increasingly interested in research on social movements and activism in Eastern Europe, so I tried to make sense of this process by looking at the academic literature. However, I did not find much about this specific type of strategic change. Soon I would learn that, even beyond the regional academic literature, studies of social movements and studies of party politics, by and large, remain detached – each focusing on its respective object of research – with only a handful of authors looking at their interactions and relations. I also learned that scholarly literature treats new political parties as phenomena relevant primarily within the research on party systems, their stability and change. It seemed that the issues of why and how movements grow into political parties remain under the radar – underinvestigated and perceived as less relevant. This thesis represents my attempt at filling some of these conceptual and empirical gaps.

In order to introduce the reader to the thesis, this first chapter is structured in four steps. First, I situate the issue of postsocialist new left electoral strategy in a global context, especially with respect to the left-wing "electoral turn" in the West over the last decade. Second, I zoom in on the cases of new left movement parties in post-Yugoslav space, with the aim of arguing that they represent a relevant and puzzling phenomenon. Third, through a brief terminological note, I further clarify my object of interest. Finally, fourth, I present the aims of the thesis with respect to diverse bodies of scholarship and present the thesis structure.

1.1 The old strategic dilemma of the left: To party or not to party?

Writing at the beginning of the 2010s, Luke March observed that Eastern Europe remains in a "democratic socialist vacuum" (March 2011: 112). At that point, the left side of the electoral arena in Eastern Europe was dominated by either center-left social democrats or occasionally "surviving" communist parties. Other types of left-wing challengers, including left populists and democratic socialists, remained virtually non-existent.

Several years later, with a more specific context of Southeastern Europe in mind, Horvat and Štiks similarly offered a metaphor of "desert" to illustrate the lack of economic and political perspective after the postsocialist transition (Horvat and Štiks 2015). Although generally optimistic in their assessment of the newly emerging left contention in the region, at that point, they observed that the resurgence seemed to be happening through "direct democratic actions and the street and not through political channels of electoral democracy and classic party politics" (Horvat and Štiks 2015: 17).

Summing up the decade at its end, however, we can notice that, even in what can be characterized as an adverse context, left-wing activists have been reclaiming electoral strategy. Indeed, compared to other parts of postsocialist Europe, post-Yugoslav space has seen an extraordinary series of newly emerging electoral actors: the Initiative for Democratic Socialism (2013) and subsequent Left (2017) in Slovenia; Workers' Front (2015), New Left (2016), Zagreb is Ours (2017), and We Can (2019) in Croatia; Do Not Let Belgrade D(r)own (2014/ 2018), Party of Radical Left (2020) and Solidarity (2021) in Serbia; and Left (2016) in North Macedonia.[1]

This trend can be seen as part of the left-wing strategic turn toward electoral competition that has been observed across the West (see March 2016, Della Porta et al. 2017, Milan 2022), where after a period of distance from electoral political strategy, we can note "a marked turn on the left from protest to politics" (Panitch 2018: 34). Following the Great Recession and related popular mobilization (Della Porta 2013c, 2015, Flesher Fominaya 2017, Gerbaudo 2017), left-wing movements in a variety of contexts recognized the mobilization potential of disillusioned portions of the electorate. Indeed, many of the most well-known social movements that emerged in response to the Great Recession have subsequently contributed to the emergence of new political parties (e.g., Podemos, Syriza, La France insoumise) or the revival of left-wing mobilization within previously existing parties (e.g., Labour Party under Corbyn). In addition to the large electoral actors, a number of smaller left-wing municipalist civic platforms have been observed in Spain (see Rubio-Pueyo 2017 for an overview) but more recently also in France (Dau 2020), United Kingdom (Ball 2019) and Italy (Vesco 2020, Alagna 2019). What brings these manifold cases together is their strong emphasis on organizing through movement parties, a particular type of hybrid actors usually defined as "coalitions of political activists who emanate from social movements and try to apply the organizational and strategic practices of social movements in the arena of party competition" (Kitschelt 2006: 280, see also Chironi and Fittipaldi 2017).

The recent revival of electoral strategy on the left is intimately related to the "age-old dilemma" between the pursuit of nonelectoral and the pursuit of electoral political strategy (March 2017,

[1] It is important to note that this observation focuses on the initial development of actors. According to several commentators and experts, Levica drastically changed its discourse and has recently been described as nationalist and chauvinist party (see Bosilkov 2021).

see also Hutter and Kriesi 2013). In his seminal overview, Sartori (1976) outlines a centuries-long tradition of suspicion, let alone open animosity toward parties and partisanship within political theory. Although political parties in their modern form did not exist until the second half of the 19th century, it was already in the 18th century that various strands of political thought were calling attention to the negative outcomes of party politics and partisanship (Sartori 1976, White and Ypi 2016). Against the backdrop of this tradition, in recent years, left-wing political theorists have restarted to discuss the potential of political parties to act as vehicles of social change (Dean 2016), suggesting the reimagining of political parties as groupings "grounded in principled commitment" rather than only pragmatic actors contesting the elections (White and Ypi 2016: 13). This rethinking of party-political organizing became relevant for different types of the political strategy currently debated on the left, including, for instance, those that favor the reconstruction of progressive nation-states (Mitchell and Fazi 2017), those that argue for left populist strategy (Laclau and Mouffe 2001), as well as those inspired by the organizing potential of new municipalism (Russell 2019, Thompson 2021).

However, much of the academic knowledge on left-wing movement parties comes from the paradigmatic cases and "success stories" of Spain and Greece, where left-wing movements were, at least for a moment, confronted with a relatively favorable political opportunity structure for electoral strategy: the transformation of cleavages due to mobilization over unrepresented issues (Della Porta et al. 2017, Portos 2021, Gerbaudo 2017), relatively open and pluralist party systems characterized by proportional representation (Della Porta et al. 2017), and relatively rich tradition of left-wing grassroots organizing (Della Porta et al. 2017, Flesher Fominaya 2015, 2020, Lisi 2019, Vittori 2017).

While acknowledging the importance of studying cases of exceptional success, this thesis starts from the assumption that a movement's "electoral turn" represents an important and interesting research puzzle in itself, regardless of the subsequent election results. Such a research puzzle is particularly pertinent in postsocialist European contexts, where the left is purportedly confronted with significant obstacles to electoral participation. What is more, in these contexts, the left was absent from electoral contestation for more than two decades, as it mainly developed through various forms of nonelectoral organizing and mobilization, often within the framework of civil society. Empirical focus on the countries of former Yugoslavia, where we can consistently observe transformations of new left movements into movement parties, is therefore of particular relevance. Although the thesis focuses on post-Yugoslav space, it draws

a significant part of its inspiration from the literature on activism in other contexts of postsocialist Europe and aims to inform it.

In what follows, I give an overview of regional features of left-wing activism and the two intertwined general research questions that motivate this thesis.

1.2 The puzzle of the "electoral turn" on the post-Yugoslav new left

The particular feature that has marked the development of post-Yugoslav, but also broader postsocialist left, for more than two decades, has been its absence from electoral politics. Indeed, for more than two decades of post-socialism, the left has played almost no role in parliaments (March 2011). Riding the wave of democratic transformation, socialist successor parties across postsocialist Europe, including those in all former Yugoslav republics, rapidly transformed themselves either into center-left social democratic types or right-wing nationalist types (see Kitschelt et al. 1999, Grzymala-Busse 2002, March 2011). The withdrawal of socialism from the parliamentary-political mainstream, in parallel to its comprehensive defamation, came with a striking loss of resources and infrastructure. As aptly summarized by Medak, observing the position of Croatian and regional left in the 1990s:

> Except for the trade unions, hurt by convertism and initial disorientation; rare beleaguered academic institutions, mostly in the humanities; and several independent media outlets, it could only have sought to continue to function outside of the state, the market and the party (Medak 2013).

Confronted with such an absence of political opportunities, left-wing activism across postsocialist Europe in the 1990s withdrew itself within the boundaries of nonelectoral participation (see Stubbs 2012, Dolenec, Doolan and Tomašević 2017, Abăseacă and Piotrowski 2018, Abăseacă 2018).[2] Nonelectoral participation meant that a significant portion of left-wing politics, represented in a variety of progressive causes, found its new place within

[2] It is possible to challenge the idea of *withdrawal* from electoral mobilization, as during the state socialism the left never needed to mobilize popular legitimation through electoral competition. In other words, socialists in most of Eastern Europe had more or less no experience of electoral mobilization since the Interwar period or, in several cases, the period immediately following the Second World War. This characteristic comes out sharply when juxtaposed to the legacy of the Western European "Eurocommunist moment" of the 1960 and the 1970s, which remains an important reference point for contemporary attempts at left electoral mobilization in Italy, France, Spain and Greece (Balampanidis 2018).

the framework of civil society (Medak 2013). The framework of civil society, however, came with many assumptions, including its clear discursive boundary in relation to the state and electoral politics (Mikuš 2018, Vetta 2018). In other words, the predominance of nonelectoral strategy on the left was not simply a matter of the state's institutional openness or material resources but also a matter of specific discourse on *how* left-wing activism should be done in relation to party politics.

The discursive predominance of nonelectoral strategy has been noted in a recent overview of research on postsocialist activism by Jacobsson and Korolczuk (2020), who claim that in postsocialist contexts, "activists tend to discursively distance themselves from party politics and to draw boundaries between politics and the everyday, local, 'real' problems" (Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2020: 132, see also Baća 2021). Indeed, such activists' tendencies were found across a variety of actors in postsocialist contexts: think tanks in Poland (Jezierska 2015, 2018), mass protests and plenums in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Puljek-Shank and Fritsch 2019), mass protests in Bulgaria (Bakardjieva and Konstantinova 2020, Stoyanova 2018), and social movements in Serbia and North Macedonia (Pudar Draško, Fiket and Vasiljević 2020).

Given the predominance of the nonelectoral left, as elaborated above, in this thesis, new left movement parties are treated as an unlikely outcome - "strange birds" of postsocialism. They are, however, not only taken as unlikely with regards to their context but also as cases of change in strategy with respect to the one that dominated post-Yugoslav left-wing activism in the period of the 1990s and the 2000s.

With the aim of understanding this change in activist strategy, which I will later conceptualize as core strategic change (Minkoff 1999), the first general research question of the thesis is:

RQ1: Why and how do activists decide to engage in electoral activism despite the long-term predominance of nonelectoral activism?

While sharing the "electoral turn" as their outcome, the cases of new left movement parties in post-Yugoslav space have a number of diverging features. Apart from sharing their origins in the long-term development of left-wing activism, what are their major similarities and differences?

First and foremost, all of the actors' programs are characterized by socioeconomic claim-making through the issues such as the advancement of workers' rights and universal access to public services, such as healthcare and schooling. All of the actors emphasize the importance

of democratic governance and widespread public participation in political decision-making on all levels of government. Substantially, their programs are, with some minor variation, critical toward neoliberal transition in their respective countries.

At the same time, however, it is equally possible to observe a number of differences among the cases, in particular with regards to two dimensions: (a) ideological articulation and (b) level of initial electoral entry. Based on the initial analysis of the abovementioned cases, it is possible to outline two main types of new left electoral pathways in the post-Yugoslav context.

Regarding the ideological articulation, it is possible to inductively establish two types: the democratic socialist left, characterized by the explicitly socialist articulation, and the green and municipalist left, characterized by articulation combining green left and municipalist politics. The empirical incarnations of these two types are represented in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 New left movement parties in post-Yugoslav space according to initial ideological articulation

Country	Democratic Socialist Left	Green and Municipalist Left
Slovenia	Initiative for Democratic Socialism (2014) - subsequently merged with Sustainable Development of Slovenia into the Left (2017)	Sustainable Development of Slovenia (2011-2017)
Croatia	Workers' Front (2016) New Left (2017)	Srđ is the City (2015) Zagreb is Ours (2017) - subsequently created We Can (2019)
Serbia	Party of Radical Left (2020) – subsequent split: Political Platform Solidarity (2021)	Do Not Let Belgrade D(r)own (2018)
Kosovo	Self-Determination Movement (2011)	
North Macedonia	The Left (2016) [3]	
Montenegro		
Bosnia and Herzegovina		

[3] It is important to note that this observation focuses on the initial development of actors. According to several commentators and experts, Levica drastically changed its discourse and has recently been described as nationalist and chauvinist party (see Bosilkov 2021).

It is important to note that the two outlined types are not always mutually exclusive or conflicting. On the contrary, it is demanding to clearly delimit the differences between democratic socialism and green left or eco-socialism. Their programs are by and large overlapping, and increasingly so given the growing salience of environmental issues in the public and strengthening of environmental movements in recent years (see Wang and Keith 2020). However, on the level of ideological articulation, it is clear that some left-wing actors in the region initially aimed for electoral mobilization based on explicitly socialist symbolism, while some other left-wing actors opted for rhetoric in which socialist symbolism played a secondary role or no role whatsoever. This is particularly clear in the case of municipalism, which can make claims about social justice, redistribution and commons without virtually any reference to socialism.

The occurrences of new left movement parties can also be qualified according to their initial level of electoral mobilization. Some movement parties initially aimed at the immediate electoral mobilization at the national level, i.e. election for national or EU parliament, while some other purposefully chose local level election for their initial electoral mobilization.

Table 1.2 New left movement parties in post-Yugoslav space according to initial electoral entry level

Country	Entry through national level election	Entry through local level election
Slovenia	Sustainable Development of Slovenia (2011-2017) Initiative for Democratic Socialism (2014) - subsequently merged with Sustainable Development of Slovenia into the Left (2017)	
Croatia	Workers' Front (2016) New Left (2017)	Zagreb is Ours (2017) - subsequently created We Can (2019) Srđ is the City (2015)
Serbia	Party of Radical Left (2020) – subsequent split: Political Platform Solidarity (2021)	Do Not Let Belgrade D(r)own (2018)
Kosovo	Self-Determination Movement (2011)	
North Macedonia	The Left (2016) [4]	
Montenegro		
Bosnia and Herzegovina		

The tables above immediately point to at least three important dimensions of variation existing across national contexts when it comes to the articulation of the new left. First, temporal variation. While the initial movement party formation in Slovenia took place already in 2011, with the establishment of TRS, and in 2013, with the establishment of the Initiative for Democratic Socialism (Iniciativa za demokratični socializem IDS), comparable actors in Serbia emerged only in 2016 and 2018. Second, variation in new left ideological articulation, primarily in terms of explicit endorsement of socialism. In Croatia and, in particular, Serbia, actors' predominant strategy has been less focused on socialist symbolism compared to Slovenia. Third, variation in the pathway of "electoral turn". In Slovenia, for instance, municipalist electoral strategy was not particularly emphasized by the new left, as the activists opted for national level elections immediately after the movement party formation. In Serbia,

[4] Same as footnote 3.

on the other hand, municipalism has been virtually the only type of new left electoral articulation until the emergence of the Party of Radical Left in 2020 and, after its subsequent split, Political Platform Solidarity in 2021.

As should be clear by now, this research deals with a moving target, meaning that the new electoral actors have been continuously emerging during the research process, which makes any mapping of actors strictly provisional. Indeed, based on the overview above, it is not possible to explicitly relate certain context to only one type of new left articulation. However, the distribution of cases points to some tendencies in new left strategy across countries.

By combining the two dimensions, all cases can be distributed into two strategic pathways: national-level democratic-socialist pathway and local-level green-municipalist pathway:

- National-level democratic-socialist pathway represents a strategic articulation of new left movement party formation in which political actors attempt to compete primarily through national level elections (parliamentary and EU elections) combined with democratic socialist ideological articulation.

- Local-level green-municipalist pathway represents a strategic articulation of new left movement party formation in which political actors attempt to compete primarily through local level elections combined with municipalist and green (environmentalist) ideological articulation.

With a partial exception of TRS (2011 - 2017), who in 2011 parliamentary election as a green political party had a one-off attempt to contest the national level election independently, all of the actors can be categorized within these two pathways.

It is important to note that both of these pathways include ideological articulation that is highly critical of capitalism, but neither of the pathways includes invoking socialist political program in an authoritarian manner (see March 2011). Both set as their goal long-term and incremental transformation of the existing neoliberal capitalist economy. The key distinction of the local-level green-municipalist pathway, however, is that here activists perceive the emancipatory potential of "electoral turn" as possible principally on the local level (see Drápalová and Vampa 2018, Puljek-Shank and Fritsch 2019, Fiket et al. 2019, Milan 2022). It does not mean that within this pathway national level electoral competition is categorically rejected. It simply means that the initial electoral mobilization is perceived as more feasible on the local level of government (Russell 2019).

Following the puzzle of divergence among the cases, the second research question is:

RQ2: Why does strategic and ideological articulation vary among post-Yugoslav new left movement parties?

In order to answer the two research questions, the thesis is based on two in-depth case studies, that include both cross-case and within-case comparison. The cases juxtaposed in this thesis are the Initiative for Democratic Socialism, a political party established in Slovenia in 2014, and Do Not Let Belgrade D(r)own, an electoral initiative established in Serbia in 2018. The logic of the case selection and the logic of comparison are explained in the third chapter of the thesis.

1.3 Delimiting new left movement parties – a terminological note

One of the challenges in defining the object of analysis of this thesis is defining the investigated phenomenon with respect to the already existing definitions of the radical left. Within the body of literature on radical left political parties, there is a relative consensus over what radical left means. According to one of the more recent review articles, the "core defining attribute, explicitly or implicitly included in all broad definitions of the family, is anti-capitalist socialism" (Fagerholm 2018: 6). At the same time, however, most of the definitions of the radical left have been rather inclusive when it comes to defining what anti-capitalism means in practical party politics. For instance, in one of the prominent definitions, the radical left is defined as rejecting "the underlying socio-economic structure of contemporary capitalism and its values and practices", but at the same time, this *rejection* can range from "rejection of consumerism and neoliberalism to outright opposition to private property and capitalistic profit incentives" (March and Mudde 2005:25). In other words, the radical left party family includes many diverse actors, such as communists, democratic socialists, socialist populists, greens and others (Fagerholm 2018, March and Mudde 2005, March 2011). Even more broadly, radical left parties can be defined as all those that position themselves as an alternative to social democratic parties, i.e., *to the left* of social democracy (March 2011). Based on this, all of the abovementioned actors, from Slovenia to North Macedonia, at least at the moment of their inception, can be qualified as the radical left.

However, instead of subsuming my cases under the abovedescribed label of the *radical left*, I opted for framing them as *new left* primarily because this has been the prevailing definitional framework within research on post-Yugoslav actors in the focus of this project (Štiks 2015, Horvat and Štiks 2015, Musić 2013, Bilić and Stubbs 2015, Matković and Ivković 2018, Dinev

2020, Štiks and Stojaković 2021). Somewhat paradoxically, in one of the agenda-setting texts in the regional literature, new left is defined as a term covering "generally progressive political and social movements as well as ideologically profiled organizations that present themselves or are labeled as the *radical left*" (Štiks 2015: 132, emphasis added). From the Western European perspective, in which the term new left originally denoted social movements that started to develop in the 1960s, and later denoted periods of left-wing mobilization during the 1990s and the 2010s (see Charalambous 2021), using radical left and new left interchangeably may seem to create terminological chaos. However, given the contextual specificity of post-socialism, it is unsurprising that contemporary radical left actors within countries of former Yugoslavia are framed as new left. What makes them new is their positioning with respect to the socialism of the Yugoslav period, as they attempt to offer an innovative vision of left politics based on a careful evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of Yugoslav socialism rather than advocating for its revival (see Štiks 2015).

Two additional clarifications are in order when it comes to the universe of cases within Table 1.1 and Table 1.2. First, the tables involve only movement parties whose core members were not previously high-profile members of political parties or elected officials in government or parliament. In other words, the universe of cases is based exclusively on so-called *genuinely* new political parties (see Sikk 2005). This is of particular importance in the case of United Reform Action (Ujedinjena reformska akcija URA), a political party founded in Montenegro in 2015. The party did indeed introduce an innovative organizational structure, empowered the position of local party branches, and demonstrated left-leaning ideological tendencies (see Stankov 2019). However, given that it was founded by two prominent members of the Montenegrin parliament, elected in the 2012 election after their split with Positive Montenegro, URA was not included in the set. Similar observations are of relevance for several other political parties in the region that may be qualified as new left but cannot be defined as genuinely new political parties, as they were outcomes of splits in already existing parties: Sustainable Development of Croatia (Održivi razvoj Hrvatske ORaH) and Croatian Labourists – Labour Party in Croatia (Hrvatski laburisti – Stranka rada); Serbian Left in Serbia (Levica Srbije); and Democratic Party of Labour (Demokratična stranka dela DSD) in Slovenia. Second, there are some cases of genuinely new political parties that did mention socioeconomic grievances in their program, but primarily endorsed liberal, centrist or conservative ideological platforms, which excludes them from the universe of new left cases. Such are the cases of For the City (Za grad) Human Blockade (Živi zid) and Franak in Croatia (see Cepić and Kovačić

2015, Albertini and Vozab 2017, Dolenec, Kralj and Balković 2021). If it was already not excluded for not being genuinely new, the same logic could be applied to the case of Enough is Enough in Serbia (see Avakumović 2017).

1.4 Study relevance and outline

There are four main reasons that make this thesis relevant for different bodies of scholarship. First, most explicitly, it engages in conversation with the scholarship on activism in postsocialist and post-Yugoslav space. It takes new left movement parties to be a worthwhile empirical development as they demonstrate the activists' capacity to engage in core strategic change in the context in which activism used to be described as "NGO-ized" or predominantly "transactional" (Petrova and Tarrow 2007). By tracing how this change takes place, it contributes to our understanding of activism in the region as dynamic phenomenon that deserves processual approach (Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2020, Baća 2021).

Second, it offers an analysis of the ways in which new left activists in the region engage with diverging political opportunities and threats in their national contexts. Although postsocialist and post-Yugoslav space have been broadly described as relatively unfavorable for development of new left and radical left activism (March 2011, Horvat and Štiks 2015), it is important to keep in mind that local and national realities structure the potential for new forms of left-wing activism in different ways (Abăseacă and Piotrowski 2018, Dinev 2020).

Third, given the choice of new left movement parties as an object of analysis, the thesis aims to contribute to the extant knowledge on the origins of this particular type of actors. Although the body of knowledge on left-wing actors' shifts from nonelectoral to electoral activism has been increasing over the past decade (see Della Porta et al. 2017, Chironi and Fittipaldi 2017, Flesher Fominaya 2020, Portos 2021), it mostly focuses on those cases where such strategic shifts were met with exceptional success. This thesis begs to differ, as it starts from the assumption that the shift between nonelectoral and electoral activism can represent an important research puzzle in itself, regardless of the subsequent election results.

Fourth, given that it conceptualizes movement parties as a type of strategy, it engages with scholarship on stability and change in social movements' strategy that centers on the meso level of actors' behavior (see Doherty and Hayes 2018). It particularly builds on the assumption that strategic change depends on ideology and identity of activists as individuals and their groups, as well as on the role of discursive work in creating cognitive change (Flesher Fominaya 2020). In that sense, it traces how long-term processes of learning interact with short-

term eventful protests in bringing about the activists' strategic change. In addition, it brings insights to the literature on social movement outcomes (see Bosi, Giugni and Uba 2016), as it contributes to the explanations on how similar social movement outcome can sometimes imply different strategic choices and pathways (see Bosi and Zamponi 2020).

The study proceeds in several steps. In chapter two, I position new left movement parties within the broader sociohistorical context of postsocialist Europe, arguing that they represent a particularly potent object of study within scholarship on postsocialist activism. In chapter three, I turn to the task of conceptualization of movement parties as a type of strategy and movement party formation as a type of core strategic change. This chapter also includes explanatory framework and reports on the thesis' methodology. Chapter four engages the reader more closely with specific domestic contexts of Slovenia and Serbia, attempting to historicize the development of post-Yugoslav new left activist field. Chapters five to seven cover different processual dimensions of the argument. Chapter five deals with origins of groups behind movement party formation, tracing their long-term strategic learning that gradually brought them to re-evaluate their strategy. Chapter six focuses on eventful protest and the interactive dynamics between the protest and the actors involved in the protest. Chapter seven documents the actors' process of movement party formation, discussing their strategic reasoning and ideological articulation. Chapter eight discusses the results of investigation, and where possible compares the development of the two movement parties. This chapter also includes a section on thesis' relevance, as well as its limitations and potential future developments.

2 Relevance of New Left Movement Party Formation for Studies of Activism in Postsocialist Europe

In this chapter, I position the thesis within the scholarship on activism in postsocialist Eastern Europe. I start by summarizing some of the key features of early research on postsocialist activism in the 1990s and the 2000s. I look in particular at the relationship of early research agenda on activism with the liberal conceptualization of civil society and the process of NGO-ization. Building on this, I give an overview of criticism that was leveraged against the early research agenda and pinpoint some of the new advancements in research on activism in the region. The central argument of the chapter is that, due to postsocialist new left actors' strong background in nonelectoral activism, sometimes framed as part of civil society, investigating their origins can help us understand how activism in postsocialist Europe engages in strategic change beyond the usually discussed processes of NGO-ization and transactional activism.

Conceiving of postsocialist Europe as an analytically coherent region has been increasingly criticized over the past decades. Indeed, already by the end of the 1990s, it was clear that the postsocialist transition created significantly diverse political and economic outcomes in different countries (Rupnik 1999). The same observations became central to the scholarship on activism, social movements and civil society in postsocialist countries (Ekiert and Kubik 2014, Ekiert 2015). More than thirty years after its collapse, the experience of socialism has a very limited capacity to explain various phenomena, and the concept of postsocialism is sometimes used in an orientalizing manner (Müller 2019). I generally agree with these points and believe that they are applicable in a variety of scholarly areas of interest. However, given that this thesis deals with the activism of new left actors, who necessarily position themselves in one way or another to the legacy of socialism and subsequent transition into capitalism, the concept of postsocialism cannot be simply discarded. This is also the reason why this chapter draws from broader literature on postsocialist Eastern Europe.

Given the previous absence of left-wing actors from parliamentary politics in postsocialist Europe, it is evident that new left movement parties represent a genuinely novel development in party systems. However, the aim of this chapter is to show that they also represent an important change not only within the context of parliamentary left-wing politics but also within the context of extraparliamentary left-wing politics. Instead of looking for clear-cut discontinuity between the framework of nonelectoral activism and new left movement parties,

it is worthwhile to understand how the emergence of new left movement parties relates to the previous experience of nonelectoral strategy.

2.1 Early research on activism in postsocialist Europe and the construction of activism in opposition to the electoral conflict

The concept of civil society has played a central role in the research on activism, social movements, NGOs and other contentious actors in postsocialist Europe over the past three decades. In order to explain the centrality of the concept in regional research, it is necessary to locate the concept of civil society within the political context of the 1990s. Typically defined as "a realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, (largely) self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules" (Diamond, 1994: 5), civil society development was perceived as one of the imperatives in ensuring a smooth transition in former socialist countries.

Postsocialist societies at that period were often described as being unprepared for democratization, i.e., as having "a deficit of social structures that were a necessary precondition of stable democratic political institutions" (Fukuyama 1995: 8, see also Bernhard 1993, Keane 1998, for an overview, see Bermeo 2003). Civil society was supposed to address this ostensible weakness by playing the role of a supportive structure to the newly democratized states (Baker 1999). Such an assumption on the role of civil society was partly imported from the Western European academic context but has partly also been rooted in the legacies of dissident and oppositional activism with some variation in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary (Navrátil and Pospíšil 2014), playing a role in the dialogue among intellectuals in East and West (Ivancheva 2011, Gagyi and Ivancheva 2019).

Indeed, for democratization scholars who saw democracy solely as an institutional mechanism of control over the post-authoritarian (post-totalitarian) state, civil society was meant to play an important role in democratization but was never meant to be part of the sphere of democratic political conflict *per se* (Meiksins Wood 1995, Baker 1999). Put more bluntly, it was conceived as an associational sphere of interest representation that works in a functionalist fashion, cooperating with the state in the ways established in Western democracies and without engagement in electoral politics (Baker 1999, Brannan, 2003). The emphasis on the distinction between the notions of civil and political opened a lot of questions that remained unanswered, in particular those on the nature of the relationship between civil society and representative democratic institutions (Foley and Edwards 1996). Again, the inspiration of domestic

intellectuals with ideas of anti-politics strongly supported ambiguity in assumptions on the relationship between civil society and the state (Ciżewska Martyńska 2015, cf. Renwick 2006). As put by Mastnak (2005), one of the main features of discourse about the importance of civil society development was "renunciation of the very idea of seizure of power" (Mastnak 2005: 347).

The impact of such conceptualization of civil society can be recognized in particular within the so-called "three spheres" paradigm, which claims that civil society, in addition to the state and the market, represents one of the three different sectors of society (Chandhoke 2001). Following this "additive perspective on collective life" (Chandhoke 2001: 7), for most of the 1990s and the 2000s, academic research in the region relied on narrow definitions of civil society and excluded many forms of contentious politics as well as electoral politics from the empirical investigation (Kopecký and Mudde 2003).

The conceptualization of civil society in the region soon found its embodiment in the organizational form of an NGO. Given the uncritical and widely spread assumption that NGOs are by definition beneficial for the development and strengthening of civil society (see Mercer 2002), and simultaneous neglect for other forms of local civil society, including those that existed during socialism (Ekiert and Kubik 2014, Giza-Poleszczuk 2017), NGOs became virtually synonymous with the term civil society in the region (Stanton 1999, Ottaway and Carothers 2000). This brought an unforeseen proliferation of NGOs in a number of postsocialist countries; for instance: between 1989 and 1994, the number of officially registered NGOs in Poland grew by 400% (Foa and Ekiert 2017); the number of Czech NGOs rose from 4,000 to over 95,000 between 1990 and 2006 (USAID 2006 as cited in: Císař 2013b); in Croatia from just below 14,400 in 1991 to almost 52,000 in 2014 (Vidačak and Petak 2015).

As the donors wanted to avoid any allegations of meddling in domestic affairs, NGOs were typically expected to keep out of electoral mobilization (Ottaway and Carothers 2000, Gershman 2004, Vetta 2009). The paradox of such expectations came out sharply. On the one hand, the NGOs' role was to promote and supervise the states in the implementation of various reform processes. On the other hand, the same NGOs were expected not to publicly relate with any politicians or political parties, even those that would potentially have endorsed the political goals that they were advocating for. This contradiction became particularly visible in those postsocialist regimes that remained authoritarian or semi-authoritarian, in which NGOs played

an important role in oppositional mobilization (Beissinger 2006, Fisher 2006, Bunce and Wolchik 2011).

The unprecedented increase in the number of registered NGOs soon became problematized by a variety of scholars within the framework of NGO-ization and bureaucratization of activism. In some post-Yugoslav contexts, NGOs during the 1990s represented a vital resource for activists working on the issues of democratization, the rule of law and human rights (Bilić 2012), but they also started to note the adverse effects of external donors' programs associated with terms such as *benevolent colonialism* (Sampson 2002) or even *imperialism* (Petras 1999). Instead of supporting the bottom-up organizing of citizens, NGOs turned into professionalized donor-driven organizations disconnected from their domestic context and focused primarily on meeting their donors' agendas (Stubbs 2007, 2012, Ishkanian 2008, 2014, Fagan 2005, 2006). NGOs' growing importance gave rise to new professional elites with the skills and networks necessary to attract funding for various causes (Sampson 2002, 2004), and over time these organizations became increasingly shaped by their funders, making high-level professionalization and continuous growth the critical precondition of sustainable organizational finances (Hahn-Fuhr and Worschech 2014).

In addition to the trends of NGO-ization of civil society, individual-level measurements of protest activity, political participation, and organizational membership seemed to corroborate the assessment of postsocialist civil society as feeble or demobilized (Bernhard 1996, Greskovits 1998, Howard 2003, Bernhard and Karakoç 2007, Della Porta 2016). Although such empirical claims about the weakness of civil society have since the 1990s been put into question both conceptually and empirically (see Kopecký 2005, Foa and Ekiert 2017, Ekiert and Kubik 2014), they used to play an influential role in regional scholarship.

NGO-ization had two important implications. On the one hand, activism was pushed away from public engagement with political parties and electoral politics in general. On the other hand, it was pushed away from popular mobilization, as activism became strongly defined by advocacy and lobbying activities aimed directly at the political elites. Following up on this characteristic, Petrova and Tarrow suggested the label of "transactional activism", relying on the idea that, instead of widespread popular mobilization typical of "participatory activism", activism in postsocialist Europe remains predominantly focused on elite-based transactions (Petrova and Tarrow 2007). Due to the overall incapacity for popular mobilization, the

argument goes, activists rely on transactional activism as a much more efficient and successful form of political influence.

The distinction proposed by Petrova and Tarrow was further developed in the "typology of extraparliamentary political activism in post-communist settings" proposed by Ondrej Císař (2013a). Based on theoretical definitions of organizational types, substantiated by the longitudinal protest event analysis on the case of the Czech Republic, Císař's typology recognizes two dimensions of variation among types of event organizers: (1) their capacity to influence politics through elite networks of interaction, primarily consisting of activities such as advocacy and lobbying ('transactional capacity'), and (2) their ability for direct collective mobilization ('mobilization capacity'). Five distinct modes of activism are derived from variations on the two dimensions: participatory activism, transactional activism, radical activism, civic self-organization, and episodic mass mobilization. The author shows that, among the five types, the highest event frequency is found within the categories of civic self-organization and transactional activism, while participatory activism, radical activism and episodic mass mobilization remain among the less frequent modes (Císař 2013a).

While the notion of transactional activism has continued to attract interest and be used to describe activism in postsocialist Europe, it is important to also note its limitations in a more contemporary context. I turn to this task in the following section.

2.2 Beyond transactional and nonelectoral activism: changing forms and meanings of activism

Postsocialist Europe today is much different to the postsocialist Europe of the 1990s and the 2000s. The context has been changing, and so has the activists' strategic behavior. Many of the countries that used to be labeled as "frontrunners" of the transition into liberal democracy are now observed as cases of so-called democratic backsliding (Dawson and Hanley 2016, Rupnik 2018). As noted by Krastev, mobilization led by right-wing actors can be seen as a backlash to the period of transition, "marked by excessive elite control over political processes and by a fear of mass politics" (2007: 58). Therefore, the authoritarian anti-elitist backlash has deeply transformed political opportunities for elite-focused transactional activism (Kluknavská and Navrátil 2020).

Assessments of transformed opportunities resonate in particular with the literature describing the ambivalent impact of the EU on the strength of transactional activism. During the EU accession process, advocacy NGOs, which can be taken as key exemplars of transactional

activism, gained prominence as "watchdogs" assessing the success of the EU-related reforms undertaken by the state (Heideman 2017, 2019). However, as soon as the countries succeeded in accession, the same advocacy NGOs could not maintain the same level of influence in decision-making processes, as shown in several policy areas: the rule of law (Wunsch 2016), environmental protection (Börzel & Buzogány 2010), and LGBT rights (O'Dwyer 2012, 2013, Butterfield 2016).

An increase in authoritarianism, illiberalism and democratic backsliding came together with the growth of right-wing mobilization outside institutional politics. Although this trend was noted almost twenty years ago (Kopecký and Mudde 2003), today, civil society is not anymore shaped predominantly by liberal and left-wing actors. It started to be claimed by right-wing and conservative actors mobilizing their support through NGOs, social movements and movement parties (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2018, Caiani and Císař 2019). In the case of Hungary, Greskovits points in particular to the significance of the right-wing's systematic efforts at embedding itself within local communities and mobilizing well-educated conservative middle classes (Greskovits 2020). Civil society matters in terms of resources as well as in terms of specific discourse that attempts to justify right-wing causes as pro-democratic and even liberal. As the case of Croatia's 2013 conservative mobilization around the marriage referendum shows, the discourse of defending human rights can be successfully appropriated by right-wing actors (Vučković Juroš, Dobrotić and Flego 2020). Similarly, in Bulgaria, the identity of civil society representatives also seems to have gained central importance in legitimizing political projects from across the ideological spectrum (Stoyanova 2018).

After all, there is a significant change in the dynamics of protest mobilization. If in the first two postsocialist decades, episodes of mass mobilization seemed to be a relatively rare phenomenon (Greskovits 1998, Císař 2013a, Della Porta et al. 2017), the impression is that over the last decade, mass protests have become a more frequent part of the contentious repertoire in various countries of postsocialist Europe, including both its southeastern and central-eastern parts (see Abăseacă and Pleyers 2019, Beissinger and Sasse 2014, Bieber and Brentin 2018, Dinev 2020, 2022a, Fagan and Sircar 2017, Guasti 2020, Horvat and Štiks 2015, Korolczuk 2016, Milan 2020, Mujanović 2018, Musić 2013, O'Brien 2019, Sava 2016, Weiss 2020).

The literature has been noting manyfold changes in activists' perception of various organizing models. The activists' discontent related to the NGO organizing model, as opposed to the grassroots organizing model (O'Dwyer 2013: 120), can be articulated from at least two perspectives. On the one hand, heavily professionalized NGOs can face various organizational problems, such as "limitations and conditions brought by funders, formalization of initial enthusiasm leading to 'soul-less' organizations, corruptive practices and the time-consuming procedures of formalization" (Polanska and Chimiak 2016: 14, see also Butterfield 2016, Morača 2016, Stubbs 2007). On the other hand, some activists are wary of the NGO organizing model due to its more general tendency to increase hierarchical decision-making and decrease intra-organizational democracy (Butterfield 2016, Polanska and Chimiak 2016).

Especially within urban activism on the left, the increased self-awareness about the weaknesses of the NGO organizing model pushes activists toward various new types of organizing. For some grassroots activists, the answer lies in careful tactical utilization of the NGO model as means of resource mobilization (Abăseacă and Pleyers 2019, Dolenec, Doolan and Tomašević 2017, Polanska and Chimiak 2016, Stubbs 2012). For some others, the answer is found in everyday activism that strives to "create community and practice solidarity on a local level" (Polanska 2018: 3). Especially related to the latter, going beyond the usual focus on NGOs and related problems of NGO-ization (Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013, Jacobsson 2015), researchers are investigating various forms of informal and everyday activism (Baća 2017, Fagan and Sircar 2017, Goldstein 2017, Polanska 2018) within the framework of Scott's *infra-politics*.

It seems that activists have been increasingly focused on achieving wider popular mobilization, typical of social movements. Based on the opening and closing of political opportunity structures, the activists may move from transactional activism to participatory activism (Soare and Tufiș 2021, Krizsán and Roggeband 2021). Furthermore, researchers have noted the activists' awareness of the need to build cross-class coalitions (Bilić and Stubbs 2015, Florea, Gagyi and Jacobsson 2018, Mikuš 2015, Polanska 2018, Vilenica 2017) and associate with mass membership organizations such as trade unions (Butterfield 2016, Dolenec, Doolan and Tomašević 2017, Stubbs 2012). Following the dynamics in their environment, activists may try to develop alliances with actors outside of their immediate environment (Polanska and Piotrowski 2015) and actors with opposing views on political strategy (Novák and Kuřík 2020).

The increasingly critical stance is not related only to the organizational form of NGOs but also to the framework of civil society. A case in point is Stubbs' historical overview of activism in Croatia, in which he detects three "waves" of postsocialist activism mainly based on diverse organizational forms utilized: the ad hoc emerging networks of the early 1990s, the highly professionalized and institutionalized NGOs of the early 2000s, and social movements of the late 2000s. One of the points of difference among the three waves is related to the activists' general identification with civil society:

> "as an emerging and, perhaps, aspiring, frame in the first wave of activism (…) as a conventional and taken-for-granted institutional paradigm for the second wave, and as a conservative force to be rejected as largely irrelevant, in the third wave" (Stubbs 2012: 26)

Indeed, the critique of NGOs and transactional activism is related to criticizing the contradictions contained in the concept of civil society, a trend that is well-represented in the literature. If the earlier research on activism in the region mostly relied on simplified conceptions of civil society, already described in the previous sections, more recent research has started to critically analyze the claims about NGOs and/or civil society as being apolitical, antipolitical, nonideological or nonpartisan.

The conceptualization which pits civil society as the sphere of virtue confronting the "political vice" (White 1994: 376) is built on three interrelated argumentative steps. First, the narrow definition of politics as the sphere of electoral competition inhabited by political parties and politicians that keep power over the state (Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2020). Second, instilling of negative characteristics in politics, which was further reaffirmed by the overall negative perception of contemporary political parties (see White and Ypi 2016) and the rise of depoliticized (antipolitical) governance models (see Hay 2007). Third, defining civil society as something essentially positive in relation to (narrowly defined) politics as essentially negative (see Vetta 2009, Jezierska 2018).

As this section attempted to illustrate, various strands of activism in postsocialist countries have become increasingly critical of NGOs and transactional activism, as well as aware of contradictions contained in the concept of civil society. NGO-ization and transactional activism, while still significant, should not be taken as essential or permanent features of activism in postsocialist Europe but rather as phases in its dynamic development. A growing number of case studies in the region is testifying to the fact that activist strategy has been

capable of manifold changes, which means that the research needs to move beyond static or essentializing descriptions of activism in the region. I now turn to the most recent wave of the literature that has been trying to address the gap between concepts and empirical reality of activism in postsocialist Europe, and demonstrate how it can be usefully applied to the investigation of new left movement parties.

2.3 How does investigating new left movement parties contribute to our knowledge of activism in postsocialist Europe?

One of the critical advancements in research on activism in postsocialist Europe over the last decade has been an increased appreciation for diverse forms of activist strategy. This appreciation rests on the assumption that researchers need to understand processes through which activist strategy switches between various stages and forms of organizing, and not insist on investigating specific organizational forms as relevant *per se* (Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017, Baća 2021). According to one recent summary, researchers would do well to adopt an approach to civil societies in the region "as relational and processual phenomena", which can help us to "analyze the relationships and fluid boundaries between the civil sphere, the family, the state, and the market" (Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017: 4).

In terms of the empirical specification of civil society through relational and processual perspectives, the recent conceptualization offered by Mikuš is of particular significance (Mikuš 2018). Instead of doing away with the concept of civil society, which has been criticized on a number of occasions for its normativity and definitional ambiguity (Allen 1997, Bilić 2011, Kumar 1993, White 1994), Mikuš claims that keeping the concept can be of help in understanding the development of activism in postsocialist Europe. More specifically, the investigation of practices within civil society can help us understand the stability and change of various actors and structures in a given context:

> Civil society should therefore be understood relationally: as mechanisms and practices that mediate between, and thereby reconstitute, the structures of the economy and the superstructures of ideology and the state. It is not a 'sector' naturally and clearly distinct from the state and the economy, but the field of practices that generate, reproduce and transform those distinctions. (Mikuš 2018: 17)

The importance of civil society as the field of practice has been similarly acknowledged by Baća, who proposes a "practice turn" in the investigation of postsocialist activism (Baća 2021).

He operationalizes such a turn through the concept of contentious practices. Contentious practices, defined in opposition to compliant practices, represent the cases in which "social actors refuse to use institutional channels - moments when citizens decide to 'do something' without falling into a routinized way of doing it - to exert their subjectivity, autonomy, and agency" (Baća 2021:17). Instead of focusing research on specific forms of organizing or repertoire, using contentious practices as the unit of analysis may help researchers in prevailing diverse dichotomies that have been pervading knowledge on postsocialist activism over the last few decades. For instance, in his comprehensive protest event analysis of Montenegro, covering the period between 1989 and 2006, Baća convincingly shows how the dynamics of transition in the state, the economy and the civil society influenced the emergence, development and reshaping of contentious practices from below (Baća 2018).

Contentious practice is a very useful unit of analysis in studying postsocialist activism, as it importantly emphasizes the difference between routinized and non-routinized forms of activism, motivating the researchers to look for the moments of strategic innovation. In particular, it is useful in grasping infra-political and everyday activism, which develops in parallel to the more routinized forms of activism, and that often unjustly remains off the researchers' radar (Baća 2021, Fagan and Sircar 2017, Jacobsson 2015, Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2020, Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013).

Overall, the processual and relational approach to activism in the region addresses the shortcomings of previous research that used to see activism as lacking in terms of the capacity for strategic innovation. Looking beyond conceptualizations of transactional activism and NGO-ization, the processual approach takes activism in the region for what it is: a dynamic phenomenon. This also allows the processual approach to appreciate the issues of strategy and strategic change. In that sense, I argue that practice turn, as discussed by Baća (2021), can help us to understand the phenomenon of new left movement parties just as it helps us to understand how citizens turn to everyday and infra-political activism. In order to do so, in this thesis, the practice turn is extended to equally include not only activists' shifts from transactional activism toward everyday and infra-political activism but also include shifts from transactional activism to electoral activism.

However, the thesis also departs from the distinction between *contentious* and *compliant* practices, which in its current form explicitly links compliance with institutional channels of influence and contention with extra-institutional channels of influence (Baća 2021). Although

I principally agree with the idea that entry into electoral competition represents a form of compliance with institutional channels of influence, newly emerging electoral initiatives and political parties can be highly non-routine and contentious in Tilly's sense of collectively organized claim-making that challenges someone's interests (Tilly 2006, Tilly and Tarrow 2015). In other words, this thesis does not take contentiousness and compliance to be essential features of either institutional or extra-institutional channels of influence, but rather continuously changing features of actors' strategies. As these strategies change, actors can use institutional, extra-institutional and combined channels of influence, while staying contentious all along (Goldstone 2003). As will be further discussed in the theoretical framework on movement party formation, the aim here is not to relativize the notion of what is contention and what is compliance. It is rather to emphasize that these are always constructed in relation to what is considered to be contentious and compliant in a given context, and not to an abstract idea of institutional and extra-institutional participation. Or, as summed up by Tarrow, "forms of protest that would have revolutionary implications in one system or time period may be treated as routine in another" (Tarrow 1991: 17).

2.4 Summary

As I argued in this chapter, literature on postsocialist activism has gone through various developments since the early 1990s. While in the initial period, it was closely related to the liberal conceptualization of civil society, which investigates the actors in civil society separately from the state, in a more recent period, it took a turn toward a relational and processual understanding of civil society and activism in the region. Given their hybrid nature, beyond the dichotomy between electoral and nonelectoral activism, movement parties represent a particularly useful object in the context of this research agenda. More specifically, movement parties bear a lot of potential for uncovering how actors deconstruct and/or reaffirm the dichotomy between "political" and "apolitical" or "partisan" and "nonpartisan" that has pervaded left-wing activism in post-Yugoslav and postsocialist space over the past three decades. By explaining the origins of new left movement parties in post-Yugoslav space, this thesis aims to explain why and how activists engage in core strategic change. In order to do so, the following chapter offers a more detailed conceptualization of movement party formation as a process of strategic change.

3 Conceptual Framework, Explanatory Framework and Research Design

> "The telling of the layered stories of people, timing, choices, and events is an effort to portray the intricacies of a social movement as it unfolded with its many moving parts that created new opportunities, challenges, and outcomes with which purposeful actors interacted."
>
> (Ganz 2009: 21)

Movement parties are a challenging object of analysis. They tend to be complex, unstable and continuously changing. My goal in this chapter is to address some of these issues by offering a new conceptual framework for the analysis of movement parties. I also outline leading assumptions through which I will answer the research questions posited in the introductory chapter.

The chapter is structured in four parts. First, it defines movement party formation and conceptualizes it as a core change in social movement strategy. Second, it points to the affinity between the literature on movement parties, including relatively scarce literature focusing specifically on movement party formation, and the literature on stability and change in social movement strategy. Third, it elaborates on the explanatory framework used in this thesis, pointing to two temporal perspectives and their interaction with the attribution of political opportunities and threats. Finally, fourth, it describes the research design, discusses the logic of within-case and cross-case analysis, and describes in detail the process of data collection, the analysis of interviews, as well as framing analysis.

3.1 Conceptual framework

3.1.1 Movement party formation as core strategic change

The relationship between movements and parties is not a new topic in the social sciences. The long-term intertwining between the two types of actors is reflected in the classics of political science and political sociology. A fairly obvious example of this intertwining is the mass party, a party type conceptualized in different iterations over the 20th century (Duverger 1959, Katz and Mair 1993, Panebianco 1988). As opposed to previously dominant elite-cadre parties (Duverger 1959), mass parties were distinguished by their organizing origins in a wider popular basis (see Gunther and Diamond 2003 and Katz and Mair 1995 for a comprehensive overview).

Although, as the concept of mass parties shows, the movement-basis of some parties was observed as early as the beginning of the 20th century, only in the second half of the century did more systematic and comparative research on the relationship between movements and parties take off in the social sciences. In his influential essay, Goldstone (2003) indicates that the long-term absence of such a connection could be explained by the fact that the movements of the 1950s and the 1960s, which crucially inspired the development of contemporary social movement theory, were mobilizing actors for whom institutional influence was clearly out of reach. Opposing this disciplinary tendency, he underlines that in the contemporary context treating institutional and extra-institutional political action as two opposites or substitutes is analytically mistaken. Goldstone argues for taking them as two sides of the same continuum:

> While some groups may, at different times, be more "in", in the sense of being more aligned and integrated with the institutional authorities, while other groups are more "out", there is neither a simple qualitative split nor a "once and for all" crossing of some distinct line separating challengers from insiders (Goldstone 2003: 9).

Following Goldstone's argument on the fuzzy boundary between "insiders" and "outsiders", it becomes clear that movement parties represent an inherently fuzzy object of analysis that sits uneasily with the definitions that aim to define movement parties as a distinct type of organizational entity.

Initial mentions of movement parties can be traced all the way back to the parliamentary politics of 19th-century Britain. At that time, the term movement party was used to denote particularly liberal and progressive political groups in Westminster (Wilkinson 1971). A more contemporary version of the term is very different from that one. It was revived through research on green left-libertarian parties in Western Europe undertaken by Herbert Kitschelt (Kitschelt 1989, 1993, Kitschelt and Hellemans 1990). Following the organizing concept of *Basisdemokratie* (democracy from below), derived from their origins in the movements of the 1960s and the 1970s, green parties tried to foster participatory practices and avert bureaucratization in party organizing (Poguntke 1987, 1993, Kitschelt 1989, Kaelberer 1993). Over the last two decades, the research which aims to investigate the interaction between social movements and political parties went way beyond left-libertarian actors in Western European countries. Movement party links on the left were studied in work on ethnic parties and "pink tide" in Latin America (Van Cott 2005, Roberts 2015), work on the US Democratic Party

(Heaney and Rojas 2015), as well as cases of left-wing movement parties in Southern Europe (Della Porta et al. 2017, Chironi and Fittipaldi 2017, Flesher Fominaya 2020, Portos 2021). In a more recent context, the concept was also utilized by researchers focusing on the far right in Europe (Minkenberg 2018, Caiani and Císař 2019, Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2018).

The increase in the number of diverse empirical phenomena to which the term has been applied naturally created many definitional challenges. Indeed, movement parties have features that make them especially hard to define. To begin with, as actors that are in the process of organizational consolidation, movement parties are prone to change. Although they may start with few resources or no organizational structure (Kitschelt 2006), they can rapidly adapt and develop (see Della Porta et al. 2017).

An additional issue relates to the problem of membership definition. Paraphrasing Eldersveld's classical study on political party behavior, Kitschelt describes all parties as "conflict systems with subcoalitions of activists advocating different strategies and goals" (Kitschelt 1989: 47). This characteristic is even more pronounced in movement parties as actors emanating from broad movements. It is hardly possible to imagine a social movement undertaking a full transformation into a party, as the concept may lead us to believe. Drawing on the notion of fractal arenas within movements themselves (Mische 2015), we could expect to find elements of the movement which engage in party politics and elements which remain distanced from it. This fuzziness is well-illustrated by the term "party in the street", used in describing the unstable intersection between social movements and the Democratic Party in the US context (Heaney and Rojas, 2015). Relating the spatial instability to the aforementioned temporal one, we can note there are always elements of the movement which keep existing even after some other elements decide to engage in party politics. The additional point is that this electoral engagement may come in the form of an electoral list of independent candidates, purposefully avoiding any organizational formalization or party registration and further complicating the researcher's task of membership-based demarcation. Considering both types of conceptual instabilities, rather than *transformation* (McAdam and Tarrow 2010), sometimes it is much more precise to talk about an *extension* of movement activity into the electoral field, or what can be labeled as a "movement spin-off of political party" (Goldstone, 2003: 23), whereby movement and party continue to exist in parallel.

Given all of the abovementioned predicaments, how can we define movement parties? I argue that, rather than defining them as specific party-political entities, it is more fruitful to observe

them as a type of social movement strategy. I base this argument on adapting the conceptualization proposed by Herbert Kitschelt, which until today remains one of the most influential in the research on movement parties.

To begin with, I argue that there are two ways to understand Kitschelt's well-known definition of movement parties as "coalitions of political activists who emanate from social movements and try to apply the organizational and strategic practices of social movements in the arena of party competition" (Kitschelt 2006: 280). One possible interpretation of the definition is that movement parties' key characteristic is that they are coalitions of political activists with a background in social movements. However, I would argue that the key characteristic comes in the latter portion of the definition, as many political parties are based on coalitions of social movements. Their key characteristic is that they *apply social movement organizational and strategic practices in the arena of party competition*. In other words, the definition of a movement party is not so much about describing a type of organizational entity but rather a matter of describing a type of organizational and strategic practice.

In his work on environmentalist movement parties of Belgium and Western Germany, Kitschelt aims to explain how movement parties operate and change over time (Kitschelt 1989, 2006). He offers an analytical framework distinguishing between the *logic of constituency representation* and the *logic of electoral competition*. While the former describes the political strategy which principally obeys the ideological position and demands made by movements in the party's core constituency, the latter describes the strategic adaptation to the imperatives of broader party competition (Kitschelt 1989).

In this thesis, movement parties are taken to be a specific point in the continuum between movement-based and party-based political strategy (Figure 3.1). In this continuum, social movements are typically associated with what Kitschelt (1989) described as the logic of constituency representation or movement behavior driven by the internal audience (Jasper 2006). On the other side of the continuum, political parties keep close to the logic of electoral competition, making an effort to address and mobilize a wider audience. It is important to note that the intention here is not to argue for a reifying image in which all movements are associated with one type of behavior and all parties with the other. The point is rather to claim that, overall, social movements tend to prioritize the immediate representation of their participants, while political parties tend to prioritize representation of the wider public, i.e., the electorate. Slightly adapting Kitschelt's analysis of left-libertarian parties from the 1980s, movement parties can

similarly be seen as an exercise in shifting between the logic of constituency representation and the logic of electoral competition.

Figure 3.1 Movement parties within the continuum between social movements and political parties

It is crucial to note that moving along this strategic continuum is not a simple strategic change. Apart from the difference and the extent of strategic change explained above (see also Rucht 2018), an additional layer of risk relates to the tension that exists between nonelectoral and electoral activism. While social movements are overall positively perceived as a solution to the crisis of representative democracy – by both left-wing and right-wing movements – parties are seen as the crisis' main culprits. Indeed, even only a cursory review of concepts describing the democratic demise in the past decades, such as *audience democracy* (Manin 1997), *public relations democracy* (Davis 2002), and *postdemocracy* (Crouch 2004), shows that they all level grave criticism against political parties, their cartelization and withdrawal from the citizens toward the state (see Katz and Mair 1995, 2009, Mair 2013). This difference in perception of movements and parties has important implications for negotiating and debating the potential for electoral strategy within social movements. As vividly described by Kevin Ovenden in his study of the case of Syriza, on one side of the debate are those who strictly oppose movements' association with the party-political arena, seeing it as a source of inherent contamination. On the other side are those who see social movements primarily as a supportive base serving a political party, which should be the primary vehicle of social progress (Ovenden 2015). Although somewhat simplistic, Ovenden's description of the two positions makes an important point: the issue of movements' shift toward organizing in political parties remains a deeply contentious strategic issue.

Given the abovementioned predicaments, I argue that we can conceive of movement party formation as a case of *core* strategic change (Minkoff 1999). Different to other changes in strategy, core strategic change is "expected to be disruptive and re-expose recently altered groups to 'liability of newness' that stems from needing to reconstruct routines and

relationships with environment" (Minkoff 1999: 1671). In other words, core change in strategy brings risk related to a reconstitution of a new actor.

This has important implications for the way I position my work in relation to the concept of institutionalization. Within social movement studies, the concept of institutionalization is typically used to describe the processes of movements' turn toward party politics in the aftermath of mass protest waves. Within the scholarly tradition of contentious politics, institutionalization is defined as the movements' incorporation "into the routines of normal politics" (Tarrow 2011: 190) and is usually seen as one of the possible movements' evolutionary pathways, in addition to movements' radicalization (escalation) (Della Porta and Tarrow 1986), as well as involution and commercialization (Kriesi 1996). A large part of the literature on contentious politics, however, informed by Michelsian and Weberian tradition, related the institutionalization to centralization of decisional structures, moderation of goals and focus on organizational survival instead of transformation of political reality (Della Porta and Diani 2006).

In more recent literature that specializes more closely in analyzing the consequences of social movements and other forms of collective action (see Bosi, Giugni and Uba 2016), the traditional scholarly notions of institutionalization have been increasingly criticized. In other words, it is wrong to essentialize institutionalization as the process that always brings deradicalization, depoliticization or demobilization to social movements (Suh 2011). In this thesis, I subscribe to this more nuanced notion of institutionalization, showing through comparison of two contexts how movements' can perceive their institutionalization in various ways. In addition, I discuss movement party formation as a specific form of institutionalization that can represent a source of instability and risk for social movements.

To sum up, in this thesis, I conceive of movement party formation as a core strategic change undertaken by social movements in order to mobilize support and exert greater political power (see Cowell-Meyers 2014).[5] But, how does this research fit in the literature on new political

[5] It is important to note that, in analogous manner, maintaining of cooperation with social movements may be characterized as a strategy undertaken by political parties, as shown in the case of the German far right party Aletrnative für Deutschland (Heinze and Weisskircher 2021).

parties, and what is the potential contribution of social movement theories in answering it? In the following subsection, I tackle this issue.

3.1.2 Movement party formation beyond systemic perspective and rational choice theory

The topic of movement party formation is importantly related to the political science literature on new party entries, which is primarily focused on measuring contextual factors' influence on the probability of a new actor's decision to enter into the electoral competition. This strand of research typically applies rational choice theory through medium-n or large-n comparative analyses and is interested in understanding the outcome that the party system has on decisions about new party entries and vice versa. There are several groups of factors investigated within explanatory models of new party entry: the presence of new issues or issues that are overall neglected by existing parties (in particular, economic issues); institutional-regulatory constraints that can demotivate new actors to form political parties; and finally, the interactions between potential new parties and already existing parties (Hug 2001). Over the past two decades, studies of new party entries have been increasingly focused on cases in postsocialist Europe, creating many relevant insights that try to grasp the trends of new party entry in the region. In particular, the regionally focused literature has been assessing the impact of factors such as a regulatory framework for the creation of new parties, accessibility of public funding, chances of winning seats and economic voting (Tavits 2008, Casal Bértoa and van Biezen 2014, Powell and Tucker 2014, van Biezen and Rashkova 2014, Rashkova 2020).

While the literature on new party formation clarifies general trends and can crucially inform explanations dealing with movement parties, it does not give much attention to the actors themselves, keeping most of its focus on system-level characteristics. Furthermore, it deals almost exclusively with parties and lists that succeed in elections and exert systemic influence while mostly neglecting the investigation of less successful or negative cases of new party entries (Hug 2001). One of its leading assumptions is that new entrants are motivated solely by the purpose of winning seats and that they balance out potential benefits and losses with respect to that specific purpose. This, however, is not always the case, and actors sometimes form new parties with the aim of drawing the public attention to their cause (Harmel and Robertson 1985).

While acknowledging the importance of the abovedescribed research on new parties, I argue this strand of research leaves some of the important questions underinvestigated: What was new parties' previous experience of political activity and what were their strategies, if any, before establishing a new party? How can such a change in political strategy be specified on

the level of mechanisms and processes? What is the precise role of contextual factors, and what is the role of movement-related factors in strategic change? In order to better understand how actors take the "electoral turn", it is necessary to take them not only as rational and strategic actors but also as actors historically and discursively grounded in their own routines and legacies. As aptly put in the overview of movement parties that emerged in Southern Europe over the past decade:

> Movement parties' action is, to a certain extent, strategic, driven as it is by assessments of opportunities and constraints, advantages and disadvantages, risks and benefits. At the same time, however, those assessments are strongly constructed through cognitive and affective processes that define visions and norms, but also emotions. (Della Porta et al. 2017: 182)

This is the point where I believe scholarship on movement parties can most fruitfully connect social movement studies and studies of party politics, contributing in that way to recent calls for the renewal of the sociology of political parties (Mudge and Chen 2014, de Leon 2013). Social movement scholarship is indeed well-placed to address many of these issues, as it gives more attention to strategic interactions between context and actors as they develop over time. Let us look more closely into the specific contribution of social movement studies to the understanding of the process of movement party formation.

3.1.3 Movement party formation as a historically and ideationally grounded phenomenon

An increasing body of literature dealing with movement parties has been developing over the past two decades. Scholarship on movement parties seems to "develop in waves", just as do movement parties themselves (Della Porta et al. 2017: 181). Indeed, as in the times of green's attempts at *Basisdemokratie*, as well as in the decade of the "pink tide", the recently revived scholarly interest in this specific breed of political actors can be related to growing academic interest in the crisis of representative democracy and its wide-ranging consequences for political dynamics (Caiani and Císař 2019, Hutter, Kriesi & Lorenzini 2018).

More specifically, the latest wave of left movement parties' emergence in Southern Europe can be associated with the *movements of the squares*, a protest wave that interconnected anarchism and left populism, combining both *horizontal* notions of participation and *vertical* notions of representation (Gerbaudo, 2017). After the protest wave subsided, the anti-capitalist contention in several countries, the most well-known being Spain and Greece, was sustained through

political parties established and supported by social movements (Della Porta et al. 2017, Chironi and Fittipaldi 2017).

In dealing with the cases of left-wing movement parties, literature has often focused on elaborating tensions existing between the strategic practices of social movements and the conditions imposed by the electoral arena, tracing in particular how movement parties develop and sustain internal organizational democracy against oligarchizing tendencies, and how they mediate between movement-based activism and conditions imposed upon them by the arena of representative politics (Aragón et al. 2017, Chironi and Fittipaldi 2017, Della Porta et al. 2017, Deseriis and Vittori 2019, Gerbaudo 2019, Vittori 2017, Zelinka 2018).

While movement parties have been increasingly relevant as the object of research, the literature does not problematize them as cases of core strategic change and mostly glances over the issue of explaining where they come from. The emergence of movement parties is usually observed as a direct outcome of high-profile mass protest episodes that attract a lot of public attention. For this reason, analysts are prone to emphasizing their spontaneity and novelty, just as is the case with social movements themselves (Flesher Fominaya 2015).

In recent years, however, the researchers started to offer more nuanced accounts of movement party formation. For instance, a comparative analysis of Podemos, Syriza and Five Stars Movement (Della Porta et al. 2017) traced five common factors relevant to the emergence of the three cases: cleavage transformations; conducive conditions in the electoral system; delegitimization of the mainstream parties, in this case particularly the left parties; mobilization on non-represented issues; and massive anti-establishment mobilization (Della Porta et al. 2017:7-12).

Indeed, it is possible to see movement party formation as a combined outcome of context-related and movement-related factors. Such an approach can be found in explanations of movement party formation in Latin America. In her study of ethnic movement party formation in the region, Donna Lee Van Cott (2005) acknowledges the factors of party system openness and institutional permeability and furthermore includes movements' characteristics in the explanation. More specifically, she claims that movements with relatively stable structures and experience of success had a greater propensity to form political parties in spite of the contextual constraints. In a more recent case study of the same context, Oikonomakis (2019) puts an even closer focus on intra-movement mechanisms that brought a strategic shift between protest and electoral politics in his work on the electoral strategy of Bolivian *cocaleros*. He shows that,

while political opportunity structures may have an influence on activists, they do not determine strategic decisions on their own. Instead, according to his nuanced account, strategy is an outcome of a process consisting of several phases: selecting potential strategies, winning the ideological hegemony, and securing the discipline of the membership (Oikonomakis 2019: 204).

Turning back to Southern European cases, we can find a similar processual approach to movement party formation has been demonstrated in recent case studies of crisis-related contention in Spain by Flesher Fominaya (2020) and Portos (2021). Both researchers look at the process of movement party formation but offer a slightly different focus. Portos focuses primarily on the relationship between the anti-establishment wave of mobilization and the institutionalization, outlining three mechanisms driving the institutionalization of 15-M into Podemos: movements' successful appropriation of political opportunities, symbolic construction of leadership with a role of personifying both movement and party, and cognitive liberation. Fominaya, on the other hand, aims to relate movement party formation to more long-term processes of movements' development. Her insights offer several important "prompts" about where to look for an explanation of movement party formation. First, the movement's relationship to political strategy, even when decided upon in periods of mass protest waves, is shaped by the movement's long-term continuity (see also Chironi and Fittipaldi 2017, Flesher Fominaya 2015). Therefore, it is not enough to investigate movement parties only as outcomes of specific protest waves. It is necessary to go further into the past, which allows a better grasp of the movement's previous organizational bases, resources, and experiences. It also enables a better comprehension of the exact effects that protest waves had on movement party formation. Second, movement party formation involves a change of ideas and, therefore, as Flesher Fominaya convincingly shows, involves discursive work on behalf of a movement's leadership. In order to ensure the shift between nonelectoral (or anti-electoral) and electoral strategy, Podemos had to reframe the idea of politics and the political, at the same time criticizing representative democracy and making claims on its own ability to change it. Finally, third, taking movement party formation as a movement's strategic answer to certain incapacity, it is necessary to look at the ways in which movement actors' perception of political opportunities and threats changed and consolidated at certain points in time (Flesher Fominaya 2020: 224).

Based on the abovementioned literature, I agree that movement party formation has to do not only with protest waves but also with processes that unfolded long before them. Therefore, an explanation of how it takes place cannot rely solely on the understanding of a specific protest

wave and contextual factors at the moment of the decision to take the "electoral turn". Instead, in order to understand the processes that bring social movements to change their strategy, it is necessary to utilize a genealogical approach enabling us to trace movement continuity (Flesher Fominaya 2015, Meyer and Staggenborg 2012, Taylor 1989). This is why I think we need to work on explicitly interlinking the literature on movement parties with the literature on social movement strategy, which is the task I turn to in the following section.

3.2 Explanatory framework

Understanding why and how social movements engage in strategic change has been one of the tasks central to social movement studies. For the purpose of this thesis, strategic change is defined as the activist groups' response to their changing perception of which of their primary activities work in a given context (Minkoff 1999). This definition has a strong temporal dimension: strategic change, in essence, means that throughout its lifetime, a group of activists may change their position toward various primary activities, reaffirming successful ones and giving up on the unsuccessful ones.

Temporality is indeed central to an actor's agency. According to the conceptualization offered by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), agency is a phenomenon constituted of three temporal elements: *iterational element*, which involves traditions and routines; *projective element*, which involves imagination about future trajectory; and *practical-evaluative element*, which involves actors' capacity to make judgments about the present situation. In other words, "actors are always living simultaneously in past, future, and present" (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 1012), which means that their agency is, with some variation in intensity, always determined by each of the three perspectives.

A similar logic of temporal perspectives has been applied by Koopmans in his conceptualization of the three mechanisms of strategic change in social movements (Koopmans 2004). He sees strategic change as an outcome of three intertwined mechanisms: *strategic anticipation*, which involves future-oriented thinking very much like the one envisioned by rational choice theory; *strategic adaptation*, which involves the actors' strategic learning through trial and error; and *environmental selection*, which involves the processes of diffusion and reaction based on the actors' vicarious learning from other movements' examples (Koopmans 2004).

A study by Minkoff (1999) represents a useful example of the empirical application of several of the abovementioned principles. Drawing from organizational theory and resource

mobilization theory, Minkoff offers a number of environmental and organizational factors (independent variables) that should help explain a social movement organization's likeliness to engage in the change of its core strategy: the openness of the environment, organization's age, size, and level of formality, the radicality of its goals, and prior experience of flexibility with strategic change (Minkoff 1999: 1674-1678). Similar to Minkoff, Ganz outlines several sources of what he calls "strategic capacity", including the ones related to leaders' biographies - identity, social networks, and knowledge of tactical repertoires - and organizational structure - regular deliberation, an efficient inflow of resources and accountability (Ganz 2009). All of these factors can be classified in relation to the groups' past, present and future perspectives.

This thesis investigates how various temporal perspectives influence activists' decision-making about engagement in movement party formation. Indeed, breaking with routine is not caused simply by a single event or element which sheds new light on the routine in relation to the political context but long-term development of activists' attitudes toward the routine itself. In that sense, in order to explain the strategic change, this research project combines two temporal perspectives: one of the long-term process of movements' development and one of the eventful temporality. Combining both allows us to grasp the full complexity of the processes preceding movement party formation.

These temporal perspectives are related to two elements of the perception of political opportunity structures (POS): (a) the institutional openness of the party system and (b) discursive opportunities and threats within a given context. These contextual characteristics are not observed in a manner that is detached from the processes. On the contrary, the perception of political opportunities and threats has a strong temporal dimension, as movements' perception of POS continuously changes (Meyer and Minkoff 2004). Indeed, movements' strategy develops through a process of trial-and-error that at times motivates the movements to keep doing the same and at other times motivates them to engage in smaller or bigger strategic change (Koopmans 2006). I will now define and elaborate on each of the three elements of the proposed explanatory framework.

3.2.1 Long-term processes of strategic change

In contemporary social research, the focus on long-term historical processes has been mostly promoted within the tradition of historical institutionalism. Different from other strands of social research, in particular the rational choice theory, historical institutionalists insist on the path-dependent idea of causality, looking at specific outcomes as strongly influenced by

previous events and long-term processes (Hall and Taylor 1998, Thelen and Steinmo 1992). Partly drawing from this tradition, social movement researchers have tried to account for movements' strategic change by analyzing the phenomena at the macro level. A good example of this is the concept of contentious repertoire, which is typically assumed to be an outcome of long-term processes of change, sometimes spreading over centuries, and very much focused on the structures of the state, society or economy as key explanatory factors (Tilly 1978, 1989).

In their rebuttal to the famous essay on new institutionalism by Hall and Taylor (1996), Hay and Wincott (1998) claim that, although it has structuralist tendencies, historical institutionalism can be usefully combined with sociological institutionalism in order to offer more precise explanations of strategy. Hay went further in elaborating an alternative explanation of actors' strategic behavior, claiming that individuals and groups (1) directly observe the direct effect of their strategies on context and, based on this, (2) engage in strategic learning that enhances their "awareness of structures and the constraints/opportunities they impose, providing the basis from which subsequent strategy might be formulated and perhaps prove more successful" (Hay 2002: 132).

Indeed, in order to understand movement party formation, taken to represent a core change in movements' strategy, it is not enough to trace past events in the manner of historical institutionalist, but it is also necessary to trace the moments of strategic action[6] and its direct effects on the context. The success of such an approach crucially depends on the capacity of research to combine different levels of analysis.

But, how can we usefully combine macro-level, meso-level and micro-level perspectives? One recent example can be found in the theorization of movements' strategy by Federico Rossi in his work on the Argentinian *Piquetero* movement (Rossi 2016, 2017). Rossi starts from the assessment of the two predominant approaches in social movement studies dealing with the issue of change in activism – the abovementioned scholarship on contentious repertoires represented by Charles Tilly and the scholarship on strategic interaction perspective,

[6] As Hay (2002) points out, all action is, to an extent, strategic, as it is always based on some type of calculation, even if not fully conscious. According to him, we can distinguish between routine practices on one side and explicitly strategic actions on the other. While the former includes some level of perception of an actor's context, the latter includes not only perception but also an explicit formulation of possible actions in relation to the context (Hay 2002).

represented by James Jasper, that gained in popularity over the past two decades. As Rossi rightly summarizes, while the former tradition has established macro-level analysis of long-term historical change in activists' repertoire, the latter tradition has focused much more on the micro level of strategic interactions. As a way of bridging the two perspectives and striking more balance between the macro and the micro level of analysis of strategic change, Rossi proposes the concept of "repertoire of strategies", which he defines as "a historically constrained set of available options for non-teleological strategic action in public, semi-public (evolving across specific groups), or private arenas" (Rossi, 2016: 22).

This effectively means that Rossi observes a broad field of *Piquetero* social movement actors in order to show how the actors' choice of strategy is related to their previous experiences. For the purpose of the argument, he claims that repertoires of strategy change through "stock of legacies", which he defines as:

> (…) concatenation of past struggles, which, through the sedimentation of what is lived and perceived to be lived as well as what is intentionally learned, produces an accumulation of experience that adds or eliminates specific strategies from the repertoire of strategies as both a self-conscious and oblivious process (Rossi 2016: 31).

To an extent, the *repertoire of strategies* and *stock of legacies* can be easily applied to the research problem of movement party formation, as it looks specifically at shifts between the nonelectoral repertoire of strategy and the electoral repertoire of strategy within left activism in the observed cases. Another excellent example of a strategy-oriented study combining historical institutionalist reasoning with meso-level analysis is the longitudinal study of sixty activist groups based in Pittsburgh undertaken by Kathleen Blee (2012). The study observes the level of groups, applying concepts of path dependency and turning points through ethnographic analysis in order to show how activist groups' "collective sense of the possible" widens and contracts based on various group experiences (Blee 2012).

3.2.2 Eventful temporality in strategic change

In addition to long-term processes, in the second element of the explanatory framework, I look at the impact of another type of temporal experience: eventful temporality. Posited by William Sewell, eventful temporality sees social causality as temporally heterogeneous, emphasizing the potential of events in transforming ostensibly unchangeable social structures (Sewell 2005).

Within the framework of this thesis, the concept of eventful temporality is particularly applicable to protest waves that took place before the movement party formation.

However, social movement researchers are often wary of focusing on events "presumably because the fleeting quality and emotional headiness of the transformative events (…) are hard to capture or validate within the conventional analytic language of social science" (McAdam and Sewell 2001: 102). I concur with McAdam and Sewell that this type of criticism is unfounded and that the researcher's role is to investigate various types of protest waves' impact on movements. Indeed, the spectrum of potential relational, affective and cognitive mechanisms is very broad:

> During protest events, new tactics are experimented with, signals about the possibility of collective action are sent, feelings of solidarity are created, organizational networks are consolidated, and sometimes public outrage at repression is developed. (Della Porta 2013a: 5)

Given the importance of eventful temporality, in addition to clarifying long-term processes of strategic change, I aim to specify mechanisms taking place within the eventful protest. This is necessary if we are to detect and elaborate on the process through which the long-term *potential* of accumulated movements' experiences and legacies, as elaborated in the previous section, translates into strategic change at a specific point in time.

3.2.3 Attribution of political opportunities and threats

Both outlined temporal perspectives – long-term processes and eventful temporality – are shaping the actors' perception of political opportunity structure (POS). POS has played an important role in contemporary social movement studies, as it became a central part of the political process model, which emerged as an alternative to models that previously dominated social movement scholarship, mainly the classical "strain and reaction" model and more recent resource mobilization model (McAdam 1982, McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001, Tilly and Tarrow 2015). According to one of its key proponents, POS originally aimed to grasp movements' strategic behavior in relation to "narrowly defined" political opportunities - polity's institutional openness for challengers, elite alignments and coalitions, and repression (McAdam 1996). Indeed, POS has been used to explain how macro-level conditions influence movements' emergence, mobilization, radicalization, institutionalization and other movement-related phenomena in a variety of contexts (Della Porta and Rucht 1995, Rucht 1996, Kriesi

1996, Kitschelt 1986, for overviews see: Della Porta 2013b, Giugni 2009, Meyer and Minkoff 2004).

There are, however, three important shortcomings of understanding the strategy based solely on POS. First, even though the wide applicability of POS promoted an increase in comparative work across social movements and contexts, it also opened the gates for the creation of a large number of often incongruent conceptualizations (Meyer and Minkoff 2004, Goodwin and Jasper 1999). POS, in other words, got "in danger of becoming a sponge that soaks up virtually every aspect of the social movement environment - political institutions and culture, crises of various sorts, political alliances, and policy shifts" (Gamson and Meyer 1996: 275). Second, the application of POS promotes structuralist types of explanations. This means that the source of stability and change in strategy is seen primarily as external to the movements, and not much attention is given to the actors' perceptions or their own strategic capacity (Kurzman 1996, Gamson and Meyer 1996, Goodwin and Jasper 1999). Third, POS is often criticized for offering very static explanations, a criticism endorsed by McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001), who claimed early on that we have to move from correlational logic of static factors and conditions toward the identification of processes and mechanisms. As summed up by Koopmans: "political opportunity structures are only meaningfully defined in relation to existing repertoires of contention" (2006: 27). Following this recommendation, explanations of core strategic change need to trace how the movements perceive POS at diverse points in time.

In doing so, I focus on two specifically defined elements of POS that can be assumed to have a significant impact on movement party formation. First, the institutional openness of the party system for new actors, which has to do with the rules of new entry into the electoral competition and formal hurdles that actors need to satisfy in that respect. Second, the discursive opportunities for new left actors. The perspective of discursive opportunities observes movements' frames and discourses in relation to their resonance in a broader political environment (McCammon 2013). This approach developed as a complement to those approaches that attempted to explain protest primarily by looking at the institutional openness and similar narrowly defined political opportunities and threats (Koopmans and Statham 1999).

3.3 Empirical strategy: Combining comparative and processual perspectives

Given the motivation to explain both within-case (processual) and cross-case dimensions of new left movement party formation in post-Yugoslav space, this thesis relies on the strategy of

small-n, case-oriented comparison, which allows for both "historical-interpretative" and "causal-analytic" reasoning (Ragin 2014: 35, see also Della Porta 2008a, Tarrow 2010). Indeed, the capacity to engage with both perspectives represents one of the main strengths of such a comparison, as noted by Hall:

> Instead of viewing comparison primarily as an exercise in correlating a few independent variables with a dependent variable, we should understand the comparative method as a technique in which inspection of this kind is combined with systematic process analysis of the cases. (Hall 2003: 395)

This observation concurs with the claims of other comparative historians, such as Rueschemeyer and Mahoney, who both praise comparative historical research for its capacity to include both within-case and cross-case analysis and avoid assuming that the relationships between variables are linear, as is typically the case in large-n comparative analysis (Rueschemeyer 2003, Mahoney 2003, see also Pavone 2022). To be more specific, small-n research design may be able to detect those factors that are *not* sufficient or necessary for a given outcome, but it is generally weak in establishing the factors that *are*, which makes use of process tracing an important step in establishing a valid explanation (Falleti and Mahoney 2015). Indeed, as noted in one of the more critical accounts of the comparative method, although small-N analysis utilizes cross-case comparison, "within-case analysis must do the heavy lifting for hypothesis testing" (Goertz and Mahoney 2012: 90).

3.3.1 Case selection and the logic of within-case and cross-case inference

The comparative design follows the logic of case selection "on the dependent variable", meaning that only the cases where movement party formation took place were considered. Although overall not recommended within the paradigm of experimental or statistical research (see King, Keohane and Verba 1994), selecting "on the dependent variable" is legitimate in underinvestigated areas of research, where case studies can serve "the heuristic purpose of identifying the potential causal paths and variables leading to the dependent variable of interest" (George and Bennett 2005: 23, see also Della Porta 2008a). Another reason for this logic of case selection is that movement parties and, especially, new left movement parties are a relatively rare phenomenon, which means that "useful variation" is rare (Gerring 2007: 56-57) and the negative cases, which would be those cases where certain movements explicitly decided *not* to form a movement party, are not easily detectable.

The task of case selection starts from the definition of the *universe* of possible cases (Schmitter 2008), which was already undertaken in chapter one. All in all, there are at least ten cases which could be possibly included in the analysis: *Sustainable Development of Slovenia* (2011-2017), *Self-determination Movement* (2011), *Initiative for Democratic Socialism* (2014), *Workers' Front* (2016), *New Left* (2017), *Party of Radical Left* (2020), *Left* (2016), *Zagreb is Ours* (2017), *Srđ is the City* (2015), *Do Not Let Belgrade D(r)own* (2018). Which out of the ten detected cases can be most useful in answering the two central research questions? Temporally, the case studies on selected cases were to cover the period between (1) the establishment of an activist group from which the movement party originated, and (2) the initial electoral engagement, which is in accordance with the explanatory framework described in the preceding section. Due to the limited feasibility of such a research strategy, and the fact that I wanted to keep an in-depth processual perspective, I opted to choose only two cases for analysis.

The cases of the *Initiative for Democratic Socialism* (Slovenia) and *Do Not Let Belgrade D(r)own* were selected. Before elaborating on the logic of comparison, including the strengths and weaknesses of comparing a case from Slovenia and a case from Serbia, let me briefly describe each of the two cases:

- The Initiative for Democratic Socialism (Iniciativa za demokratični socializem IDS) was established in the aftermath of the anti-establishment protest wave which took place in Slovenia between November 2012 and March 2013. In parallel to its establishment, together with two other political parties, it formed the coalition United Left and contested 2014 elections on all levels (EU, national and local) with considerable success for a new entry. Although it emphasized its novelty and divergence from the legacy of Yugoslav socialism, re-evaluating its positive and negative sides, IDS took an unabashedly radical left identity and symbolism, ideologically based on democratic socialism (Toplišek and Thomassen 2017, Toplišek 2019). In 2017, IDS, together with TRS, merged into a new political party – the Left (Levica) – which is, as of 2022, still a parliamentary party.
- The electoral initiative Do Not Let Belgrade D(r)own (Ne da(vi)mo Beograd NDB), building on the legacy of struggle against the large-scale urban development project Belgrade Waterfront, competed in the Belgrade City Assembly election in 2018. It gained prominence after two massive anti-establishment protest waves which shook Belgrade and Serbia in 2016 and 2017. The initiative brought together various strands of domestic left-wing activism, including several radical left organizations, and branded

itself a municipalist and green platform critical of neoliberal city governance (Matković and Ivković 2018, Fiket et al. 2019).

There are two positive aspects of pairing these specific cases for comparison. First, comparing IDS and NDB allows in-depth investigation of each of the two pathways mapped in the first chapter. Insights from each of the two cases, therefore, can serve as a heuristic in understanding other cases within the same type. Second, such a comparison allows us to see how the process of shifting between movement and party unfolded in two different contexts. The description of the process in one case challenges the description of the process in the other one (Tarrow 2010) and, in a manner of the method of agreement, discloses those conditions that are not present in both contexts.

Slovenia and Serbia differ significantly with respect to the two contextual conditions of interest in the suggested explanatory framework: institutional openness and discursive opportunities. Slovenia is a country with a relatively high level of openness to new political parties (Kustec Lipicer and Henjak 2015). Serbia, on the contrary, has a high threshold of signatures and fees needed for political party registration (Jovanović 2019), as well as a single-district electoral system, which makes it hard for new parties to enter the parliament (Vučićević and Jovanović 2015). In addition, the Slovenian party system can be characterized as a moderately fragmented multi-party system (Krašovec and Johannsen 2016), while the Serbian party system, since 2012, has been increasingly dominated by one party to the point of being qualified as competitive authoritarianism (Bieber 2020, Castaldo 2020) (see Table 3.1). Indeed, the choice of Slovenia and Serbia bears relevance for broader postsocialist context exactly because of their divergent postsocialist trajectories, in particular with regards to the former being a relatively stable pluralist multi-party democracy and the latter being a competitive authoritarian regime.

Differences can also be observed in terms of discursive opportunities. First, while Slovenia has for most of its postsocialist period been governed by liberal and center-right governments, the predominant force of electoral mobilization in Serbia remains in the hands of the far right and nationalists that can still utilize the issue of incomplete state-building (see Ejdus 2020, Grdešić 2008, Zakošek 2008). Second, although the legacy of Yugoslav socialism is generally more positive relative to the legacies of state socialism in the Eastern Bloc (see chapter four), there are differences among former Yugoslav countries (see Velikonja 2009). This relates especially to the claims of the Milošević regime about its ideological continuity with socialist Yugoslavia

(see Jansen 2005, Vasiljević 2012), which may have further discredited the legacy of socialism in Serbia. It is reasonable to assume that differences in the ideological structure of the electoral competition and the legacy of Yugoslav socialism significantly structure the resonance of socialist symbolism in the public sphere.

Table 3.1 Summary of differences in institutional openness of Slovenia in 2014 and Serbia in 2018

Elements of institutional openness	**Slovenia (2014)**	**Serbia (2018)**
Electoral threshold	4% (eight districts)	5% (single country-wide district)
Financing of political parties	parties obtaining >1% of votes	parties represented in parliaments and municipal councils
Political party establishment	200 signatures	10000 signatures, officially notarized
Party system	moderately fragmented multi-party system	dominant-party system

By combining two cases from two different contexts, the leading aim of the analysis is to assess the regularity and similarity of mechanisms, i.e., "to unearth how similar mechanisms of change combine differently with varying environmental conditions in distinctive trajectories of historic change" (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly: 83). In order to do so, the thesis drew on theory-building process tracing, a specific variant of process tracing that does not engage in testing previously specified mechanisms, but instead starts from the empirical material and then analyses it in a structured manner in order to identify causal mechanisms (Beach and Pedersen 2013). In this variant of process tracing, also known as theory development process tracing, the researcher uses inductive thinking in order to understand "how events connect together to form sequences and processes" (Falleti and Mahoney 2015: 229). This also allows not only understanding of *what* happened but also *how* it happened, engaging attentively with the actors' perceptions (Vennesson 2008).

Mechanisms, however, are not generic "intervening" variables that should always be expected to have the same effect regardless of their context (Falleti and Lynch 2009, cf. Mahoney 2001). This brings me to the second main research question, which aims to understand divergence across the cases. While new left movement parties, as an outcome, are present in both contexts, their strategic articulation differs. This is where context becomes highly relevant and where it is necessary to conceive of mechanisms as indeterminate in the sense that their outcomes depend on attributes of context (Falleti and Lynch 2009). For this reason, after establishing the

mechanisms in both contexts, I investigate them in relation to the activists' perception of POS in both respective contexts.

Although the matter of conceptual equivalence was already addressed within the mapping section, it is important to address possible criticism related to the conceptual equivalence of IDS and NDB. Namely, it could be said that both cases drew together only one portion of new left activists among those favoring the "electoral turn". Critical readers, for instance, could observe that IDS brought together principally activists with explicit socialist identity, while the case of NDB gathered primarily activists focusing on municipalist issues. This criticism, while partly valid, can be challenged based on the fact that both cases in their initial electoral campaigns mobilized wide coalitions of activist groups from all walks of left-wing activism, including socialists, greens, and left-leaning liberals. In that sense, as is shown in the theoretical framework, their conceptual equivalence is related to Kitschelt's conceptualization of movements as coalitions of activists (Kitschelt 1989, 2006).

Finally, it should be noted that this type of comparison is of relevance in understanding the relative importance of political opportunities and threats to the broader field of movement party literature. It allows us to investigate how similar processes in relatively disparate contexts bring to the divergence in pathways of new left strategy, i.e., to divergent movement outcomes (Bosi, Giugni and Uba 2016). Here the contribution lies in the potential of the project to provide insights into the relative importance of institutional openness and discursive opportunity structure in the movement party formation.

3.3.2 Data collection, analysis of interviews and framing

On a more operational level, this thesis is based on a genealogical approach to movement parties (Flesher Fominaya 2015, 2020), tracing the origins of movement parties back to the inception of the groups that founded them. This approach has also been named *movement microhistory* (Markoff 2015). In short, applying the tenets of comparative historical analysis and process tracing, this thesis takes groups of activists as dynamic actors that can over time change their rules, strategies, identities, and other features, as best shown in the already discussed examples by Blee (2012) and Rossi (2017).

The fundamental aim of the data collection was to reconstruct chronologies of events that preceded the formation of the two cases observed. One of the challenges of theory-building process tracing is in defining the starting and the ending point of the period under study (Falleti 2006). The research design of this study delimits the chronologies by two points in time: they

start at the time of the observed activist groups' emergence and end at the time of the group's first electoral engagement. While the ending point is easy to define, defining the starting point – the emergence of the observed activist groups that later engaged in movement party formation – proved to be challenging. There are two reasons for this. First, the research design did not aim to cover a representative sample of participants and do a systematic biographical analysis that would enable a more precise inference about the starting point. Second, although the experience of the core members of the movement party is informative, their interpretation of the beginning of the activist groups can be slightly contradictory. Eventually, in both cases, it turned out that, instead of pinpointing the time of groups' establishment, it is much more analytically reasonable to start the chronologies with key events that interviewees were able to recognize as shared. In the case of Slovenia, it was the period of student movement activity in 2008, and in the case of Serbia, it was the occupation of Inex Film in 2010. Therefore, in the case of IDS, the period covered spans from 2008 to 2014 and in the case of NDB, from 2010 to 2018.

In order to be able to fully comprehend chronologies of events, in particular the actors' perception of these sequences, researchers doing process tracing need to rely on a variety of observations. Three main types of such observations applied to this research project were: comprehensive storylines that involved an overview of structural conditions and key steps in the movement party genealogy; "smoking guns" that point to temporal and spatial proximity within the process; and confessions that contain information on the actors' perception and meaning-making (Blatter and Haverland 2012).

I collected the data through two main activities - desk research and in-depth interviewing - which I did in a back-and-forth manner. Desk research was based on a systematic search of media reports, organizational documents and postings (usually on social networks and blogs), as well as occasional audio/video recordings (often easily accessible online). On some occasions, I was also able to get insight into meeting minutes and summaries. In order to grasp a wider context, I additionally relied on non-academic books, opinion articles and documentary movies produced about important events. I found the knowledge of these various "cultural artifacts" particularly important, as it allowed me to be aware of those statements within the interviews in which activists may have intentionally or unintentionally "performed" collectively consolidated narratives.

Given the specific importance of transformative protest within the explanatory framework, I created detailed chronologies of protest waves within the case studies. I systematically collected data on protest waves based on newspaper issues, as well as online media sources, effectively bringing me to create two small protest event datasets - one related to the 2012-13 protest wave in Slovenia (in Maribor and Ljubljana) and one related to 2016 and 2017 protest waves in Serbia (in Belgrade). Protest event data were further complemented with a variety of photographic material containing messages and performances undertaken within the protest wave. When possible, recordings or transcripts of speeches within protest waves were collected, which crucially informed the analysis of the interaction between the protest waves and the activists, in particular the framing analysis focusing on the interaction between activist groups and protest waves.

The in-depth interviews were conducted in Ljubljana and Belgrade during several fieldwork visits in 2019, 2020 and 2021. I managed to collect a total of 33 in-depth interviews (21 interviews in Belgrade and 12 in Ljubljana). Interviews with actors can be of great importance in process tracing research as the instrument of grasping the actors' motivations through "confessions" that can further our understanding of observed spatial and temporal proximity of two events in a sequence ("smoking gun observations") (Blatter and Haverland 2012). Within the scope of this thesis, in-depth interviews were principally used as an important source in eliciting collective memory of events and processes in the manner of oral history research (Bosi and Reiter 2014). All interviews were undertaken after comprehensive desk research of the recent historical context and the movement's past, which allowed me to conduct every interview with clearly defined points of focus.

Regarding the sampling of interviewees, I initially had a very straightforward plan to interview the activists of core groups involved in movement party formation. This, however, turned out to be a weak basis for any inference once I started my fieldwork and preliminary analysis of interviews. In January 2019, I first went to Belgrade, where I immediately became aware of the fact that a number of activists that I was interviewing, who were on the electoral list of candidates of Do Not Let Belgrade D(r)own (Ne davimo Beograd, NDB) less than a year ago, claimed not to be associated with the initiative or claimed to be only passive supporters. In other words, with the exception of a handful of people in the core team, it seemed rather complicated to clearly define what individuals make up NDB as an electoral initiative. While this fuzziness of organizational membership later turned out to be a valuable insight on its own, at that point, I was for the first time confronted with the need to rethink my sampling strategy.

How to approach a field in which organizational memberships are multiple and unstable? How to grasp the complete picture if the current positions of participants may influence their accounts of past processes? The only possible solution was to acknowledge the diversity of the field and use this to my advantage by approaching individuals with different organizational memberships and experiences. Midway through my fieldwork in Belgrade, this approach started to make sense based on interviewees' references to similar experiences. Through this, I outlined specific sections of the broader activist field and tried to talk to the members of each. Later on, I devised the same strategy for the case of Ljubljana (see Table 3.2 and Appendix A). This interviewing strategy turned out to be in accordance with the unstable nature of movement parties as "coalitions of activists" (Kitschelt 2006), meaning that their origin is rarely related to a single coherent actor.

The experience of fieldwork had important implications for my definition of the object of analysis. Although core activist groups that formed movement parties are of central importance in this thesis, it turns out that genealogical investigation of a single collective actor cannot give a complete account of movement party formation. Instead, I strived to grasp strategic change keeping in mind to connect it to the level of networks of individuals and collectives with a shared identity (Diani 1992), which is synonymous with strategic action fields (Fligstein and McAdam 2011) or arenas (Jasper and Duyvendak 2015) in more recent literature. I had to look in particular at the relationship of core activist groups with other actors in the field and their dynamics of alliance building and conflict (see Mische 2008). Although it created further complexities within the research process, I believe that this approach allowed me to analyze different sections of new left activism, acknowledging the diversity of actors and positions.

For what concerns conducting of the interviews, I typically asked the questions in chronological order (see Appendix B). In order to elicit as detailed memories as possible, in some interviews, I used specific media reports on events in an attempt to prompt the participants to share their side of the story on these events. Whenever possible, I confronted activists with statements that they or other members of their movements made in the past. In this way, I was able to check for possible disagreements on certain events. Given the sensitivity of the topic and the fact that the interviews tackled strategic assessments in a potentially risky environment, the interviewees were guaranteed confidentiality, and direct quotes of their responses have been pseudonymized.

Table 3.2 Organizational position of interviewees

Ljubljana (12 interviews)	Belgrade (21 interviews)
- 6 core activists - 1 activist who joined immediately before movement party formation (2013) - 5 activists from other radical left organizations (Social Center Rog, Anarchist Info Shop Ljubljana)	- 5 core activists - 6 activists who joined immediately before movement party formation (2016 and 2017), - 8 activists from other radical left organizations (Marx 21, Left Summit of Serbia & Social Democratic Union and anarchist collectives) - 2 academic experts

The interviews were transcribed and analyzed through software-assisted coding (MaxQDA software). During various points in the process of coding, I was always trying to look for the three types of data shared by the interviewees:

- data on moments of strategic change within the group of activists;
- data on interactions, mostly coalition building and breaking, within the broader organizational field;
- data involving interviewees' meaning-making and perceptions of politics and, in particular, party politics.

The first analytical task was probably also the most difficult as, save for a handful of leading activists, the interviewees rarely reflected explicitly on the process of strategic change by naming it "strategic change". However, implicitly, interviewees were often reasoning through two points that form the same narrative: description of a problem and description of a solution that they tried. In addition to all three analytical tasks, I was also interested in detecting personal accounts of their emotions of frustration and/or satisfaction with regard to specific moments in time. Although personal accounts were not the direct aim of the data collection, as would be the case if I undertook life history research (see Della Porta 2014), interviews were always starting with a question about the interviewees' initial activist engagement, which was not only useful as a way for me to position the activist in a given organizational field, but also to enable interviewees' to focus their attention.

In addition to the analysis of in-depth interviews, the thesis also relies on frame analysis of media statements, declarations, manifestos and speeches of various protest actors that were

participating in the protest waves (see chapter six). Within social movement studies, frame analysis principally looks at how the meaning of existing concepts and objects is reconstructed by social movements (Lindekilde 2014). Frames can take on a variety of forms – diagnostic, prognostic and motivational – and are always constrained or enhanced by the specific context in which social movements act (Snow and Benford 1988). Movements are therefore taken to be *signifying agents* with the ability to influence their context through specific framing strategies instead of being passive observers of opportunities and threats around them (Snow and Benford 1992). In this aspect of the research, particular importance was given to systematically describing and illustrating the strategic framing that new left actors utilized as a part of their discursive work in justifying the movement party strategy (see chapter seven). Framing analysis was continuously juxtaposed to the interview data about strategic action.

Finally, I would like to reflect on my own positionality with regard to the object of research. Before starting this research project, I had several years of activist experience in Croatia, which involved multiple organizations and initiatives. What is more, my direct interest in understanding the process of movement party formation was motivated by my own engagement in a new left movement party in Croatia (Zagreb is Ours). Although I was marginally involved in decision-making and never held any party or public office, this engagement means that I overall support the strategy of movement party formation on the post-Yugoslav new left. The aim of this thesis, however, is not to promote movement party formation as the best strategy or to promote movement parties themselves but rather to historically situate the phenomenon and understand its context-specific potentials and limitations. This was specifically enabled by engaging with a broad base of interviewees, including those who openly disagree or critically reflect on the strategy of movement party formation. Indeed, as will be discussed in the final chapter of the thesis, given that new left movement parties are a moving target, their fast development prompts researchers and researcher-activists to look more closely at these actors' capacity to maintain the organizational form of movement party, and make it more than a simple rhetorical device.

3.4 Summary

I started this chapter by reflecting on the conceptualization of movement parties as a type of entity defined by specific organizational features. Based on critical reflection on contradictions that are typical of movement parties, especially their temporal and spatial stability, I argued for conceptualizing movement parties as a type of strategy. More specifically, I defined movement

party formation as a strategic change undertaken by social movements in order to mobilize support and exert greater political power. In addition, I showed how this is not just *any* kind of social movement strategy but rather a *core* strategic change that exposes a social movement to the "risk of newness" (Minkoff 1999).

Based on the conceptualization of movement party formation as a type of social movement strategic change, I devoted the second section of the chapter to outlining the three central elements of the explanatory framework. Drawing on the literature on social movement strategy, the explanatory framework combines temporal perspectives of long-term processes and eventful temporality, as well as an analysis of the activists' attribution of opportunities and threats. In the third and final section of the chapter, I moved on to the task of specifying the empirical strategy, outlining the logic of case selection, the logic of inference, and data collection.

4 Two Stories of the Post-Yugoslav New Left

Ljubljana and Belgrade, the capital cities of Slovenia and Serbia, are two significantly different places. An uninformed visitor may find it hard to believe that they were part of common federations for the larger part of the 20th century. The differences are everywhere: urban planning, public transportation, wealth, social life and culture. During months spent in fieldwork, as I was immersed in everyday life and politics of these two countries, I found the very idea of comparing two so disparate countries rather daunting. The experience of fieldwork made me engage with different questions: What makes post-Yugoslav space so specific? What are the similarities and differences existing between Slovenia and Serbia that were relevant for the development of new left movement parties? Can we trace certain post-Yugoslav continuities or discontinuities related to the development of postsocialist left-wing activism and new left activism in the two countries?

Socialist Yugoslavia represents a specific historical case wrought with contradictions. On the one hand, it was a single-party authoritarian state with a powerful military and repressive apparatus. On the other hand, different to other Eastern European state socialist regimes, from 1948, it maintained a relative political distance from the Soviet Union, remaining outside of the Warsaw Pact. Given its particular position, the country engaged in liberalization and democratization, as well as an economic opening toward the Western Bloc comparatively early (Vučetić 2018). Overall, although the governing communist party (League of Communists of Yugoslavia) kept a tight grasp over politics, Yugoslavia enjoyed a relatively high level of domestic legitimacy compared to the rest of the authoritarian socialist countries. Even from a contemporary perspective, although anticommunism and anti-Yugoslav sentiments exist (see Cipek 2017), the legacy of Yugoslavia is overall still seen as positive by significant portions of the population in former Yugoslav republics (Velikonja 2009, Maksimović 2017).

Notwithstanding its specific legacy relative to other socialist countries of the time, Yugoslavia should not be taken as a monolith. As a federation, it brought together six republics (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia) and two autonomous provinces (Kosovo and Vojvodina) with vastly different historical legacies, ethnicities, sociodemographic characteristics and levels of economic development (see Jović 2009). Indeed, this heterogeneity also means that the republics' post-Yugoslav trajectories were also divergent in various aspects of politics and political economy.

In this chapter, I aim to address variations in post-Yugoslav trajectories by offering an overview and comparison of the development of new left activism in Slovenia and Serbia since the 1990s. Although various specific social movements have been objects of comparative research in countries of former Yugoslavia over the past three decades (see Bilić and Stubbs 2015, Balunović 2020, 2021, Dolenec, Kralj and Balković 2021, Horvat and Štiks 2015, Štiks 2015, Štiks and Stojaković 2021, Siročić 2019), researchers have rarely tried to systematically compare long-term development of activism in the region. In one of the few works that attempt to undertake such a comparison, the author notes four groups of factors that can help us to understand differential development in the former Yugoslav countries: (1) the type of democratic transformation, (2) the presence or absence of war, (3) the intensity of external influence and (4) the divergent dynamics of Great Recession that started in 2008 (Fink-Hafner 2015). Although this overview will not focus on the same groups of factors, it certainly shares the assumption that, in order to understand contemporary new left actors' development, it is necessary to go into the past. For this reason, the chapter is structured in a chronological manner – the first section deals with the period of early transformation during the 1990s, while the second and the third sections deal with the period of the 2000s and 2010s, which I label the "crisis of transition".

The purpose of the overview is not to offer a comprehensive, detailed picture, as this would necessitate systematic collection of organizational data and protest event data, but rather to make general points about the divergent postsocialist trajectories of the two countries. Specifically, the chapter describes the divergence of the two contexts with regard to the type of transformation in the 1990s, the relative strength of trade unions and social democratic parties, and the relative strength and diversity of extraparliamentary left-wing actors. The key observation is that, in the long run, new left actors in Slovenia, compared to their Serbian counterparts, were developing with more diversity, more autonomous resources and better discursive opportunities already since the 1990s.

4.1 Early postsocialist transformation in Slovenia and Serbia during the 1990s

In the early 1990s, as was the case in most of the postsocialist Europe of the time, left-wing actors in countries of former Yugoslavia became marginalized. In the atmosphere of the "end of history" (Fukuyama 1992), with capitalist transformation and "transition" becoming imminent, genuinely left-wing actors mostly vanished from mainstream parliamentary politics

and were deprived of institutional resources. Although this phenomenon was universal, it happened to a different extent and in different ways across former Yugoslav republics. In that sense, Slovenia and Serbia can probably be taken as two polar opposites (Orlović 2011).

The initial post-Yugoslav period in Slovenia was marked by the predominance of liberal centrism in the party system. After the first multi-party parliamentary election, which was held in 1990, the first cabinet was constructed by the nationalist and anti-communist coalition Democratic Opposition of Slovenia (Demokratična opozicija Slovenije, DEMOS), consisting of five political parties. The cabinet of DEMOS, however, fell apart already in 1992, initiating a snap election that brought to the first in a series of cabinets headed by Liberal Democracy of Slovenia[7] (LDS). LDS became the most successful liberal party in postsocialist Europe (Bakke 2010), remaining in power all the way until 2004, with very popular politician Janez Drnovšek serving as the prime minister for most of this period.

The relative stability of government, supported by liberals and social democrats, as well as fast accession to the European Union, motivated the assessments of Slovenia as one of the success stories within the *transitological* scholarship of postsocialist countries (Bebler 2002). Indeed, Slovenia was the first country of former Yugoslavia to apply for membership in the European Union, ending the negotiations in 2002 and becoming a member state in 2004.

The political stability of the 1990s was also supported by the gradualist and pragmatist approach to economic transformation (Mencinger 2001). Throughout the first decade of its independence, Slovenia undertook limited market reforms while making sure to institutionalize the collective bargaining system between the workers, the employers and the state. While initially, the country was confronted with a loss of important markets in other former Yugoslav republics, which created a decrease in economic activity, Slovenia was rather successful in reorienting its export toward new foreign markets (Mencinger 2001). Although one portion of the workers lost their jobs in the early 1990s, early retirement absorbed potential social shocks, and privatization was done through vouchers, which allowed a significant portion of the workers to become owners of the companies in which they worked (Grdešić 2006, Kržan and Birač 2022, Mencinger 2001, 2006). Indeed, due to this exceptional dynamic, Slovenia at the

[7] Between 1990 and 1992 named Liberal Democratic Party.

end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s was taken as the only case of neo-corporatism in Eastern Europe (Bohle and Greskovits 2007, Feldmann 2006).

Very different to Slovenia's early consolidation, in the 1990s, Serbia was dominated by the regime of Slobodan Milošević, who rose to power through nationalist mobilization in the late 1980s (see Vladisavljević 2008, Grdešić 2019). Serbia of the 1990s can therefore be best qualified as a hybrid regime or competitive authoritarian regime, where the authoritarian government managed to maintain its legitimacy through regular but unjust electoral competition (Levitsky and Way 2002). Milošević's regime was governed by the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), established in 1990 as the successor to the League of Communists of Serbia (SKS). While utilizing nationalist identity for broad popular mobilization, the Milošević regime symbolically claimed continuity with Yugoslavia, which in part allowed it to achieve broad and heterogenous legitimation, particularly with respect to Serbia's engagement in wars across Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo (Jansen 2005, Vasiljević 2012). The hegemonic position of SPS continued throughout the 1990s: SPS was the relative winner of parliamentary elections in 1990, 1992, 1993 and 1997, often governing in coalition with other right-wing parties, and it controlled the posts of the president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and the republics of Serbia and Montenegro (Goati 2001).

In the second part of the 1990s, the SPS regime confronted problems in maintaining its legitimacy, as years of wars and a related socioeconomic crisis were increasingly felt by the population. Indeed, the transformation in Serbia started with a dramatic economic shock after the disintegration of SFRY in 1992. On the one hand, Serbia (now part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia together with Montenegro) lost its protected export markets in former Yugoslav republics, while on the other hand, it engaged in excessive war-related spending, which provoked one of the highest hyperinflations ever recorded between 1992 and 1994 (Uvalić 2011). Throughout the 1990s, postsocialist transformation in Serbia remained in a type of vacuum due to economic sanctions, no functional foreign trade and virtually no foreign investments (Uvalić 2011). The decade was marked by instabilities and general hardship across diverse portions of the population. The unresolved status of Kosovo and the engagement of NATO in the conflict culminated in the 1999 NATO Bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the establishment of the UN administration over Kosovo. In September 2000, the presidential election was won by the opposition candidate Vojislav Koštunica. Milošević's attempt to cancel the electoral result provoked a widespread popular outburst that brought to

the overthrow of Milošević on 5 October 2000, also known as the "Fifth of October Overthrow" or "Bulldozer revolution" (see Dolenec 2011).

4.1.1 Left-wing political parties and trade unions

In Slovenia, the communist successor party, now named League of Communists of Slovenia - Party of Democratic Renewal (ZKS-SDP), managed to maintain its popularity and participate in most governmental cabinets throughout the 1990s. Although it did not manage to form the government after the first Slovenian multi-party election in 1990, ZKS-SDP obtained a relative majority of 17.3% of the votes. After spending a brief period in opposition, in the second election of 1992, ZKS-SDP won 13.6% of votes as part of the electoral coalition "United List", which included several minor left and center-left parties - Workers' Party, Social Democratic Union, and Democratic Party of Pensioners.[8] United List had a relatively high coalition potential and became part of the coalition government along with Liberal Democracy of Slovenia and Slovene Christian Democrats (SKD). In 1993, on the basis of the electoral coalition, the Workers' Party, Social Democratic Union and one part of the Democratic Party of Pensioners merged into the United List of Social Democrats (ZLSD).

Throughout the 1990s and until 2004, ZLSD consistently supported coalition governments of liberal democrats, at times also sharing the government cabinet with right-wing political parties. Although ZLSD came in as the third strongest party in the 1992 parliamentary election and the fifth strongest party in the 1996 parliamentary election, it kept its popularity in a relatively stable base of voters throughout the 1990s. In part, the popularity of the communist successor party in Slovenia is related to the symbolic role of ZKS in opposing the federal government in Belgrade at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s (Balut and Cabada 2000). However, as was the case with many comparable successor parties across Europe, the party gradually engaged in an ideological transformation, accepting the tenets of an ever more moderate social democratic and centrist political agenda. The process of ideological moderation toward the "Third Way" was further catalyzed by the election of Borut Pahor, a representative of a newer generation, as the new party president in 1997 (Balut and Cabada 2000).

[8] Statistical Yearbook of the Statistical Office of Republic of Slovenia, 2001, pp. 112

Very different from the party transformation in Slovenia, in the 1990s, left-wing or even center-left actors virtually vanished from the Serbian parliament. Although Serbia is one of the cases in which a communist successor party continued to govern in the immediate postsocialist period, the successor party SPS retained only a symbolic relationship to left-wing politics and socialist Yugoslavia. Instead of socialist continuity, the policies of SPS created a dramatic increase in inequality and degradation of workers' rights and the standard of living (see Bakić 2015, Balunović 2013). The privatization process during the 1990s, although limited, happened in the context of the war economy and foreign sanctions, which meant that privatization effectively served as a mechanism of wealth redistribution among the SPS nomenclature and its clientele (see Obradović 2007).

During the 1990s, there were some political parties with social liberal ideological orientation, such as the League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina (Liga socijaldemokrata Vojvodine LSV) and Social Democratic Union (Socijaldemokratska unija SDU), but they mostly played a smaller role within a broader centrist and center-right coalition headed by Democratic Party (Demokratska stranka DS) (Stojiljković and Mladenović 2014). The only revolutionary communist party – the Party of Labour (Partija rada PR), established in 1992, remained marginal and extraparliamentary throughout the period.

Another difference between Slovenia and Serbia of the 1990s is related to the position of trade unions. Although partly co-opted within the Yugoslav socialist government, trade unions were by no means acquiescent actors in the late Yugoslav period, especially in the 1980s. On the contrary, in its last decade, Yugoslavia saw an increase in the number of strike actions that were provoked by economic stagnation (Lowinger 2009; see also Cvek, Ivčić and Račić 2015, 2019). This unrest, however, did not continue in the same way in all Yugoslav successor states.

In the early 1990s in Slovenia, trade unions still represented some of the most powerful political actors, and the overall labor force was relatively prone to striking. According to Stanojević (2003), the key moment in confirming the strength of Slovenian trade unions happened in 1992, when strikes reached their peak during the right-wing DEMOS government. After 1992, trade unions started to collaborate very closely with center-left political parties and managed to significantly influence labor policy (Stanojević 2003, Fink-Hafner 1994). The strike activity decreased but still remained significant: from 1992 to 1996, measured per million members of the labor force, between 100 and 200 strikes were organized every year in the country, making

Slovenia comparable to some of the most strike-prone countries of the period, such as France or Italy (Stanojević and Vrhovec 2001).

At the same time, trade unions in Serbia were heavily weakened and fragmented. The successor of the Yugoslav trade union (Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions) served more or less as a transmission belt to the SPS regime (Arandarenko 2001). For this reason, in 1991, part of organized labor decided to reorganize into the first independent trade union Independence (Nezavisnost), which aimed to contest the regime beyond the issues of workers' rights and immediate membership interest (Arandarenko 2001). While in the context of Slovenia, trade unions managed to maintain their influence, much of the Serbian trade union activity became absorbed during the 1990s by the nationalist mobilization and nationalist regime of Slobodan Milošević (Arandarenko 2001, Grdešić 2008, Stanojević 2003).

As shown in this brief section on the institutional left of the 1990s, there are two important differences that we can note in Slovenia and Serbia in the early period of postsocialist transformation. First, while in Slovenia, left-wing parliamentary politics had a very gradual trajectory toward "Third Way" social democracy, in Serbia, the left was virtually not represented in parliamentary politics at the beginning of postsocialism. Second, the trade unions, as institutionalized left-wing actors whose existence was acceptable within the framework of capitalist transformation, had a very different level of influence in the two countries. In Slovenia, they managed to maintain a tight grasp over labor policy, initiating and utilizing neo-corporatist arrangements throughout the 1990s, while in Serbia, organized labor was by and large co-opted by the nationalist regime and weakened. Although left-wing causes were, to an extent, demeaned in both countries, it is clear that during the 1990s in Slovenia, the institutional left managed to maintain some of its resources and influence, while in Serbia, it was heavily marginalized.

4.1.2 Nonelectoral left-wing actors: liberal civil society framework and beyond

Given the weakened position and resources of the institutional left, in the 1990s, left-wing causes were partly re-established through extraparliamentary and nonelectoral activism. This meant that left-wing activism partly maintained itself through various formal and informal organizations, often intertwined with anti-authoritarian and anti-nationalist goals (see Bilić 2012). It is, therefore, more precise to talk about *left-liberal* activism as a form of an ideological mixture of the 1990s within which left-wing causes were partly sustained. Many of these

organizations, especially in the context of the 1990s, worked within the framework of civil society as a mechanism for maintaining resources and public visibility (see Stubbs 2001, 2012).

For this reason, before engaging with the overview of nonelectoral left-wing actors, it is first necessary to summarize the general development of the civil society framework in each of the two countries.

In the 1980s, when the popularity of the concept of civil society increased across Eastern Europe, as noted in chapter two, similar ideas started to take off in Yugoslavia. Slovenia, in particular, saw the development of a number of actors promoting the concept of civil society and working more or less autonomously from state-related or party-related organizations. This included many of the so-called *new social movements* – such as feminist, gay, peace and environmental movements – as well as a particularly lively punk scene that contributed to youth subcultures (Mastnak 1992, Stubbs 1996).

Within both the academic sphere and the general public, the debates on civil society were at the center of attention by the mid-1980s. Slovenian sociologist Frane Adam, writing in 1987, noted that the concept of civil society became ubiquitous in academic, popular, as well as movement-produced publications; it was mentioned in judiciary processes, in the meetings of the socialist party's central committee, in the public statements of highest functionaries of the League of Communists of Slovenia, as well as in the program of its youth organization (Adam 1987). Indeed, as noted by Križan, writing in the late 1980s, the intellectual and academic circles across Yugoslavia were inspired by the ideas of civil society as a conceptual alternative to the "social monism" of Yugoslav socialism (Križan 1989).

In Slovenia, actors that claimed to represent newly emerging civil society have not been developing in pure opposition to the socialist state but also leaned on relatively institutionalized resources, such as the radio station Radio Student (Radio Študent), which was very popular among young people, the already mentioned magazine Mladina, and the League of the Socialist Youth of Slovenia (Zveza socialistične mladine Slovenije ZSMS), the youth wing of ZKS, whose pressures proved important in pushing the ZKS toward the reforms and embracing of pluralism (Mastnak 1992, Bibič 1993).

The liberalization trends in Slovenia were also clear from the public mobilization against the famous "Trial against the Four" in 1988, in which four journalists were sentenced by the court martial in Ljubljana for their writing critical of the Yugoslav military. The abject overreach of power, in this case, motivated further consolidation and unification of the oppositional actors

and the establishment of the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (Odbor za varstvo človekovih pravic) as one of the most influential organizations of the period, that in part co-opted the previously mentioned "new social movements" of the 1980s (Mastnak 1992). This partly amalgamated the civil society and the nationalist discourse of the "Slovenian spring", including its conservative political agendas (Mastnak 1992, Stubbs 1996, Jalušič 2001).

While the concept of civil society gained exceptional importance in the context of Slovenia, it was well-spread across activist and academic milieus in other Yugoslav republics as well. The feminist movement is a good example of how civil society was indeed promoted in cooperation among a variety of groups from different Yugoslav cities, such as groups of Woman and Society established in Zagreb within the Croatian Sociological Association and in Belgrade under the auspices of the Student Cultural Center (Bilić 2012). Many other types of independently organized actors, including environmental organizations and student organizations, were spread across Yugoslavia already before the wars of the 1990s (Stubbs 2007, Lay and Puđak 2014). [9] As elsewhere, in Serbia, the concept of civil society and its relationship to the state was an important topic in the intellectual milieu already in the 1980s (see Mikuš 2018: 45-48).

With the breakup of Yugoslavia in 1991 and 1992, the meaning of civil society in Slovenia and Serbia became increasingly shaped by respective democratization trajectories. In Slovenia, a significant part of civil society activists entered political parties and became part of the state structures (Mastnak 1992, Jalušič 2001). In Serbia, given the context of war and the increasingly authoritarian regime of Slobodan Milošević and SPS, by the early 1990s, civil society was conceived primarily in strong opposition to the state (Mikuš 2018), i.e., as an instrument of control over the overbearing authoritarian state and not the sphere of democratic political conflict *per se* (see Baker 1999). Indeed, this conception of civil society became popular among external democracy-promoting actors in Serbia who concentrated their

[9] Even beyond the "new social movements", more traditional civic associations enjoyed limited autonomy in Yugoslavia. For instance, the socialist state supported numerous organizations, such as associations of people with disabilities, cultural associations, and others. Although these organizations were well-integrated in the state and partly controlled by the party structures, they had some level of autonomy and a significant redistributive role (see Mikuš 2018, Jalušić 2001).

resources on building various types of professionalized organizations, such as NGOs with specialized advocacy expertise (Sampson 2002, Vetta 2009).

Different frameworks of civil society had implications for different practices of organizing. Although, in general, the number of civil society organizations in Slovenia grew rapidly throughout the 1990s (see Fink-Hafner et al. 2015: 77), Jalušič critically notes that after 1991 most of the civil society activity was reduced to feminist and cultural initiatives, and a few institutionalized NGOs (Jalušič 2001). She gives two reasons for this. On the one hand, external democracy-supporting foundations, with rare exceptions, were generally not very interested in funding civil society actors in Slovenia. On the other hand, given that the new state was relatively cohesive, there was no watchdog activity or substitution of state functions as in other postsocialist countries (Jalušič 2001).

In Slovenia, activism that went beyond the standard NGO type of organizing, which was promoted by external donors, started to develop already in the early 1990s. One crucial example is Metelkova, a complex of buildings and barracks in central Ljubljana, previously used by the Yugoslav military, that was occupied in 1993 by a coalition "Network for Metelkova". The occupation was an intervention against the planned restructuring of the area into a commercial and business space and a response to the lack of space for a number of organizations and collectives active in arts, independent culture, antimilitarism and human rights organizing (see Bibič 2003, Gržinić 2007). With part of its background in the movements of the 1980s (see Beznec 2009), Metelkova became the first autonomous cultural center, relevant also in the broader region (Kirn 2007). It served as space for a number of innovative organizations and practices, including the collective *Youth Handicapped Deprivileged*, *LGBT clubs Tiffany and Monokel*, *Anarchist [A] Infoshop*, *Balkan Anarchist Book Fair*, *International Feminist and Queer Festival Red Dawns* (see Pavlišič 2013a, Pečarič 2013, Pistotnik 2013a). Over the decades of its existence, Metelkova underwent many changes and has been struggling against requests for formalization and regulation from the local authorities, as well as trying to avoid commercialization and touristification. Nevertheless, Metelkova has, since the 1990s, played an important role in developing and maintaining anti-capitalist and anti-neoliberal actors in Slovenia (Pureber 2013).

In Serbia, at the same time, the number of highly professionalized NGOs working within the anti-authoritarian and anti-nationalist framework was growing. Some of the most important NGOs in Serbia in the 1990s were: Center for Anti-War Action, Women in Black, Women

Parliament, Labris, autonomous houses (sanctuaries) for women and children victims of violence, etc. (see Blagojević 1998, Bilić 2012). Other prominent organizations involved in the anti-war and feminist movements were: Forum for Ethnic Relations; Helsinki Parliament of Citizens; Movement for Peace in Vojvodina; Fund for Humanitarian Law; Committee for the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms, and European Movement in Serbia (see Petrović and Paunović 1994 as cited in Orlović 2015: 123).

Different to Slovenia, where civil society was acknowledged and, in a way, co-opted by the state and pacified during the 1990s, in Serbia, the activists working within the framework of civil society became marginalized and threatened by the state authorities (Bilić 2012, Mikuš 2018). In addition, this emerging civil society was perceived as part of the so-called "Other Serbia" or "Civic Serbia"[10], labels denoting the pro-EU, urban, middle-class population that opposed the nationalist majority supporting the Milošević regime (Jansen 2005, Vetta 2018, Mikuš 2018). For this reason, civil society in Serbia has also been proactively demonized by the authorities and the media.

4.2 "The crisis of transition" and its implications on new left activism in the 2000s and 2010s

In this section, I describe the period of the 2000s and 2010s, with particular emphasis on the local dynamics of the Great Recession, which increased the sense of disillusionment in the promises of postsocialist transformation. I first detail the political and economic context of each of the two countries and then turn to the tracing of the development of the new left.

4.2.1 Slovenia

Over the second postsocialist decade, the Slovenian party system started to be more polarized, with frequent new entries (Haughton and Krašovec 2018, Krašovec and Haughton 2014, Krašovec and Johannsen 2016, Krašovec and Ramet 2017, Kustec Lipicer and Henjak 2015). The turning point was the 2004 parliamentary election, in which the long-term domination of centrist LDS came to an end. After the election, a right-wing government was formed by Janez Janša for the first time since the right-wing cabinet of DEMOS (1990-1992). Heading over the right-wing bloc – Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), Slovenian People's Party (Slovenska ljudska stranka SLS) and the New Slovenia (Nova Slovenija NSi) – and supported by the

[10] Original language: Druga Srbija, Građanska Srbija

Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (Demokratična stranka upokojencev Slovenije DeSUS), the first Janša cabinet announced a comprehensive set of neoliberal reforms (Toplak 2006).

After four years of a right-wing government, in 2008, the relative winner of the election became Social Democrats, headed by Borut Pahor, who formed a government with the support of LDS, DeSUS, and a newly emerged Zares. The Pahor cabinet was not stable, and in 2011 the coalition fell apart under the increasing impact of the Great Recession on the Slovenian economy, provoking a snap election. After the election, although SDS, as the leading right-wing party, was not the relative winner of the election, Janša managed to return to the prime-ministerial position, forming his second cabinet through a coalition with NSi, DeSUS, SLS and the Independent List of Gregor Virant.

With the revival of right-wing forces during the second postsocialist decade, Slovenian gradualism was fundamentally brought into question. The first Janša cabinet (2004-2008) attempted to undertake a comprehensive set of unabashedly neoliberal policy measures, such as a flat tax rate, further privatization, as well as labor market flexibilization (see Toplak 2006). Notwithstanding its ambitious program, the government did not have an easy time suggesting or implementing some of the reforms, especially due to the resistance of trade unions. After a clear demonstration of its disregard for social partners, Janša rapidly fell out of favor, with approval ratings decreasing from 70% to 45% in 2005 (Guardiancich 2012). For instance, in November 2005, trade unions mobilized some 40,000 workers for one of the biggest demonstrations in the contemporary history of Slovenia in response to the labor market reforms promoted by Janša's cabinet (Stanojević and Broder 2012). It is important to note that, however, an important discontinuity in gradualism was happening already before the first Janša cabinet, at the beginning of the 2000s, as Slovenia was getting ready to join the Eurozone, which it eventually did in 2007 as the first among the formerly socialist member states (Podvršič 2018).

The neoliberal reform agenda was further continued by the center-left Pahor cabinet (2008-2011), which initially expressed its commitment to social partnership, but then pushed out the Economic and Social Council when it came to the 2010 pension system reform (Guardiancich 2012). During the mandate of the Pahor cabinet, due to the consequences of the Great Recession, the Slovenian economy sharply contracted by 7.9% in 2009 (Guardiancich 2016), and the unemployment rate (based on Labour Force Survey) increased by 4.6% from 2008 to

2010 (Bartlett and Prica 2011). In response to the crisis, the Pahor cabinet initiated two referenda on the pension system and labor market reforms, which were rejected in 2011, provoking the early election at the end of the same year. As Janša managed to form the government after the election, the neoliberal agenda was simply reinforced while the consequences of the crisis were hitting ever more strongly.

The increasing reorientation of economic policy from gradualism to neoliberalism did not leave traditionally strong Slovenian trade unions untouched. In the early 1990s, as already noted, trade unions represented some of the most powerful political actors in the country, and the labor force was relatively prone to striking. Although by the end of the 1990s, the frequency of strikes lowered, the union density remained relatively stable beyond 40% until 2003 but fell dramatically to only 26.6% in 2008 (Stanojević and Broder 2012). The contraction of trade union membership can be explained by the 2004 accession to the European Union and 2007 accession to the Eurozone, which meant an intensification of work and pressures on the labor force (Stanojević and Broder 2012). Part of the reasons can also be found in the reforms imposed by the first Janša cabinet between 2004 and 2008. Although some of the reforms were successfully opposed by the unions, especially in the 2005 mass protest, the incremental and systematic pressures on the labor force became a permanent challenge for the labor force within neo-corporatist structures (Stanojević and Broder 2012). The structures of social dialogue did not formally change after the crisis, but the pressure was increased due to the strong external influence of supranational institutions (Stanojević, Mrčela and Breznik 2016, Stanojević 2018).

4.2.2 Serbia

The "Fifth of October" overthrow did not bring to strong consolidation of democracy in Serbia. Although democratic pluralism was stronger with respect to the 1990s, the period after 2000 is characterized by limited democratization and continuity of partitocracy and corruption (Pešić 2007, Orlović 2008, Stojiljković 2012, Bieber and Ristić 2012, Balunović 2013, Pavlović 2010, 2020). Throughout the second postsocialist decade, governments in Serbia were formed by various elements from the former anti-Milošević coalition Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), in particular by the three strongest centrist and center-right parties: Democratic Party of Serbia (Demokratska stranka Srbije DSS), Democratic Party (Demokratska stranka DS) and G17+. In parallel, the presidency of the republic between 2004 and 2012 was held by the prominent liberal opposition figure Boris Tadić. Political conflict maintained a predominant focus on socio-cultural cleavages and the issue of state-building, i.e., the issue of Kosovo

(Antonić 2007, Zakošek 2008, Jou 2010). In this period, socialist political positions were further discredited through the discursive association of the left with the Milošević regime (Kuljić 2008, Golubović 2008, Atanacković 2009).

Government coalitions of former members of DOS came to an end in 2012 when Serbia saw an unprecedented accumulation of power in the hands of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), which rapidly took over the government on all levels and revived the regime of competitive authoritarianism (Bieber 2020, Castaldo 2020). SNS was created after a 2008 split in far-right SRS, successfully combining nationalist ideology with a pro-EU stance, effectively securing both internal and external sources of the regime's legitimacy (Pavlović 2017, Bieber 2020). The rise of SNS was happening in parallel to the increasing crisis within DS, the core liberal political party that, after its failure to keep power in 2012, became weakened through a series of fragmentations and in-fightings.

While throughout the 1990s, transition in Serbia remained in a type of vacuum, after the overthrow of Milošević in 2000, it engaged in an intense period of privatization (Uvalić 2011). However, unemployment remained high, and the growth was driven by debt, which was further exacerbated by the consequences of the Great Recession that hit Serbia most dramatically in 2009 (see Bartlett and Prica 2011). Throughout the period of 2000s, the Serbian economy has been marked by deindustrialization and financialization (Đuričin and Vuksanović 2014) as well as the continuity of extractivist practices and corruption by all governing political elites (Pavlović 2020).

As is the case with many other countries of the Eastern European semiperiphery, high pressures on the labor force have been weakening the position of workers and trade unions in Serbia, which has one of the lowest minimum wages in Europe (see Anić and Vuksanović 2019). The prevalent economic policy, and increasingly so under the government of SNS over the past decade, has been to attract as many foreign investments as possible by increasing labor flexibilization and lowering labor standards (Novaković 2017, Ladjevac 2017, Zlatić 2011). In the same period, the privatization of publicly owned companies intensified, although some privatizations were annulled due to corruption (Novaković 2020, see also Uvalić 2004). While during the 2000s, there was an increased presence of strikes and strike-related activity, partly due to the increased intensity of privatization, trade unions were mostly unable to seriously confront the lowering of labor standards (see Novaković 2017).

There were, however, some notable cases of workers' self-organized struggle that happened with partial support or without the support of the trade unions (for an overview, see Novaković 2017, 2020). Particularly instructive was the case of the workers-shareholders of a pharmaceutical company Jugoremedija, who, after privatization in 2001, managed to collectively retain control over 58% of shares. Given their relative strength, the private owner who bought the rest of the shares attempted to squeeze them out of the management, at times due to the support of the governing parties (see Zlatić 2011). From the struggles of Jugoremedija workers and several other companies in a similar position, in 2009, a Coordination Committee of Workers' Protests was formed (Koordinacioni odbor radničkih protesta) as an attempt at unifying the demands of workers from Rača, Zrenjanin, Belgrade, Ćuprija, Vršac, and Subotica.[11]

4.2.3 Emergence and early development of nonelectoral new left activism in Slovenia and Serbia in the 2000s and early 2010s

In one of the most well-known analyses of the post-Yugoslav new left, its development is related to the dynamics of the post-2008 crisis period, which created general disillusionment about the transition into capitalism (Štiks 2015, Horvat and Štiks 2015). Although the Great Recession indeed influenced the development of new left actors in Slovenia and Serbia, their origins can already be traced to the beginning of the 2000s. Let us look at some of the important episodes that served as the basis of new left activism in the two countries.

Left-wing activism in Slovenia in the early 2000s was strongly related to the anarchist movement. Slovenian activists were taking part in alterglobalist mobilization against elite summits in Seattle, Prague, Gothenburg and Genoa (Razsa and Kurnik 2012, Razsa 2015). Important to these mobilizations were autonomous spaces, such as already existing Metelkova, but also additional autonomous spaces, such as Vila Mara, Autonomous zone Molotov and Autonomous zone Galicija (Korošec 2014). Anarchists had an important role in mobilizing against the "war on terror" and the 2003 invasion of Iraq, as well as in public campaigning against Slovenia's accession to NATO. Although the accession to NATO was consensually supported by political elites of the time, and Slovenia eventually acceded to the alliance, the

[11] Koordinacioni odbor radničkih protesta 2009

campaign managed to pressure the state into initiating a referendum about the accession (Korošec 2014).

According to Razsa and Kurnik (2012), during the 2000s, the specificity of the Slovenian context motivated the activists to focus their energy and resources on the issue of citizenship and state-sponsored discrimination of minorities. This issue became particularly pronounced in the early 2000s through an increased public interest in the case of the *Erased* (Izbrisani). The term *Erased* relates to the residents of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia who were, in February 1992, secretly erased from the register of permanent residents by the Ministry of Interior of the recently created Republic of Slovenia (Jalušič and Dedić 2008, Zorn 2009). Through this administrative act, the legal basis of which was later declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court of Slovenia, more than 18,000 people were overnight stripped of citizenship rights, including rights in the areas of employment, education and healthcare, and were effectively turned into illegal migrants at risk of deportation. Many of these people were long-term residents of Slovenia or were even born in the country but were typically of non-Slovenian ethnic origin or were immigrants from other former republics of Yugoslavia (Jalušič and Dedić 2008). The *Erased* organized into an association in 2002, and in the following years, their problems became publicly known through efforts of several NGOs, such as Peace Institute, and other organizations and initiatives. The issue of ethnically discriminatory citizenship went beyond the issue of the victims of the erasure, and it included many other groups that self-organized and created alliances with left-wing activists, such as war refugees from former Yugoslav countries, exploited migrant workers on temporary visas, and asylum seekers (Razsa and Kurnik 2012).

An important node for all these different groups became the 2006 occupation of the former bicycle factory Rog, the first large reappropriation of space after the occupation of Metelkova in 1993, mentioned in the previous section. As elaborated by one of the researchers and activists of Social Center Rog, Metelkova was an outcome of earlier activist generations, with origins in the movements of the late 1980s (Beznec 2017). With changing political-economic context and intensified transformation of Slovenia at the beginning of the 2000s, the occupation of Rog responded to the growing need for new symbolic and material space for new movements and collectives (Beznec 2017). Within Rog, several initiatives took off over the years, including the activities of solidarity with seekers of international protection and the collective Invisible Workers of the World (Nevidni delavci sveta IWW) that gathered self-organized migrant workers, in particular exploited migrant workers from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Particularly

important in this period was the 2011 strike of the dockworkers of the Port of Koper, who mobilized against lowering labor standards through labor outsourcing to private companies. This mobilization was significant as it also meant solidarity with immigrant workers, who made up a big portion of the outsourced labor force (see Vidmar Horvat and Učakar 2014).

As the economic malaise of the Great Recession started to hit Slovenia, and given the consensus about austerity measures among all political parties, the anti-neoliberal contention increased. On 15 October 2011, a local incarnation of Occupy Movement (15 O) organized a protest in Ljubljana, where it mobilized around 4000 participants, and Maribor, where around 500 participants turned up.[12] Immediately following the protest, some 60 activists established an encampment in front of the headquarters of the Ljubljana Stock Exchange. Indeed the movement soon became known as *Boj za*, a satirical wordplay of the Slovenian word for stock exchange in the literal meaning of the *fight for*.

Similar to other such encampments from around the globe, Occupy Ljubljana emphasized the practice of direct democracy as its core organizing principle. It is worth noting that the local variant of this organizing principle, named "democracy of direct action", went even further than assembly-based consensus creation (Razsa and Kurnik 2012). Instead of voting on every initiative through the assembly, every participant of the occupation was motivated to undertake whatever initiative they wanted and then later, only if necessary, get the approval of the assembly. As Razsa and Kurnik elaborate, critical of "we are the 99%", this local variant of Occupy emphasized the importance of "minoritarian movements", such as those of non-Slovenian ethnic communities or immigrant workers, which were socially among the most excluded ones (2012, see also Kurnik 2013, Pistotnik 2013b).[13] Parallel to the occupation in front of the Ljubljana Stock Exchange, part of the activists organized in the collective Mi smo univerza (We are University) occupied one part of the building of the Faculty of Arts. Due to

[12] Večer (2011, October 17). Protestniki hočejo novi socialni pakt, pp. 1-3, 14

[13] As recounted in an essay by one of the participants (Hrvatin 2013), the daily life of the occupation in front of the Ljubljana Stock Exchange gravitated around several main 'workshops', i.e. initiatives aiming to address various areas of interest. Through daily meetings, these workshops became spaces of experimentation with new types of activity. These included the creation of the networks of solidarity with victims of debt enforcement and evictions, as well as rethinking the concept of social work (*direktno socialno delo*) (Hrvatin 2013).

the importance of this episode for the succeeding "electoral turn", it is covered in detail in chapter five.

Left-wing activism in Serbia during the 2000s developed within the context of the newly intensified transition into capitalism, which was embraced by the post-Milošević political elites. In this period, and in particular, within the student milieu, several small groups and organizations emerged, such as the Anarchosyndicalist Initiative (Anarhosindikalistička inicijativa), established in 2002, [14] Progressive University Society "Dositej Obradović" (Progresivno univerzitetsko društvo "Dositej Obradović"), established in 2003,[15] and Social Front – Direct-Democratic Movement of Solidarity (Socijalni front), established in 2004[16]. The activities of these and similar groups were partly motivated by the local reception of the alter-globalization movement. They criticized privatization, the exploitation of workers, the commercialization of education and right-wing nationalism.

The period of the late 2000s on the Serbian left was marked by the increasing activity of the student movement. One of the important events for a large part of the local left-wing field was a six-day occupation of the Faculty of Philosophy, which took place in November 2006 as a way of contesting the commodification of higher education (see Bailović et al. 2007). [17] Although the occupation itself lasted for only six days, the protest activity lasted for three months between October and December 2006, and its demands were supported by more than 17,000 students of the University of Belgrade. The students demanded a 50% cut in tuition fees, clearer criteria for tuition waivers, and changes to the higher education reform (Bailović et al. 2007). The way students occupying the Faculty of Philosophy in 2006 constructed their collective identity as both anti-neoliberal and pro-democratic, as well as their choice of repertoire, represented a novelty in the local context (Reinprecht 2017). Occupations of the Faculty of Philosophy also took place in 2011 and 2014 (see Filipović and Jovanović 2017). In her account of student protests in a general post-Yugoslav context, Bačević (2015) rightly claims that university occupations were unprecedented in the articulation of critique oriented

[14] Anarhosindikalistička inicijativa, 2008

[15] Progresivno univerzitetsko društvo Dositej Obradović, 2009

[16] Socijalni front, 2007

[17] Occupations of the same faculty took place again in 2011 and 2014.

at neoliberal transition but also "important acts of resistance in contexts previously dominated either by silent consensus or (predominantly ethno-nationalist) cleavage politics" (Bačević 2015: 241).

Student protests reinvigorated the activity of left-wing groups and organizations in Serbia. Several notable new actors emerged, such as Marks 21 in 2008 and the Center for Politics of Emancipation in 2010. In addition, in 2010, the German political party the Left (Die Linke) opened the regional office of its Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung RLS) in Belgrade, bringing new resources for regional new left actors.

Several notable organizations were also created based on the experience of self-organized workers' protests and strikes from the end of the 2000s, covered in the previous section of the chapter, such as Ravnopravnost[18] and Zrenjanin Social Forum. Combining student protests and workers' protests, the next important step in the development of left-wing activism in Serbia was the creation of the Left Summit of Serbia (Levi samit Srbije LSS) in 2013, which at its peak gathered around twenty different groups of workers and left-wing activists from across the country.[19]

4.3 Summary

In this chapter, my main aim was to describe political contexts that structure the two cases of new left movement parties analyzed in this thesis. Based on the assumption that new left "electoral turns", as well as these turns' specific strategic articulations, are at least in part influenced by the long-term historical development of their contexts, I pointed to several dimensions of difference in the postsocialist trajectories of Slovenia and Serbia that can serve as relevant indicators in understanding the development of new left activism: (1) the type of postsocialist transformation during the 1990s, (2) the strength of the postsocialist institutional left (social democratic party and trade unions), and (3) the strength of nonelectoral left-wing activism.

[18] Ravnopravnost was initially formed as an electoral actor, managing to enter Zrenjanin city assembly in 2008 local election, but after a single mandate in 2012 returned back to nonelectoral activity. (Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung 2012)

[19] Marks21.rs (7 February 2014)

Table 4.1 Features of postsocialist trajectories of Slovenia and Serbia

Slovenia	Serbia
transformation into a liberal democracy	transformation into a competitive authoritarianism
relatively strong social democratic party and trade unions	non-existent social democratic party and relatively weak trade unions
relatively strong nonelectoral left activism	relatively weak nonelectoral left activism

Specifically, the fact that Slovenia underwent a relatively smooth transformation into liberal democracy meant that already in the 1990s, left-wing activism was developing with more freedom and pluralism and was less dependent on external resources. This is different to Serbia, where much of the left-wing activism in the 1990s was constituted with close association with liberalism and anti-authoritarianism. Second, the presence of the social democratic party and trade unions in Slovenia indicates that the influence of left-wing politics in this specific postsocialist context did not diminish as much as was the case in Serbia. At the same time, with the increasing sense of "the crisis of transition", in particular after the Great Recession, we can see the redevelopment of new left actors with anti-capitalist and anti-neoliberal ideological positions. Relatively successful cases of such movements and organizations in Slovenia in the early 2000s point to a strong early presence of various new left movements. In Serbia, however, new left activism remained relatively marginal throughout the 2000s, and its position was further aggravated by the return to competitive authoritarianism under SNS in 2012.

5 Nonelectoral Origins of New Left Movement Parties: Long Stories of Bittersweet Success

Mass protest waves are often uncritically described as novel, unexpected and spontaneous (Flesher Fominaya 2015). Given that they often emerge after mass protest waves, movement parties are also often associated with characteristics of spontaneity. And while it is correct that, from the perspective of party system stability, new electoral actors' entry and eventual success might come across as unexpected, movement parties themselves do not necessarily have to come out of rapid and simple strategic adaptation. They can rather be an outcome of a long-term process of strategic change. Tracing this process of strategic change is the main aim of this chapter.

In what follows, I recount the origins and long-term development of my two cases: IDS in Slovenia and NDB in Serbia. Based on in-depth interviews, complemented with organizational documents and media sources, in this chapter, I investigate how the movements' accumulated experience is used as the source of strategic change, eventually contributing to the decision for the movement party formation.

At the center of this chapter are the interviews with activists from activist groups who took part in the "electoral turn" and other left-wing activist groups in their environment. As discussed in the chapter on methods, the narratives presented below are only partial and can never give a complete account of left-wing activist fields in two countries. After giving a macro-level introduction to the political-economic context and development of new left activism in both countries, covered in the previous chapter, here I zoom in on the actors themselves, attempting to interpret how they changed their idea of legitimate and successful political strategy. By focusing on the events that were of central importance for activists and their groups, I trace the moments of failure, strategic learning and innovation in both cases.

Each of the case studies starts with a very brief paragraph about the moment of movement party formation and then proceeds by going back to the initial emergence of the activist group investigated. The rest of each case is presented chronologically, putting an emphasis on specific strategies and tactics preferred by the activists in different periods. Both case studies also discuss the activists' ideological articulation and attitude toward party politics and representative democracy more broadly.

5.1 IDS

The Initiative for Democratic Socialism (Iniciativa za demokratični socializem, IDS) was established and publicly presented for the first time on 30 April 2013, a day before International Workers' Day, by activists coming from several left-wing organizations and collectives. During 2013 and the beginning of 2014, IDS prepared the groundwork for the development of the new political party under the same name and the coalition "United Left". Officially established as a political party a year later and publicly presented on 8 March 2014, IDS entered the electoral competition for the first time in the EU parliamentary elections of May 2014 as part of the broader coalition, the United Left (Združena levica, ZL), that included two older but relatively marginal political parties – Sustainable Development of Slovenia (Trajnostni razvoj Slovenije, TRS) and Democratic Party of Labour (Demokratična stranka dela, DSD) – as well as an additional group of nonelectoral organizations, collectives and individuals ("The Fourth Group"). The development of IDS, in the following pages, is traced back to the late 2000s, when a number of leading activists of IDS had their first experiences of activism within student movements.

5.1.1 Revival of student activism in Slovenia (2008-2010)

The origins of IDS can be traced back to the late 2000s. Across the interviews, activists who are or were active in IDS described the period of student movements approximately between 2008 and 2010 as formative for their view of politics and political strategy. Indeed, in that period, Slovenia went through a more general revival of student activism. In only a few years, several notable student collectives emerged, often with explicit left-wing agendas and very critical of officially recognized "corporativist organizations" of student representatives. Their focus, however, was not only on the specific issues of higher education and students' living standard. They contested more general neoliberal policies, in particular their consequences such as an increase in precarious work, exploitation of immigrant workers, austerity measures and privatization.

The contentious episode that marks the beginning of new student-led contention in 2007 emerged around the collective Autonomous Tribune (Avtonomna tribuna AT), created by three interrelated groups of activists: activists of the Info Shop in Metelkova, students of the Faculty of Arts, and the students of the Faculty of Social Sciences (Nikolič and Tamše 2008). The purpose of AT was to stand up against the neoliberal aims of the newly proposed reform of higher education and research in Slovenia. In its first manifesto, AT problematized the

introduction of market-driven logic in the university system of Slovenia, demanded free access to higher education as a universal right and criticized the Slovenian government's preference for investing in the military over investing in public education.[20] AT organized a number of events throughout 2007, concentrating its activity in parallel on several faculties of the University of Ljubljana. It achieved several short-term occupations of lecture halls within four of the faculties: Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Social Sciences, Faculty of Social Work and Faculty of Pharmacy.[21] Particularly noted were demonstrations on 22 May 2007, organized by AT in front of the University of Ljubljana and the Ministry of Higher Education and Science.

Throughout 2009, student engagement in left-wing activism kept growing. For instance, on 27 April 2009, approximately 800 to 900 participants, many of them students, were mobilized under the banner of the Invisible Workers of the World (IWW), mentioned in chapter four, in a protest event that combined both anti-capitalist and anti-fascist framing.[22] Another student-based contentious episode in Slovenia took place in 2010 under the banner of the Front of Precarious (Fronta Prekercev), contesting the government's proposal of the Mini-Jobs Act, which aimed to further flexibilize an already precarious labor market, including part-time student jobs. Similar to Autonomous Tribune, Front of the Precarious had its core membership among the left-leaning students of the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Social Sciences in Ljubljana. In addition, some of the well-known figures also took part in the student association of political science students Polituss.

The members of the Front of Precarious were particularly critical of the official student representatives organized in Slovenian Student Union (Študentska organizacija Slovenije, ŠOS), claiming that representatives are insufficiently problematizing exploitative practices in student labor and are mostly concerned with maintaining the student union's income from financial contributions collected through student jobs. The Front organized the Working Group against Work (Delovna skupina proti delu) that put specific emphasis on criticizing exploitative practices in student jobs and organized several demonstrations against employers who stopped

[20] Avtonomna tribuna (2007, May 21)

[21] Avtonomna tribuna (2007, June 19)

[22] RTV Slovenija (2009, April 27). "Nestrpnost nima prostora nikjer" https://www.rtvslo.si/slovenija/nestrpnost-nima-prostora-nikjer/99482

paying out salaries to the students.[23] One of the interviewees, who later became one of the leading figures of IDS, reminisced on his own engagement with the Front of the Precarious:

> When the crisis began, a number of companies that employed students stopped paying out their salaries. And we decided to act against such companies, to draw the attention of the public to the student workers who did not receive their salary, to inform the media and publicly condemn the employers who did not pay the students. And we were successful in making them pay. (…) I then saw that with some engagement, we could make things better. (Interview S03 with Aleš)

On 19 May 2010, around 8,000 participants[24], most of them university students, gathered in two parallel demonstrations, one organized by the Front and another organized by official representatives from ŠOS. Both demonstrations took place in one of the central squares of Ljubljana, where part of the protesters entered into a conflict with the police forces and damaged the seat of the Slovenian Parliament.[25]

For many of the activists who would later form IDS, the Front of the Precarious was one of the formative experiences (see Korsika 2015). As all of them noted when asked in the interviews, the latter strategy of electoral engagement was at that time hardly imaginable. These first student-based contentious episodes were closely related to the local student and anarchist activism, invested in emphasizing the importance of autonomous organizing based on direct-democratic principles. In terms of resources and infrastructure, of particular importance in that period were Metelkova and Autonomous Factory Rog, occupations described in chapter four. The organizational structure of the abovementioned student movements relied overall on principles of horizontal, direct-democratic self-organizing, with the rejection of formal organizational representation. Take, for instance, the organizing principles of Autonomous Tribune:

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[23] http://www.njetwork.org/Direktna-akcija-izterjave

[24] Delo.si (2010, May 19). Pred parlamentom se je zgodila "mala Grčija" https://old.delo.si/novice/slovenija/pred-parlamentom-se-je-zgodila-mala-grcija.html; According to more generous assessments, the protests gathered around 15,000 participants, see: Dnevnik.si (2010, May 19) Posnetki s študentskih demonstracij: Pročelje državnega zbora nosi posledice izgredov https://www.dnevnik.si/1042360555/lokalno/1042360555

[25] Delo.si 19 May 2010

> Our operation and organization are based on self-organization and self-initiative, and on non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian and direct-democratic principles. We connect horizontally. (…) Individuals who work within the Autonomous Tribune can represent only their own personal opinion in public. Those who are selected to present Autonomous Tribune to the public are obliged to present only the conclusions of the Autonomous Tribune. (…) Autonomous Tribune is an autonomous political group and, as such, completely independent of any organizations, associations or political parties. (Avtonomna tribuna 2007, June 19)

Presenting their work in the call for the abovementioned student mobilization on 19 May 2010, the Front of Precarious and the Working Group Against Work listed four central claims of their work. Among them, under the headline "Against Representation - For Autonomous Organizing!" they stated:

> We refuse work because we refuse alienation of our powers! For this reason, we refuse political or interest representation. We do not intend to delegate our powers! We will organize our common power of all precarious and exodus from shitty society of work! Power to precarious workers!!! (Fronta prekercev 2010, May 17)

Apart from these public protest activities, one of the key activities well-represented in the in-depth interviews is the experience of participation in the Workers' and Punks' University (Delavsko punkerska univerza, DPU), an educational program organized by the Peace Institute, a Ljubljana-based research and advocacy NGO established in 1991. As its name clearly states, DPU was a nonformal educational program initiated in 1998 with the purpose of critically complementing the existing university study programs. Strongly informed by the legacies of Slovenian social movements of the 1980s, over the years, the main point of the DPU was to serve as a space for critical thinking on a broad range of topics that were devised by the coordinating board of DPU on an annual basis: from neoconservatism and the new right to political ecology and totalitarianism. The structure of the program included not only lectures but also reading circles, as well as the annual First of May School, which was organized five times from 2008 until 2013, and dealt more specifically with problems of political economy.

DPU played an important role in the ideological positioning of the activists, enabling them to confront complex topics and debate a variety of Marxist perspectives. It was, as explained by

one of the interviewees, “an academic circle” (Interview S05 with Peter). This experience of theoretical development, however, had an important role in inspiring the activists and setting the course of activities over the years. The annual programs of DPU mirrored the grievances addressed by student movements and events discussed in the previous section. For instance, the topics in the period between 2010 and 2012 were: “The class struggle after the class struggle” (2010/2011), “Financialization” (2011/2012), and “Double Crisis of European Integration” (2012/2013). [26]

To sum up, the idea of autonomy and direct-democratic organizing had central importance in the movements that served as early activist socialization for the future activists of IDS. However, this cannot be read simply as evidence of discontent with representation in the sense of electoral competition or party politics, but rather more general concern with official student representative bodies that have turned their backs on students. In terms of the predominant strategic outlook in the first phase of development, the activists were strongly focused on direct protest activity related to the neoliberalization of the university and the specific grievances of students.

5.1.2 Occupation of the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana and Working Group on Political Strategy (2011-2012)

In parallel to the events described in the previous section, Slovenia entered a period of unprecedented economic crisis, already described in chapter four. A country that used to be taken as a prime example of a gradualist transition into market economy, governed by well-established neo-corporatist structures (Mencinger 2001), was confronted with requests for privatization and the introduction of austerity coming from the international financial institutions (Stanojević 2014). Although between 2008 and 2011, the government was led by the main center-left party Social Democrats, it followed the neoliberal policy course already set by the preceding cabinet of the right-wing conservative Slovenian Democratic Party (2004-2008).

Among the initiatives of that period, the key to the later development of IDS was the initiative We are University (Mi smo univerza, MSU). Created in March 2011, MSU focused its activity

[26] See the full list of annual topics on the following link: https://sl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delavsko-punkerska_univerza

on stopping the neoliberal reform course taken by the government of centrist liberal SD under prime minister Borut Pahor, which attempted to implement a whole set of austerity measures at the universities, including but not limited to: increase in tuition fees, further degradation of student workers' rights, and laying off of non-teaching staff.

On 23 November 2011, members of MSU occupied one part of the building of the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana. The occupation articulated several core demands: access to higher education free of fees and supported through scholarships, abolition of outsourced and precarious working contracts for university staff, and a more participatory quality system of the study program.[27]

Following up on the abovementioned student-based contentious episodes, and inspired by similar student occupations which took place in Croatia in 2009[28] and Serbia in 2006, the occupation was governed by an open, direct-democratic assembly (Skupščina), which happened daily. The ambition of Skupščina was to discuss the ongoing logistical aspects of the occupation and, at the same time, to serve as an open forum for discussion of various political and social issues (Kuhar 2014).

Inspired by the principles of direct democracy, MSU was also highly critical of the institutions of representative democracy. A potential example of this critical attitude happened on the very first day of the occupation, 23 November, when a representative of the green party Youth Party - Greens (SMS-Zeleni) entered the Faculty of Arts building to express his party's support for the occupation. The students occupying the building reacted immediately by hooting down the party representative and chanting "Parties out! Parties out! Parties out!" [29] In order to better

[27] Mi smo univerza (2011, November 27)

[28] In the first meeting of MSU, on 24 March 2011 at the Faculty of Arts, the representative of students from Zagreb shared their own experience of occupation. (Mi smo univerza, 2011, March 27) On 8 November 2011, MSU declared public support for student occupation taking place in Belgrade. (Mi smo univerza, 2011, November 8) These points indicate that the mutual support and the diffusion of tactics were very much present within the ex-Yugoslav region.

[29] Delo.si (2011, November 23). Gibanje na fakulteti izžvižgalo Darka Krajnca. https://www.delo.si/novice/volitve2011/gibanje-na-fakulteti-izzvizgalo-darka-krajnca.html; RTV Slovenija (2011, November 23). Dnevnik https://4d.rtvslo.si/arhiv/dnevnik/121740836

understand the students' motivation in this episode, I asked my interviewees to recount what happened on that specific day, using a brief news report as a tool of elicitation. All interviewees stated that they saw the expression of support from political parties as an act of opportunism, with politicians trying to profiteer from symbolic association with the student movement. In order to avoid this, they immediately and spontaneously reacted by distancing from parties and party politics. From a contemporary point of view, as one of the interviewees mentioned, it cannot be interpreted as an explicitly and elaborately anti-party sentiment:

> Looking from the present perspective, after all those years, I have an impression that this was not necessarily an aversion to political parties as a form of political organizing. At the same time, I can hardly imagine that any party at that moment would get any better treatment. (…) This was an immediate reaction to these people's arrival, not an outcome of elaborate thinking. (Interview S01 with Igor)

After its initial success at taking control over one part of the building, the occupation soon started to descend. Although the administration of the Faculty of Arts, including the dean, initially welcomed the occupation, only one week later, it started to distance itself from the students (Kuhar 2014). Lack of support did not come only from the administration, but what is more, from part of the professors and students (Kuhar 2014).

In spite of the efforts by the activists of MSU, on 23 January 2012, two months after its beginning, the occupation ended without achieving its goals. In discussing the internal weakness of the occupation, two interviewees recounted that the occupation lacked some specific and attainable goals (Interview S05 with Peter, Interview S06 with Jure). As recounted in another interview:

> I remember that I warned the others on several occasions that the occupation could not go on forever. (…) We should have had an attainable goal that would allow us to stop the occupation without weakening the morale of those participating, and the whole thing dying out as usual. (…) This would have allowed us to stop the occupation and declare victory. (Interview S01 with Igor)

Indeed, as testified in an article by two student leaders that would later be among the founding members of IDS, Luka Mesec and Anej Korsika, the 2011 Occupation of the Faculty of Arts provoked an increased reflection on the potentials but also limits of new left activism based on student identity and university-related issues:

> On this basis and through the reflection of experiences of the occupation a clear understanding was formed that different and most importantly much stronger organizational forms are necessary. Forms that will be able to go beyond university struggle and ultimately address the universal struggle in our society, i.e. class struggle. (Korsika and Mesec 2014)

In reflecting on this quote, one of the interviewees mentioned the challenges of direct-democratic decision-making:

> The thing develops spontaneously, but nobody gives a direction, and soon it dilutes if there is no structure in the background. I think this was the key issue. You cannot have this if you want to build an organization that can survive, grow big and implement a certain strategy. Not an organization that emerges and fades out immediately. (Interview S05 with Peter)

As narrated in the two quotes above, in addition to the lack of attainable goals, the student movement confronted the weaknesses of the organizational nature. Based on the experiences of the interviewees, they felt that the general lack of organizational structure had a detrimental impact on the movement's capacity to reach beyond the limits of the urban student population and strategically engage with social change on a more general level involving a broader population.

5.1.3 Rethinking strategy (2012)

For the core of the activists who would later move into the electoral arena through IDS, the events of 2011 were indeed formative and significant in many ways. However, as is well known in social movement studies, public protest events represent only one part of the story of movement strategy development, meaning that the researcher needs to look for all instances of public claim-making unrelated to protest (Koopmans and Statham 1999) as well as private or semi-private events (Rossi 2016).

DPU was also the place for reflection on political strategy. Soon after the Occupation of the Faculty of Arts came to its end, sometime in 2012, members of DPU started to organize a nonformal Working Group on Political Strategy (Delovna skupina za politično strategijo DSPS) (Korsika and Mesec 2014). The working group came in the context of relative disappointment with the results of the preceding occupation, as activists were becoming aware that they needed to envision a new approach to organizing:

> We were frustrated with the lack of continuity of our activities, while at the same time, the structure of the state and the capital against which we were struggling had their continuity. Those are rank-and-file organizations. And that Sisyphean task of continuous attempts started to frustrate us. (Interview S02 with Robert)

One of the initiators of the working group elaborated in the interview on the potential strategic options that were discussed within DSPS. First, the activists were assessing the strategic potential in building closer collaboration with associations memorializing the anti-fascist struggle of the Second World War. Their umbrella organization - Union of the Associations for the Values of the National Liberation Movement of Slovenia (Zveza združenj borcev za vrednote Narodnoosvobodilnega boja Slovenija, ZZB NOB) - according to the 2016 data, had 82 organizations and more than 42,000 individuals in its membership.[30] Although its activity is primarily focused on organizing memorial events and publishing activities related to the WW2 anti-fascist struggle, rather than explicit promotion of any political program, it is among the organizations with the largest membership in the country and is organizationally present in all parts of Slovenia.

The second option that was assessed was to build closer cooperation with trade unions, in particular the Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia (Zveza svobodnih sindikatov Slovenije, ZSSS). Organized in several confederations, trade unions in Slovenia still gather in their membership a significant part of the workforce. Although they have managed to keep relevance relative to trade union organizing in other countries of former Yugoslavia, in recent years, they have also been increasingly put under pressure (see chapter four). Given their relevance, activists saw a lot of potential in refocusing trade unionism toward more anti-systemic left-wing stances.

In the cases of both ZZB NOB and ZSSS, the activists soon came to the conclusion that reshaping such large and highly institutionalized organizations is not a feasible option:

> They were clearly sympathetic to us, but it soon turned out that these organizations were not primarily political in the sense of party politics or direct involvement in the party arena. (Interview S02 with Robert)

[30] ZZB NOB (2016)

Finally, apart from potential greater collaboration with the two organizations that were usually perceived as nonelectoral, the activists were also evaluating the possibility of entering the mainstream center-left party Social Democrats and changing it from within. Although they had some contacts with leading figureheads of the party, according to several interviewees this was never actually perceived as a feasible option (Interview S02 with Robert, Interview S06 with Jure, Interview S07 with Alenka).

The three evaluated strategic options - cooperation with anti-fascist associations, cooperation with trade unions, and a type of entryist strategy with the Social Democrats - rested on the assumption that, in order to create a strong radical left organization capable of anti-capitalist mobilization, it is necessary to move beyond the issues and grievances addressed within the student movement, as well as move beyond the horizontalist organizing (see also Toplišek and Thomassen 2017, Toplišek 2019).

At that point, however, the idea of entering party politics through an independent organization still seemed rather unrealistic:

> It generally seemed to us that, even if we had a party, we wouldn't know what to do with it. The elections were nowhere in sight. There was no strong pressure. Maybe we were considering organizing a political party in two years' time, but we didn't know. Our circle was very small. (…) I remember that we were so few that we were sitting at one small table, just like the two of us right now [laughter]. In that sense, the question of organizing a political party was not seriously discussed. (Interview S07 with Alenka)

Another interviewee claimed that the reason for focusing on collaboration with already existing organizations and Social Democrats came from the contention that any political party needs to be based on previously organized networks. And at that point, they were aware that their network was mostly limited to an academic milieu based in Ljubljana (Interview S03 with Aleš). The thinking about strategic limits was, however, soon challenged in November 2012 with the outbreak of one of the most massive protest waves in the history of Slovenia. I focus on that period in chapter six.

5.2 NDB

The electoral initiative Do Not Let Belgrade D(r)own (NDB) has its immediate origins in contentious activity against the large-scale urban development project Belgrade Waterfront (BW) that started to unfold in late 2014. After two massive anti-establishment protest waves that shook Serbia in 2016 and 2017, the initiative, which was up to that point exclusively nonelectoral and nonpartisan, decided to enter the electoral arena and compete in the Belgrade City Assembly election in March 2018. Although the initiative did not manage to pass the 5% electoral threshold, its entry into electoral politics represented an important turning point in the context of the new left in Serbia. In what follows, the origins of the electoral initiative NDB are traced back to 2011.

5.2.1 Initial attempts at reclaiming the urban spaces (2011-2014)

The postsocialist transition has left a palpable mark on the urban development of Serbia, and in particular, its capital of Belgrade. The inhabitants of this rapidly expanding metropolis, which used to be the capital of Yugoslav federations, have for most of the last three decades struggled with the lack of adequate living space and decaying public infrastructure (see Petrović 2001, Vilenica 2017). With the gradual shutdown of the city's once vivid industrial zones, the city population has been left with vast abandoned spaces. In many cases, this was an outcome of corrupt privatization processes and asset-stripping through which the city and the state sold their property at an undervalued price as a way of meeting the needs of the governing politicians' supporters.

Reflection on these large urban problems and injustices created by neoliberal deregulation motivated a group of activists to get organized in the collectives Who Builds the City? (Ko gradi grad? KGG) and Ministry of Space (Ministarstvo prostora MP). As he was sharing his memory of their earliest common experiences, one of the activists mentioned a general sense of injustice:

> Well, [we shared] a relationship, a sense of injustice about various redistributions of resources. In spatial terms, this was very clear and banal: "A punk band has no place to play." Or: "Why do we have to pay for using some space?" And there was this feeling of injustice: "Why somebody *can* and we *cannot*?" (Interview B02 with Luka)

As mentioned in the quote above, the activism of NDB at the time was already resonant with the Right to the City movement practices. The activists' strategy was to demonstrate that the abandoned urban spaces can serve both activists and broader local communities. Through a variety of tactics, including occupations and public performances, the activists attempted to practically demonstrate the abandoned spaces' potential.

Although partly relying on the form of NGO, the activists were very critical of project-based funding and bureaucratizing tendencies within the usual framework of civil society. For instance, while engaging in fundraising as an NGO, they purposefully attempted to avoid donor-driven organizing, which also meant that they lost some of the funding opportunities and maintained equality in salaries (Interview B02 with Luka, Interview B03 with Milica, see also Morača 2016).

The first attempt at reclaiming such an abandoned space happened through the occupation of the premises of Inex Film, which took place in April 2011. In addition to the activists of KGG and MP, the occupation involved two additional groups: a group of anarchists aiming to create an autonomous space and a group of artists looking for a place where they could create and exhibit their work (see Schulze 2017). In the following months, across the space of 1500 square meters, the activists managed to clean up the space and set up a number of activities – some of them independently, some of them in collaboration. These activities included one-off events, such as exhibitions or concerts[31], but also some long-term programs, such as an urban garden and an autonomist kindergarten.[32]

Initially, the activists were convinced that Inex Film premises were in public ownership, but soon after the beginning of their occupation, it turned out that the building was privately owned. The owner, to everyone's surprise, turned out to be benevolent toward the activists' efforts and did not try to evict them immediately (Interview B11 with Vuk). The police also did not try to evict the activists, as the activists' presence meant that the abandoned building was not a hub for various illegal activities, as it had been for a long period.

The occupation was to be governed through consensus reached at weekly meetings of all users of the space. Although it was not facing immediate external threats, it soon faced a variety of

[31] e.g. Ekspedicija Inex Film (2011, November 8, December 24, 2012, March 14)

[32] Architectuul.com (2011). Expedition Inex Film https://architectuul.com/architecture/expedition-inex-film

internal conflicts. As narrated by an activist, while at the very beginning, the occupation nurtured cooperation and solidarity, after only a few months, the conflicts about the character and the purpose of the space took off:

> As long as Inex had a common space - we were working together. And these first six months were a case of small "applied" communism. Everybody was involved. (…) But, at some point, groups involved have started to act in a selfish manner, trying to take the benefits for themselves and privatize the control over parts of the common space. And this created initial problems. The decision-making was very hard because those who were first to come attempted to claim a superior position in meetings. (…) We saw this space as an instrument for addressing the needs which go beyond individual groups, and at that point, this was not achievable anymore. (Interview B05 with Dušan)

As recounted in the quote, the key challenge in Inex Film was keeping the focus on the "commonality" of the space beyond the particularistic needs of specific collectives involved. This was not only the issue of the best and the most efficient handling of space but also the issue of its political purpose. Some collectives participating in the occupation simply saw the space as means of satisfying their individual or organizational needs for resources without a strong urge for a shared ideological and political vision of the space. Some others, mostly those who were part of the anarchist collective, saw Inex as an instrument of explicit political struggle against various injustices.

One of the members of the anarchist collective that was active in Inex aptly summed up the conflict as a divergence in understanding of freedom:

> The artists had the idea of freedom as something you *can* do. They needed a space where they could extend themselves as widely as possible. And our [anarchist collective's] idea of freedom was to keep the space where people that were historically oppressed, or people who were meeting unfreedom on a daily basis, find freedom. And that means keeping the space clear of certain elements. (Interview B10 with Nikola)

As previous research on the case of Inex Film underlined, these two groups were in conflict for most of the occupation, while KGG and MP activists were described as "mediator strata" attempting to hold the involved groups together (see Schulze 2017, especially for the period between 2012 and 2015). Indeed, the activist quoted above remarked during our interview that,

at the time of Inex Film, a running joke about KGG and MP activists was: "When will they run in elections?" (Interview B10 with Nikola). Already at this point, the activists of KGG and MP were confronted with the challenges of alliance building and mediating in order to keep things together.

In parallel to their involvement and later withdrawal from the Inex Film occupation between 2011 and 2013, the focus of KGG and MP moved on to other abandoned spaces in their environment - the public cinemas. The main point of the campaign on abandoned cinemas, named "Cinemas: The Return of the Written-Offs", was to remind citizens of the privatization of the public company Beograd Film in 2007, which immediately brought to the shutting down of fourteen cinemas across the city. This new campaign aimed at various interventions in public spaces in an attempt to remind the public of the importance of cinema. One example of such public action, which took place in November 2011, was a series of interventions or performances on four abandoned cinema buildings across Belgrade (20. Oktobar, Balkan, Odeon and Slavica), reminding the local communities of the buildings' former function.

In order to better comprehend and triangulate the activists' strategic reasoning at the time, it is useful to turn to the transcripts of the discussion, which took place on 13 December 2011 in the occupied spaces of Inex Film. This discussion evaluated a series of actions within the campaign described above and discussed future strategy (Ekspedicija Inex Film 2011).

The meeting participants extensively discussed the best way to provoke the revival of cinemas – through petitions and advocacy or through direct protest action. Within the meeting transcripts, this dilemma is succinctly described in the question posed by a KGG/ MP activist who later became one of the core activists of NDB:

> Do you think we should do such things through the system, by gathering signatures, organizing a union of film associations, and contacting some governmental official in charge of this - or do you think we should do some performances and express protest (…) In other words: through the system or around the system[33] to achieving our goal? (Ekspedicija Inex Film 2011: 137)

The dilemma quoted above gives an idea of what was the early strategic reasoning of the activists of KGG and MP - the strategy was discussed in relation to the potentials offered by

[33] Literal translation from Serbian: izvan sistema - out of the system

the institutional and extra-institutional means. While some participants preferred one strategic approach over the other, by the end of the meeting, the best way forward seemed to entail a simultaneous effort through institutional channels and extra-institutional channels of pressure. Such a flexible strategic approach to the dilemma demonstrates that already in 2011, the activists were open to the strategic repertoire with more confrontational characteristics.

Again, as much as can be deduced from the transcripts, the political purpose of occupation as a type of contentious repertoire was one of the topics. While for some, the goal was to set up a functional independent cinema, for others, it was a broader struggle for cinemas as spaces of community and culture that would be independent of the market logic.

The peak of the campaign happened in 2014, when the activists occupied Cinema Zvezda, one of the abandoned cinema buildings in central Belgrade. The first attempt at occupation, which took place in February 2014, was immediately noticed by the police and brought to the eviction of the occupation before it even started. The second attempt at occupying Zvezda, in November of the same year, brought more success, which activists' narratives associated with the change in tactics:

> In comparison to the first attempt, this time, we basically contacted all journalists covering culture during the months preceding the occupation. We took our time to explain the point of the action, and this brought results. Therefore, when we occupied the cinema for the second time, the media were overwhelmingly appraising this action. This was very powerful. (Interview B05 with Dušan)

As recounted above, the change in tactics was related to learning from the failed experience of a previous attempt at occupying the cinema. In order to strengthen the occupation, instead of working on their own, they made sure to build a broader consensus about the importance of their action, which included the media as well as the milieu of professional film artists (directors, actors, producers, etc.) early on in the process of preparation. This meant that the occupation was less threatened by various external actors, including authorities and repressive apparatus.

Being the first example of such an occupation in Serbia, but also in broader Southeastern Europe, it soon received attention in the domestic and international media, as well as the public endorsement of globally acclaimed intellectuals and artists, such as Michel Gondry and Alan Badiou. In a brief manifesto titled "We are here, and cinema is ours", activists criticized public authorities' neglect of culture and cultural content for young people. Following up on the

campaign which they started in 2011, activists were trying to focus the attention of the public on the corrupt process of privatization of the company Beograd Film. The occupation immediately confronted the issue of resources and sustainability, as it relied exclusively on voluntary work and financial resources collected from the general public through a crowdfunding campaign.

As in the case of Inex Film, the debates over the occupation's political purpose emerged as the point of conflict among the involved groups. According to one of the activists of KKG/MP, there was an overall lack of trust between the two main groups of activists, as well as a lack of mutual understanding:

> There was antagonism against the term "political" because "political" was associated with "partisan". I think that was the key problem. And then they [film workers] insisted on the claim that it was an artistic act, not a political one. Thus, each attempt at persuading others about the political nature of their actions was rejected as unacceptable. (Interview B03 with Milica)

As mentioned by the interviewee, the meaning of the occupation, including its political purpose, was a heavily controversial issue within the meetings.[34] Similar conflict can also be traced from one of the prominent episodes within the occupation that took place in December 2014: the visit of Alexis Tsipras to Cinema Zvezda. At that point, Tsipras was the frontrunner in the Greek parliamentary election that was about to take place only two months later. During his official visit to Belgrade, where he met with the president of the republic and other political figureheads (see Baković Jadžić 2014), Tsipras was also welcomed to Cinema Zvezda by part of the occupation organizers. However, for some of the activists, mostly from the groups of film workers, Tsipras was not welcome, and they decided to sabotage his visit. For some of them, the issue lay in the fact that Tsipras was a politician rather than a film worker.[35]

Reflecting on this specific episode, an activist of NDB mentioned that Tsipras was not the only politician who visited the occupation. Given the abject lack of any resources, they saw politicians' support as a potential way of getting institutional support:

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[34] This narrative has also been presented in the documentary movie 'Occupied Cinema' (director: Senka Domanović, 2018).

[35] See Medenica 2014, Horvat 2015, Ristić 2015 for a polemic that ensued in the media.

A: We knew it's much easier to convince a politician into something instead of going to the barricades. I'm certain that we were not thinking about political engagement in the sense of classical party politics, but we did welcome various political officials visiting the occupation.

Q: As a way of legitimizing the occupation?

A: Well, yes. For instance, if the head of the City Secretariat for Culture comes to the occupation, you want him to approve of it. That could be part of the solution. We were always pragmatic in that sense. (Interview B11 with Vuk)

As explained by the interviewee, the strategy of demonstrating the potential of abandoned spaces came with an ambiguous type of tactics. On the one hand, the activists were creating an occupation that in itself was explicitly disobeying the law and the institutions. On the other, they were looking for ways in which they could institutionalize the occupation and promote it as a case of successful reclaiming of an abandoned public space.

Finally, in this period, in parallel to occupation activities in Inex and Zvezda, the activists of KGG/MP had success in advocating for the creation of the Street Gallery – through the project approved and supported by the city authority, a derelict alley was refurbished and remade into an open-air exhibition space. Although less complicated relative to the abovementioned occupations, the activists "struggled for two exhausting years" (Interview B03 with Milica) in order to get the recognition and support of the city government. However, different to the two abovementioned cases of occupation, Street Gallery represents a case of success through a drastically different strategy to the one utilized in the case of Inex Film and Cinema Zvezda.

5.2.2 Beginning the contestation over the BW project: Broadening the mobilization (2014-2016)

Reflecting on the early thematic focus of KGG and MP, and comparing it with a more recent focus on BW, one of the interviewees mentioned that the topic of abandoned urban spaces was never going to attract a large group of people but rather remain within a small milieu of artists and activists in independent culture: "The topic was sexy, but it did not bear political power. This [political power] came with Belgrade Waterfront" (Interview B03 with Milica). Throughout 2014, even before the beginning of the Cinema Zvezda occupation, activists of KGG and MP were gradually refocusing their activity on the growing issue of the BW project.

The main activists' strategy in this period was participation in legislative proceedings in an attempt to stop the government's plans by legal means.

Before describing how activists organized against the project, it is first necessary to outline the significance of the BW project in the context of Belgrade and Serbia. The story of BW started already in 2012. Under the slogan "Let's get Serbia moving!" (*Pokrenimo Srbiju!*), as one of the central points of its political manifesto, the newcomer Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) promised large-scale infrastructural investment and redevelopment of the waterfront area in the country's capital. SNS was, at that point, still a developing political actor (see also chapter four), and it was not fully clear whether it would be able to win power, let alone successfully implement the project. Indeed, before the 2012 election, this may have seemed just an empty electoral promise. However, after SNS succeeded to win in three elections that all took place in May 2012 - presidential, parliamentary and local - it gradually turned out that BW was an actual plan.

The only exception to the advancements of SNS in May 2012 was the City Assembly of Belgrade, which remained in the hands of the oppositional Democratic Party (DS). However, soon afterward, SNS managed to provoke early elections both in Belgrade and on the national level with the aim of consolidating its position in power. On 16 March 2014, elections were held simultaneously for both National Assembly and Belgrade City Assembly. On the national level, SNS doubled the previous result, winning 48.35% of votes and an absolute majority of seats in the Serbian parliament.[36] With similar success, SNS won 43.6% of the votes in Belgrade City Assembly[37], getting its prominent member Siniša Mali into the seat of the city mayor. With SNS holding an absolute majority in the national parliament and the position of the mayor of Belgrade, the implementation of the BW project was ready to begin.

The project was surrounded by controversy from the very beginning for at least two reasons. First, its planned impact was vast. It envisioned restructuring around 2 million square meters in the very center of the capital into a luxurious commercial and residential quarter. Just to mention a few of the consequences, the project planned reshaping of important streets and

[36] Republic Electoral Commission of the Republic of Serbia, archived official website http://arhiva.rik.parlament.gov.rs/latinica/arhiva-izbori-za-narodne-poslanike-2014.php

[37] Radiotelevision of Serbia (2014, 17 March), Konačni rezultati izbora za Beograd https://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/2208/izbori-2014/1550749/konacni-rezultati-izbora-za-beograd.html

avenues around the area, dislocation of the central bus station and even closing down of the main railway station that had been in the same location for more than a century - since 1895. In place of various public spaces and services, high-end commercial and residential skyscrapers would be erected.

In addition to its impact, there were many suspicions about corruptive deals between the national government, the city government and the private investor Eagle Hills headquartered in the United Arab Emirates. According to the initial announcements of prime minister Aleksandar Vučić, the agreement between Eagle Hills and the Serbian government would bring more than 3.5 billion euros of direct investment by the private investor into the construction of BW. Once parts of the contract between the Serbian government and Eagle Hills were disclosed, it turned out that the investment's value was significantly lower - only 150 million euros was to be invested by Eagle Hills, while Serbia was supposed to invest at least around 280 million euros (Slavković 2015). In return, the investor was given a 99-year lease of the area,[38] free of charge, and "fast-tracking" of legal proceedings necessary for construction to begin, including a legal mechanism for fast expropriation of private and public ownership found in the area. One of the first public events discussing these and other problems with BW was organized by the Ministry of Space collective within the conference of the International Network for Urban Research and Action (INURA), which took place on 24 June 2014.[39] This initial discussion, however, did not focus on potential strategies for contesting the project but rather, more generally, on the project's implications for urban space.

In this initial period of developments around BW, during 2014 and at the beginning of 2015, the authorities were focused on ensuring a legal framework through several legislative acts in the national and the local government. The activists were closely following these legislative proceedings, at first trying to utilize their right to participate in them as members of the public. One of the first such episodes was the public session of the *City Planning Committee for the plan of Drafts of the Amendments to the General (Urban) Plan of Belgrade,* which happened on 22 July 2014. During the long six-hour session, the activists took the stand, defending their comments on the plan draft one after another. Notwithstanding their efforts, not a single one of

[38]Beograd.rs (2015, October 2) Синиша Мали: Зашто браним Београд на води https://www.beograd.rs/index.php?kat=beoinfo&lang=cir&sub=1703653%3f

[39] INURA (2014)

more than 1200 written amendments and suggestions to the Amendments of the General Urban Plan, submitted by 21 institutions and 238 individuals[40], was accepted by the authorities. The experience of outright ignorance demonstrated by the aforementioned committee strengthened the activists' resolve to disrupt the further process. On 18 September 2014, the new General Urban Plan was adopted by the City Council, and already on 5 November 2014, the city authorities organized a public discussion on Special Purpose Spatial Plan proposed for the BW project. Recounting the 5 November session, an activist said:

> Since they were not listening to us and they were doing something clearly illegal, we decided not to try to change the session proceedings but to make them cancel it. Because if they do not hold a session, they cannot accept that plan. For this reason, we came with beach toys and swim tubes and just yelled and sang as loud as we could. We thought that if we behaved like idiots, they would kick us out, and then we would give statements to the media. The aim was to provoke a scandal in order to finally attract some media attention. (Interview B01 with Tijana)

As narrated in the quote, based on the experience of previous participation in public proceedings, this time, the activists decided to join the session with the sole aim of disrupting it at any cost - under the name "Operacija Šlauf" (Serbian for "Operation Swim Tube"), the activists played with beach toys, yelled and sang during the session. The event was reported in several media outlets.[41] Sometime around this point, the activists started to use the phrase "Do not let Belgrade d(r)own" not only as their slogan but also as the name of their new initiative. Under that title, as an additional change of tactic, the activists decided to print their own free

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[40] It is worth noting that most of the written amendments and suggestions were prepared in a workshop organized by the Ministry of Space on 4 July 2014. That event was mentioned in many interviewees' reflections about this period. According to one of the interviewees, on that occasion the phrase 'Do not let Belgrade d(r)own' first surfaced as the proposal (Interview with Vuk). One of the earliest mentions of the phrase in the media can be traced in the report of public session of the *City Planning Committee for plan of Drafts of the Amendments to the General (Urban) Plan of Belgrade*. czkd.org (2014, July 2014). Izveštaj: Ne da(vi)mo Beograd. https://www.czkd.org/stance/izvestaj-ne-davimo-beograd/

[41] Blic.rs (2014, November 5). Aktivisti inicijative "Ne da(vi)mo Beograd" šlaufovima i pesmom ometali sednicu o "Beogradu na vodi". https://www.blic.rs/vesti/beograd/aktivisti-inicijative-ne-davimo-beograd-slaufovima-i-pesmom-ometali-sednicu-o/8y93r4k

newspapers as a way of spreading information about the project to the wider public. On one occasion, as they were distributing the newspapers in front of the City Assembly on 19 March 2015, the activists were illegally arrested by the communal police, which at the time had no right to arrest citizens.[42] This was only the first one in a long series of authority-exceeding actions by the repressive apparatus.

In January 2015, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Special Purpose Spatial Plan and soon afterward, the legislative drama culminated on 9 April 2015 with the decision of the National Assembly of Serbia, under the absolute majority of SNS, to adopt *Law establishing the public interest and special procedures of expropriation and issuance of the construction permit for the realization of the project "Belgrade Waterfront".* This law, which was designed as a special law (*lex specialis*) to the general *Law on expropriation*, introduced several fundamental exceptions to the process of expropriation in the land area leased to Eagle Hills. First, it reshaped the legal definition of public interest in order to include commercial and residential buildings, which were not foreseen in the *Law on expropriation*. Second, it allowed for a faster and more efficient process of expropriation and related cadastral procedures.[43]

Although the adoption of the special law meant that the fight through institutions was effectively lost, on the day of its adoption, the activists installed a 2-meter-tall replica of a yellow rubber duck. The duck, whose purpose was to remind the public about corrupt activity implanted within the BW project plans, soon became the central symbol of the movement Do Not Let Belgrade D(r)own. The duck was a way of provoking the reaction of the mainstream media and the governing establishment, both of which have been ignoring the activity of NDB up to that point. In the context of this whole case, the installation of the duck can also be used as a symbol of the change in tactics of activists. Faced with failed attempts to disrupt the governmental apparatus, they moved their contention into the streets.

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[42] B92.net (2015 March 19). Komunalci privodili ili asistirali? https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2015&mm=03&dd=19&nav_category=12&nav_id=970592

[43] For more details, see legal interpretation of the Law published by 'Cvetković, Skoko and Jovičić' joint law office (available at: https://www.cplaw.rs/law-establishing-the-public-interest-and-special-procedures-of-expropriation-and-issuance-of-the-construction-permit-for-realization-of-the-project-belgrade-waterfront/)

Only a few weeks after the legislative ground for the project was prepared, the date of 27 April 2015 was set for the signing of the contract between the government and the investor. The signing of the agreement presented itself as an occasion for one of the first protest events organized by Do Not Let Belgrade D(r)own. And already, on this first occasion, several hundreds of activists who gathered for the protest were confronted by a blockade set up by the police, who did not allow them to approach the building. In addition to the police, on the other side of the road, two tram cars were parked in front of the building in which the signing ceremony took place to cover up the sight of the protest. Although the reporting on the protest found its way to some of the media, part of the media controlled by the government continued a 'blockade'. For instance, the public broadcaster Radio Television of Serbia mentioned the protest only marginally, while tabloids with the largest circulation, Informer and Kurir, kept the protest virtually unreported. Similar was the coverage of a smaller protest aimed at contesting the illegal construction of the exclusive riverside restaurant Savanova on 30 July and the performance criticizing the mayor on 14 September.

The next big event took place on 27 September, when the construction of the BW was initiated with the public cornerstone laying ceremony. In response to this event, two thousand participants articulated their disagreement with the project, but this time they were not able to get even nearby the location of the ceremony. In the last few months of 2015, the initiative retained its activity through a smaller event at the end of November and the publishing of the second issue of the initiative's newspapers that they later on directly distributed to the citizens.

In this initial period of protesting against the BW project, oppositional political parties did not show much interest in supporting NDB activities:

> For two full years, I cannot remember a single politician approaching us. We had no space to position ourselves toward them because we simply did not interest them. (Interview B01 with Tijana)

Considering that in August 2013, one of the most prominent leaders of the opposition, at that time, serving as the president of the Democratic Party and mayor of Belgrade, co-organized the meetings about the implementation of the project and recognized it as "an important

development", it is understandable that activists were keeping at a distance from the opposition.[44]

Oppositional parties started to criticize the project only later on. In the abovementioned event on 27 September 2015, two opposition parties jointly organized a separate protest event in parallel to the one already organized by NDB. The parties' protests gathered a number of well-known opposition leaders who attracted the attention of the media. This was an important lesson for the activists of NDB:

> At this protest in Savamala, the president of the New Party showed up. And just because he showed up, all the attention of the media was on him. I have nothing against that; he can do whatever he wants. But the problem is that he never made any effort to stop the project. Nothing. (Interview B05 with Dušan)

Based on these early experiences, activists started to be increasingly careful in emphasizing NDB's independence from the oppositional political parties.

As 2016 began, the political context started to change with the government's decision to call for early parliamentary elections, meaning the third parliamentary elections in four years' time. As with the previous electoral cycle of 2014, the reason was not to be found in governmental instability (Vučićević 2016). On the contrary, with an absolute majority in the parliament, the governing Serbian Progressive Party had no obvious reason for organizing snap elections. The early elections enabled them to provoke the co-occurrence of local elections with national parliamentary elections, meaning the potential for even greater consolidation of the governing party's electoral power. Interestingly, one of the lists of candidates in local elections tried to imitate the identity and the name of the NDB initiative. It was soon discovered that this attempt at appropriation was organized by the members of the governing party, who aimed to attract voters in several electoral circles for local elections.[45]

At the beginning of 2016, with the experience of many failures, the activists were starting to again reconsider their strategy. Their attempts at contesting the BW had been showing no signs

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[44] Radiotelevision of Serbia (2013, August 15). Vučić i Đilas o "Beogradu na vodi", https://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/9/politika/1378254/vucic-i-djilas-o-beogradu-na-vodi.html

[45] rs.n1info.com (2016, March 21) Ko stoji iza liste "Patkica – Ne Beogradu na vodi"? http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a144938/Izborna-lista-Patkica-ko-je-iza.html

of success for more than two years. The construction work was taking off, and they were still far away from any significant mobilization. An activist recounted the skepticism from that period:

> After more than two years of contesting BW, at the beginning of 2016, we said, "Ok, this has been going on for far too long; let's try to see which are their next steps and what we are doing about it." (Interview B01 with Tijana)

The skepticism lasted until the elections that took place on 24 April 2016. On the one hand, the result was not encouraging. The Serbian Progressive Party successfully kept its position well above the absolute majority of mandates in the National Assembly of Serbia. With such overwhelming power, SNS was finally enabled to fully implement all plans related to the BW project. On the other hand, on the very same night, a crime took place in the area of the future BW project. This crime represented a small but significant crack in the SNS hegemonic position, initiating a popular mobilization unprecedented since the Overthrow of Milošević in October 2000. In the months to come, as I will elaborate in the following two chapters, this mobilization made NDB one of the most important political actors in the country.

5.3 Summary

In this chapter, I argued that, in order to understand why and how activists decide to take the "electoral turn", we need to trace the long-term development of their groups and collectives. In other words, although the "electoral turn" is immediately associated with an eventful anti-establishment protest wave, in both contexts, this moment was preceded by the long-term activity of activists and their groups. Let me now briefly discuss the key aspects of this long-term process of development shared across the two cases.

The case study of the development of IDS shows that the activists and activist groups that formed the political party in 2014 had for a long time been proactively thinking about their political strategy. They started their activity in the student movements of the late 2000s, strongly influenced by the ideas of autonomism and horizontalism. Over the years of student activism, the activists developed an increasingly critical attitude toward various limitations of horizontal and loosely structured organizations. They also became increasingly critical of the limitations of student activism and, in the aftermath of the Occupation of the Faculty of Arts, started to look for new channels of influence through several large organizations with the aim of channeling their influence through these organizations as a basis for broader popular mobilization. The interviews show that the activists who later formed IDS were critical of

representative politics, in particular student representatives that failed to channel various student demands.

The case study of the development of NDB points to the initiative's dynamic relationship with political strategy way before it engaged in party-political competition in 2018. In the earliest phase of their activity, the activists were experimenting with the boundaries of cooperation and conflict with local and state authorities. While taking over the defunct buildings and organizing occupations, they were also open to cooperation and were hoping for institutional recognition of their efforts. However, with the exception of Street Gallery, the activists were confronted with very limited reaction or willingness to cooperate on behalf of the institutional actors. In addition to the relatively weak effect of the occupations in achieving the activists' goals, as shown in both events central to this phase, the strategic issue of the occupations' political purpose loomed large. The activist field was full of discussions about the dichotomies between political and apolitical, between politicization and depoliticization, and between ideology and expertise. The contestation over the ideological positioning and goals of both occupations, as well as struggles over procedures and forms of decision-making, pointed to important differences in the understanding of political strategy.

With the advent of the BW project, the initiative started to engage in more confrontational tactics, first within the institutional proceedings and later through means of mass protest. The process of strategic innovation stands out sharply. In their first phase, the activists were focused on demonstrating the solutions to spatial injustice by putting to use the abandoned urban environment that could work out as a counterpoint to neoliberal urban development. In their second phase, they recognized the need to engage in public conflict with local and state authorities attempting to introduce a large-scale urban restructuring project. While they kept their presence in some of the activities from the previous phase, their strategy now primarily focused on mass mobilization as an instrument that can be used against neoliberal urban development. This strategic innovation and its gradual extension into the party-political arena is further elaborated in the following two chapters.

In their initial development, both groups experimented with various tactics of protest. In Serbia, disruptive tactics were, along the lines of the Right to the City movement, related primarily to the aim of demonstrating the potential of abandoned urban spaces. In Slovenia, the disruptive tactics aimed at problematization of neoliberalizing tendencies within the higher education system and related exploitation of students with part-time jobs.

Table 5.1 Chronology of movements' development

NDB, Serbia (2011-2018)			IDS, Slovenia (2007-2014)		
Time period	Events	Tactics	Time period	Events	Tactics
2011-2014	- Inex Film, Zvezda	- occupation - advocacy activity	2007-2010	- protest mobilization related to student labour and migrant labour	- protest mobilization
2014-04/2016	- legislative proceedings and the beginning of the BW project	- participation in legislative proceedings - protest mobilization	2011-11/2012	- Occupation of the Faculty of Arts (Zasedba) - Working Group for Political Strategy	- occupation - protest mobilization
05/2016-07/2016	Anti-establishment protest wave		11/2012-03/2013	Anti-establishment protest wave	
03/2018	Initial electoral engagement		05/2014	Initial electoral engagement	

Although the actors dealt with two different topics, in both cases, the activists were trying to use NGO-related resources to attain general political goals (see also Morača 2016, Dolenec, Doolan and Tomašević 2017). More detailed biographical data may confirm that such a characteristic could be interpreted as an outcome of generational change in activism (see Stubbs 2012). Indeed, all of the core activists interviewed in both cases were born in the period between 1979 and 1989, meaning that in the formative period of these two groups, they were approximately in their twenties and early thirties.

Through their experience of nonelectoral activism, the activists gradually consolidated their assessment of political strategy. On the one hand, the cinema occupation in Belgrade and the university occupation in Ljubljana were both major events and were successful in attracting widespread media attention, at least for a limited amount of time. These events enabled the activists to promote the topics of unjust transition, privatization, commercialization and neoliberalism in the public sphere. On the other hand, these forms of activism also demonstrated two important limitations.

The first limitation is related to the weaknesses stemming from organizational forms relying predominantly on direct-democratic and horizontalist decision-making. The related lack of continuity and lack of resources motivated the activists to grow increasingly critical of loosely

structured organizing and rethink how the organizing is being done. It is important to note that in both cases, the activists gradually became aware that they needed to organize people beyond their immediate milieu. In Slovenia, the activists detected the need to spread their organizing beyond the intellectual and student milieu in urban contexts. Equally, in Serbia, the activists found that they need to communicate the messages of political injustice beyond the context of the capital of Belgrade. Instead of using complex and arcane language, they were, in both cases, acutely aware of the need to make their messages as clear and as accessible as possible.

The second limitation is related to the fact that the activists were confronted with disregard from the institutions that they were aiming at. They also tried to collaborate with the decision-makers and the pre-existing political parties but received no positive response from them. This has, at least in part, to do with the fact that institutionalized actors, and in particular the strongest oppositional parties in both countries, clearly showed disinterest in close cooperation with activists or the creation of a common political program.

To sum up, in both cases, the groups behind new left movement parties were, for a relatively long period of time, engaged in the process of strategic learning, defined as the process of "enhancing awareness of structures and the constraints/opportunities they impose" (Hay 2002: 133). From their very emergence, the groups were proactively assessing the effects of their activism on the context, which reaffirmed strategic learning. Also, as was mentioned on several occasions in this chapter, the activists had significant contact with activists from abroad, which points to the presence of transnational diffusion dynamics in the process of strategic learning.

Learning allowed the activists to change their strategy according to the changing political opportunities and threats. Here it is particularly important to note how, at the point of the outburst of mass protest waves, both groups had already accumulated a number of experiences in which they felt a sense of inefficiency or failure, which made them ready to engage in core strategic change once the opportunity was opened. The moment of the opportunity opening and related activists' core strategic change is the topic that I turn to in the following two chapters.

6 Turning Points: New Left Interacting with Anti-establishment Protest Waves

> "You startle me each time you mention that our messages were radical left. It's simple: everyone needs to have access to healthcare. That's not radical. Once upon a time, a radical left policy was nationalization, and now radical left means asking somebody to let you have some food and spare your life."
>
> (interview B11 with Vuk; Belgrade, October 2019)

In this chapter, I focus on the interaction between anti-establishment protest waves and the new left actors in Slovenia and Serbia. After tracing long-term developments behind the shift from nonelectoral to electoral strategy in the previous chapter, here I investigate the protest waves that preceded the emergence of movement parties in both countries: the anti-establishment protest wave in Slovenia (November 2012 - March 2013) and two anti-establishment protest waves in Serbia (May - July 2016 and April 2017).

The analyses of each of the two contexts are structured into four parts. First, they offer an overview of basic information on the dynamic of each of the protest waves. Second, they describe the organizational basis and framing strategies used by different actors participating in the protest waves. Third, they focus on the strategic framing used by new left actors, especially with respect to competing frames used by the government and other protest actors involved in the waves. Fourth, they specify the impact of protest waves on the actors' cognitive change in their perception of political opportunities and threats.

6.1 Anti-establishment protest wave in Slovenia (November 2012 – March 2013)

6.1.1 Overview of the anti-establishment protest wave

In November 2012, Slovenia saw one of the biggest protest waves in its history. A series of demonstrations, which took place between November 2012 and February 2013, drew a significant portion of the population to the streets in a number of Slovenian cities. The initial demonstrations began in Maribor, demanding the resignation of the city mayor Franc Kangler due to suspicions of corruption. The suspicions were related to the introduction of an automated traffic enforcement system, maintained through a public-private partnership, which was

supposed to issue traffic fines based on the city-wide video surveillance system. Although the discontent was initially focused on this specific issue and Kangler's relationship with the private company in charge, the Maribor uprisings were an articulation of long-term discontent with political elites, clearly demonstrating the crisis of representative democracy (Toplak, 2017, Kurnik 2013).

The first event in Maribor took place on 21 November, attracting some 600 participants, with further events gradually attracting more and more participants. The event of 26 November brought together between 5,000 and 10,000 participants, with 22 policemen and participants being wounded in clashes between the police and the participants and 31 participants arrested.[46] The mass demonstrations of 3 December in the same city, under the slogan "Let's carry him out!"[47], attracted approximately 20,000 participants. The event has seen particularly strong clashes between the protesters and the police, with some 119 individuals arrested and 39 of them wounded - 14 protesters and 25 members of police forces (Svoboda vstajnikom 2013). Three days later, mayor Franc Kangler announced his resignation.[48]

Notwithstanding the resignation, the protest wave was not going to stop. The images of the protest and police repression in Maribor, combined with crude ignorance of the political establishment (Kirn, 2019), and innovative communication tactics deployed by protesters (Berk, 2019), provoked the diffusion of protests to other cities and the capital of Ljubljana, transforming the wave into a full-fledged anti-governmental mobilization. The first protest in Ljubljana took place already on 27 November, with approximately 1,500 participants. Three days later, on 30 November, in Ljubljana, some 10,000 participants came to protest, with the aftermath of 30 arrested and 6 wounded individuals.[49] Again, on 3 December, some 4,000 protest participants gathered in central Ljubljana. Around the same period, the protest wave also spread to Celje, Nova Gorica, Novo Mesto, Ptuj, Velenje and even some smaller cities (see Berkopec 2015).

[46] Delo (2012 November 28). V Ljubljani tudi protesti proti nasilju v Mariboru, pp. 1 and 3

[47] In Slovenian: 'Nesimo ga vun!'

[48] Delo (2012 December 7) Kangler odstopil, protesti se bodo nadaljevali, pp. 1 and 3

[49] Delo (2012 December 1). Nasilneži v Ljubljani pokvarili mirne proteste, pp. 1–3

Massive events continued throughout December, January and the beginning of February. On 21 December, in Ljubljana, the first event, titled "Pan-Slovenian Uprising"[50], attracted 10,000 participants, this time focusing by and large on the critique of the government led by prime minister Janez Janša. On 7 January 2013, the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption, the key supervisory institution in the field of anti-corruption, published a report establishing that both Janez Janša, the prime minister, and Zoran Janković, the Ljubljana mayor and the leader of the opposition, were not transparent in declaring their assets.[51] The conclusions of the Commission's report further contributed to the widespread popular dismay, as became clear on 11 January, when between 8,000 and 10,000 people gathered for the "Second Pan-slovenian Uprising" in Ljubljana. The protesters demanded both Janša and Janković to give up their positions and declare snap elections. In the following days, two junior coalition parties of the Janša cabinet - Slovenian People's Party (Slovenska ljudska stranka, SLS) and the Democratic Party of Pensioners (Demokratska stranka upokojencev Slovenije, DeSUS) - announced that they are leaving the government.[52]

In parallel to the protest wave, the government also entered into conflict with the trade unions of public sector workers. Given the government's comprehensive proposal of various austerity measures targeting healthcare, education and other public services, trade unions organized a general strike on 23 January, during which approximately 100,000 public service workers discontinued their work. In addition to the general strike, demonstrations were organized in fourteen locations across Slovenia, with the central event in Ljubljana gathering around 8,000 participants.[53]

The event that represented the final blow to the government's position took place in Ljubljana on 8 February under the banner of the "Third Pan-Slovenian Uprising", bringing together more than 20,000 participants and demanding the resignation of prime minister Janša. Earlier the same day, in an attempt to fight back, the governing party attempted to mobilize its supporters

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[50] Although widely used, it is important to note that the name 'Pan-Slovenian Uprising' on its own represents an outcome of specific framing strategy used by part of the protest actors.

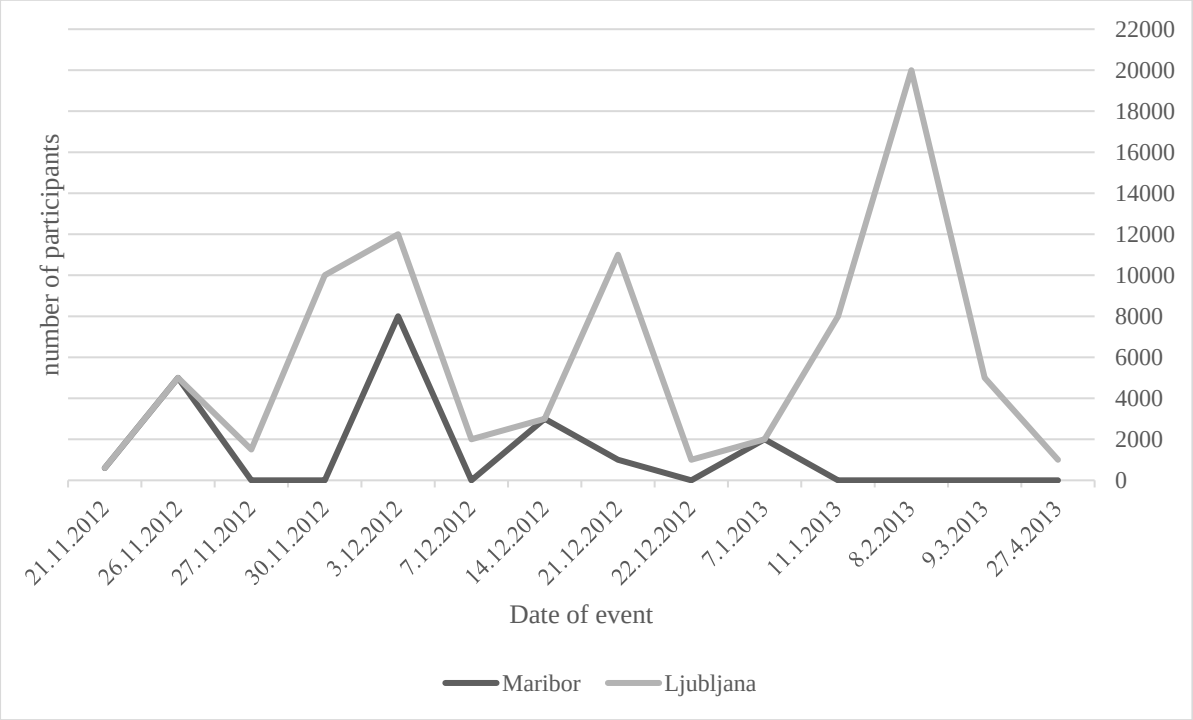
[51] RTV Slovenija (2013, January 8). Klemenčič: Ponosen sem na poročilo. Žalosten sem kot državljan. https://www.rtvslo.si/slovenija/klemencic-ponosen-sem-na-porocilo-zalosten-sem-kot-drzavljan/299707

[52] Delo (2013 January 25). Janša ne bo odstopil, iz vlade izhaja še Desus, pp. 1–2

[53] Delo (2013 January 24). Splošna stavka za en dan ohromila državo, pp. 1 and 3

through an event named "Assembly for the Republic" (Zbor za republiko) but managed to attract significantly fewer participants than the aforementioned "Uprising" event.[54] By the end of February, the SDS government was ousted through a vote of no confidence in the parliament. On the same occasion, the new coalition government was voted in – led by Alenka Bratušek and based on a broad centrist party coalition (Positive Slovenia, Social Democrats, Gregor Virant's Civic List and Democratic Party of Pensioners DeSUS). The protest activity faded out soon after the change of government. Additional fourth and fifth "Pan-Slovenian Uprisings" were held in March and April, but at that point, the protest wave lost momentum, attracting not more than a few thousand participants in Ljubljana.

Figure 6.1 Protests events within the 2012-2013 protest wave in Slovenia



6.1.2 Organizational basis and framing of the protest wave

Given the dynamics of the protest wave of 2012 and 2013, outlined in the previous section, it is not easy to associate the protest wave with a precise and neatly defined set of demands or frames. While the initial protests were focused primarily on the political situation in Maribor, later the protests moved on to several other targets, becoming full-fledged anti-establishment

[54] Delo (2013 February 9)

protests. The protest wave simultaneously addressed the issues of corruption, dysfunctional democracy, and neoliberal capitalism.

At least three groups of actors were involved in the protest wave, according to Ribać (2016): actors related to the legacy of the late 1980s pro-democratic movements ('first wave'); actors created in critical response to the movements of the 1980s ('second wave'); and anti-systemic actors, including both socialists and anarchists. A variety of academic, feminist, anarchist and LGBT actors were involved in the protest (see also Ribać 2018). Notwithstanding parallel trade union activity and protests in January 2013, Kurnik (2013) notes that trade unions on their own did not play a central role in the "Uprising" protest wave events.

A good practical illustration of this complex field of actors is the protest event that happened on 7 December in Ljubljana. Although one of the smaller events in the wave, attracting around 2,000 participants, the protest route targeted different institutions and individual officials: prime minister Janša, minister of education Žiga Turk, mayor of Ljubljana Zoran Janković, as well as the leaders of Catholic Church in Slovenia. The prime minister and the mayor were targeted as figureheads related to corruption scandals, the minister of education was targeted due to the announced austerity measures in the sector of higher education, and the church leaders were criticized for the financial support that the church had been receiving from the state.

According to some assessments, the protest wave of 2012-2013 contributed to changes in public perception of the postsocialist transition, enabling the reinstatement of the left signifier as a viable alternative to neoliberalism in Slovenian politics and detaching it from the typical framing of totalitarian communist past (Kirn 2019) However, although the wave represents an anti-austerity mobilization comparable to those observed in a number of European countries, many demands articulated by protest actors were not anti-capitalist or anti-neoliberal but were predominantly aiming at various modifications of the existing system (Zavratnik and Šori 2016). Indeed, a recent protest data analysis of protesters' claims showed that the protests were relatively more oriented on the issues of corruption and democracy than the issues of austerity and other explicitly economic grievances (Dinev 2020: 209-212).

Given its broad appeal, during the protest wave, it was possible to find several conflicting interpretations explaining the popular anger at the political class. For more liberal and center-left actors, the protest was primarily an expression of citizens' demands for anti-corruption, a stronger rule of law and technocratic solutions to the financial crisis.

One of the actors that framed uprisings as a response to political corruption and a "crisis of morality" is the Coordination Committee of Culture of Slovenia (Koordinacijski odbor kulture Slovenije KOKS), an advocacy coalition of cultural institutions and organizations, which was initiated by Slovene Writers' Association (Društvo slovenskih pisateljev, DSP) in early 2012 in reaction to Janša government's specific policies toward the cultural sector. Symbolically associated with social movements of the late 1980s, therefore wielding significant public attention and influence, KOKS perceived itself as a potential channel through which the uprising movement could be articulated and supported (see Ribać 2016). In its public statement, published at the beginning of the protest wave, KOKS framed the uprisings as an outcome of political irresponsibility that created an "artificial" crisis. Its principal demand was the immediate dismissal of the government and the creation of a new technical government based on broad consensus (Koordinacijski odbor kulture Slovenije 2012).

The framing strategy of center and center-left actors can be best described by looking at the activity of the Pan-Slovenian Peoples' Uprising (Vseslovenska ljudska vstaja VLV), an ad hoc collective that was among the first actors attempting to claim that it represented "unified" protest demands.[55] The Manifesto of VLV, one of such attempts published on 29 December, articulated three key demands: resignation of the current government, creation of a temporary technical government, and early elections in six months' time. From the future government, the manifesto demanded: the cancelation of austerity measures, reform of the judiciary in order to effectively punish corruption, and reform of the political system in order to increase popular control over political decision-making (Vseslovenska ljudska vstaja, 2012). While the manifesto of VLV did criticize austerity measures, it mostly remained focused on the issues of corruption and lack of popular power in democratic decision-making.

Although KOKS and VLV did partly acknowledge the socioeconomic dimension of protest, they mostly did not explicitly discuss the crisis of capitalism or put central emphasis on the austerity measures promoted in the political mainstream.

More toward the left, the organization Direct Democracy Now! (Neposredna demokracija zdaj! NDZ) published its own manifesto on 19 December. The manifesto demanded specifically the introduction of several mechanisms of direct democracy in the Slovenian political system: the

[55] Delo (2012 December 8). V Ljubljani prve težnje po določitvi skupnih zahtev, pp. 3

introduction of a popular vote of no confidence, participatory budgeting, and electronic voting on the local and national levels of government. In terms of economic measures, it demanded from the politicians the introduction of workers' co-management in companies, the promotion of workers' co-ownership, and the promotion of the economy of solidarity (Neposredna demokracija zdaj, 2012).

Anarchist, anti-fascist and anti-authoritarian groups were organized in October 29 Movement in Maribor and Anti-capitalist Bloc in Ljubljana. Anarchists put a lot of effort into redirecting the framing of the protest toward a critique of neoliberal capitalism with a clearer anti-systemic position (Zdravković 2015). This came hand in hand with the anti-representational position, as elaborated by one of the interviewees:

> In the second or the third uprising event, especially after Janša's resignation, everyone started to ask: "Ok, what now? Who will represent us?" And this was a moment in which we insisted on the message "Nobody represents us!". Because all that was on offer were cosmetic changes to the existing structure – not the change of structures. And we attempted to add up to our previous activity in Occupy Ljubljana in 2011. Even after 2008, general mainstream media saw capitalism as a good thing that needed a bit of improvement. Here we saw the need for broader anti-systemic interpretations. (Interview S08 with Lara)

In the month between the second and the third "Pan-Slovenian Uprising", the potential electoral outcome of the uprisings became one of the central debates in the media, creating various expectations from the protest wave and the actors involved. According to the analyses of Zdravković (2016), Pavlišič (2013b), as well as Toplak (2013), a significant amount of pressure in public was put on protest actors to "articulate" and "unify" their demands. More specifically, Zdravković argues that the "unification dictate" came in three different variants: pressures for the establishment of a new center-left party, pressures for the unification under the banner of "national project", as well as pressures for the unification of protesters' demands and identity under a single banner (Zdravković 2016: 56). Even in the media sympathetic to the uprisings, such as the weekly Mladina, the expectations for "transforming" the protest wave into party-political actors were clearly articulated (e.g., Stefančić 2013, as cited in Zdravković 2014). As a culmination of demands for unification, Zdravković (2016) and Pavlišič (2013b) point in particular to a public assembly organized on 30 January by KOKS and DSP. In the assembly, more than 80 speakers representing various organizations and collectives gathered to discuss

the demands and the strategy of protest (see Ribać 2018: 109, 175-177 for more information about the event). Given that DSP has strong symbolic linkages to the independence movement in socialist Slovenia, the initial panels within the event were dominated by the older generation of activists who were active in the period between the 1980s and the 1990s. The predominance of the older generation of activists, some of whom did not directly participate in the protest wave, was criticized for establishing the hierarchy that attempted to co-opt the protest wave within the representative framework (Zdravković 2016).

6.1.3 New left framing strategy within the wave: Beyond criticism of Slovenian "crony capitalism"

From the very beginning of the protest wave, new left actors invested a lot of energy in framing the wave by using frames similar to the ones in other cases of the anti-austerity movement, emphasizing the crisis of neoliberal capitalism, embodied in austerity measures, as the root cause of problems. However, as presented in the previous section, apart from DPU and the anarchists' Anti-capitalist Bloc, as well as to an extent NDZ, a significant portion of protest actors opted rather for anti-authoritarian and anti-corruption framing of the protest wave. In that sense, diagnostic framing utilized by DPU emerged as an outcome of addressing the anti-corruption' framing.

According to one of the interviewees, the frame of the anti-corruption was detected by DPU as problematic from the very start of the wave:

> For us, it was very clear from the very beginning that this moralist-anticorruption critique touches only the surface and that nothing particularly good can come out of it. (…) Corruption is part of the system that is in itself wrong and needs to be changed. And if you think that these [corruption scandals] are only anomalies and that there is some kind of good and just capitalism, you are wrong. (Interview S01 with Igor)

In other words, corruption should be seen as directly related to the transition into capitalism. During the Second Pan-Slovenian Uprising event in Ljubljana on 11 January 2013, the coordinator of DPU Luka Mesec held a speech in front of several thousand protest participants, in which he emphasized that corruption is only a part of the problem at hand:

> The biggest problem of this government is not corruption but, first and foremost, its policies. Two hundred thousand euros that were embezzled by the prime

> minister are a problem, but this money is a drop in the ocean compared to the billions that will be used within a bad bank in order to save, among others, private banks. It is a drop in the ocean compared to the state holding that will put up public companies for sale. It is a drop in the ocean with working places that we will lose in that way. (Luka Mesec, speech in the Second Pan-Slovenian Uprising, 11 January 2013)

As can be seen in the quote above, DPU used framing that tried to refocus the critique of the Janša government from the topic of corruptive activities to the topic of the government's economic policy approach. More specifically, however, DPU was using the framing that opposed two frames present in the mainstream: the one about the crisis of moral values that relied on abstract notions of "moral bankruptcy" across society to explain the crisis, and the one emphasizing the specificity of capitalism in Slovenia as crony,[56] i.e., an anomaly to what real capitalism should look like. Luka Mesec, speaking in the name of DPU, also tried to subvert these frames within his intervention at the assembly organized by DSP, named "Slovenian culture in the midst of the collapse of values":

> During the crisis, capitalist entrepreneurs pressure the state to lower taxes, privatize public companies, enable lower wages and deregulate the financial industry. That crisis has been going on in the West for more than 30 years, and these processes are not a consequence of the "collapse of values" but increasing competition wars in late capitalism. Based on this, it is clear that the crisis is not specifically Slovenian, as the promoters of the capital would like to convince us, but global. The crisis was not created by the overspending public sector or the population that has been living beyond their means, the rigid labor market, high taxes, too influential trade unions or referenda. On the contrary: the crisis started with the collapse of global speculative finances, the causes of which have been developing over three decades of neoliberal lowering of taxes and wages, privatization of public companies and deregulation of the financial sector. Therefore, the crisis was caused by the very same "medicine" that domestic critics of "Slovenian crony capitalism" have been advocating for. In short, we are not confronting the crisis of values but the crisis of capitalism. And that crisis

[56] Slovenian phrase: pajdaški kapitalizem

> is not specifically Slovenian but global. (Luka Mesec, speech in the assembly "Slovenian culture in the midst of the collapse of values", 30 January 2013).

In the intervention quoted above, the predominant frames explaining the crisis are criticized for promoting two wrongful assumptions: (a) that Slovenia has never really seen a transition into capitalism and (b) that this has to do with specific weaknesses of Slovenian culture and society. In the intervention, these two assumptions are shown not only as mistaken but also as further deepening the causes of the crisis.

Another example of implanting anti-capitalist framing into the protest wave happened in reaction to the conspiracy theories about the existence of deep state *éminence grise*, i.e., "puppet masters behind the scenes"[57], a phrase widely used among Slovenian right-wing politicians. Satirizing the right-wing claims, they created a banner stating that "the puppet master is the capital."

Given the focus of their framing on the crisis of neoliberal capitalism, the demands advanced by DPU activists aimed at the immediate annulment of austerity measures, privatization and other policy pressures coming from the Troika institutions. Different from other actors, the frames used by DPU were particularly specific and elaborate, demonstrating expertise and ideological coherence.

In their invitation to the public to join the first Pan-Slovenian Uprising on 21 December 2012, which was also one of their first public statements related to the protest wave, DPU outlined an elaborate list of sixteen specific demands. Apart from the demand for immediate government dismissal and parliamentary election that they shared with the abovementioned competing groups, DPU also outlined a detailed set of steps that should be taken in order to annul any of the current government's policies, including abandoning plans for the creation of the state holding that would concentrate publicly owned companies and facilitate privatization; cancelation of plans for privatization of publicly owned banks and companies; cancelation of plans for the creation of a "bad bank" as an expensive way of subsidizing private sector bankruptcy; immediate restitution of funding for public services (in particular healthcare and education), and other. In addition, DPU also made claims targeting any succeeding governments: shortening of working week from 40 to 35 working hours; fixing the minimum

[57] Slovenian phrase: strici iz ozadja

wage at 70% of the average wage; creating a more progressive tax regime; an industrial policy that would ensure full employment; and other (Delavsko-punkerska univerza 2012).

Banners that were created by DPU for the same event mostly criticized austerity and privatization measures and demanded their cancelation (see Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 List of banners created by DPU for the first Pan-Slovenian Uprising event

Slovenian	English translation
Ustavimo privatizacijo!	Let's stop privatization!
Slaba banka = Slaba rešitev	Bad bank = Bad solution
Dovolj je strateški h partnerstev, čas je za delavsko upravljanje!	Enough with strategic partnerships, it's time for workers' management!
Javni sektor je bogastvo, ne strošek!	The public sector is an asset, not an expense!
Banke v službo družbenega, ne zasebnega interesa!	Banks should be in the service of the public interest instead of the private one!
Javno šolstvo naj dviguje izobrazbo, ne profitne stopnje!	Public schooling should advance education instead of profit rates!
Javno zdravstvo naj daje zdravje, ne profita!	Public healthcare should ensure health instead of profit!
Prodajmo Šušteršiča, ne bank!	Let's sell Šušteršič instead of banks!
Dol s kapitalom, gor z delom!	Down with capital, long live labor!

With their specific demands and banners attacking austerity and privatization policies, the activists attempted to rearticulate anti-corruption protests into anti-neoliberal ones. This was necessary, as they perceived other competing groups, especially those leaning toward the political center, as lacking in content and proposals of alternatives:

> There were some general articulations of dissent. Against corruption, against things that are wrong with the state, but generally, it was along the lines of "This is wrong, they steal, they are corrupt." There was not much content. (…) People are universally against political corruption. I mean, nobody would argue that it's ok for politicians to be corrupt and to steal. Anyone could identify with that. (Interview S05 with Peter)

In addition to the protest activity, members of DPU were also participating in a variety of public discussions and intervened in media discussions on various levels. For instance, at the

beginning of the wave, one of the daily newspapers with the highest circulation *Delo* created a specific opinion section, *Revolt and Alternatives* (Revolt in alternative), that was open for interventions from a variety of public intellectuals, academics, artists and others. Out of 149 contributions to the section published by 13 March 2013, a number of those were written by the members of DPU.[58]

As the overarching label of their many proposals and solutions, DPU promoted democratic socialism. This was significant as, for the first time in more than two decades, socialism re-entered the public sphere not only as a symbol of problems and legacies from the period of socialist Yugoslavia but also as an alternative to the ongoing transition into capitalism.

6.1.4 The protest wave outcomes and cognitive change among activists

The assessment of the protest wave's success depends on how we define the protest wave's outcomes. From the perspective of demands for political dismissals, the protests were very successful. In a matter of few weeks, they pressured the mayor of Maribor into resigning from his office, and in a bit more than two months, they managed to provoke ousting of the government. However, the new government was voted in by the already existing parliament at the moment of the vote of no confidence[59] for the Janša government, avoiding a new election. What is more, the new liberal centrist government under prime minister Bratušek did not do much to address the socioeconomic dimension of the protest wave's demands. On the contrary, Bratušek continued the previously determined policy direction that involved further austerity measures and privatization of publicly owned companies in several sectors of the economy, including publicly owned banks (Stanojević et al. 2016, Piroska and Podvršič 2020). From the perspective of substantial socioeconomic demands, in particular the demands for canceling of anti-austerity policy, the protest wave was unsuccessful.

In any case, the unprecedented size of the protest wave represented the great potential for future mobilization. By the activists of DPU the protest wave was perceived as a unique window of opportunity. Several interviewees explicitly articulated their doubts about the subsequent

[58] e.g. Mesec (2012), Rutar (2012), Vrečko and Korsika (2013), Furlan (2013), Krašovec (2013), Slaček Brlek (2013)

[59] Known as constructive vote of no confidence.

creation of the movement party if there was no mass mobilization in the first place. Reflecting on this, one activist makes a comparison with the contemporary Slovenian political context:

> It's a big question if we would do it if there were no uprisings. I would say we wouldn't. Because it's really hard to persist in some idealistic position of that kind, even if it has support in history and even if you know that the crisis will always re-emerge in the capitalist system. But, the reality is another thing - who supports your ideas directly and who doesn't? For instance, in the contemporary context, as Slovenia is in a period of economic growth, it would be much harder to create such a party. (Interview S02 with Robert)

Although the activist is not entirely sure, he assesses the uprisings as the key enabling factor for the latter development of a movement party. What was the exact impact of protest waves on the activists' perception of political opportunities and threats?

> It was the first big mobilization, and there was some interest in the ideas that we were creating. The ideas of democratic socialism were suddenly interesting to the media, which had never before shown this kind of interest. At the same time, we had our experience of unsuccessful protest actions, and we knew that we had to take responsibility. (Interview S06 with Jure)

Another activist further described the impact of the 2012-2013 protest wave by comparing it to her previous protest experience, namely protests against the 2003 invasion of Iraq and protests against Slovenia's accession to NATO. She noticed that, different to previous large protest waves, the 2012-2013 protest wave allowed for a more systemic critique of capitalism.

> These protests [of 2012 and 2013] seemed to me as politically articulated. They were not single-issue protests, such as the anti-war and anti-NATO protests, which were also important. These protests [of 2012 and 2013] were addressing broader society, problems of capitalism, and questions that we had dealt with for years. It was possible to see a mass of disgruntled people who were maybe not socialists or did not even want fundamental changes in the political system but who saw that something was wrong. (Interview S07 with Alenka)

The significance of the 2012-2013 protest wave lies in the fact that it indicated a sense of anger and injustice across the board. Regardless of the relative lack of success in the sense of socioeconomic demands, the potential of this mobilization represented for activists an

important window of opportunity. The way they strategically used it in movement party formation will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

6.2 Anti-establishment protest waves in Serbia (May – July 2016, April 2017)

6.2.1 Overview of the anti-establishment protest waves

On the night of the 2016 parliamentary election in Serbia, in the first few hours of 25 April 2016, a group of around thirty men in balaclavas occupied a privately owned land parcel (approximately 1,000 m^2) in the city quarter of Savamala, positioned in the center of the area planned for the Belgrade Waterfront (BW) project. Armed and well-organized, they restrained several witnesses, including the security guard overseeing the area. In the following hours, the group demolished all of the objects on the site and left without a trace.

Apart from the fact that the demolition was *per se* an evident case of criminal activity, having been done undercover and in complete disregard of any laws or legal procedures, what made the episode particularly controversial was the fact that police explicitly rejected to visit the site in spite of several emergency calls made by the worried passers-by in the early morning of 25 April. The abject ignorance of the police provoked strong suspicions that the crime was encouraged or even directly organized by a government official. Two weeks later, on 9 May, these suspicions were officially confirmed in the report of the Office of Protector of Citizens of Serbia (Zaštitnik građana), the national ombudsman institution in charge of human rights protection headed by lawyer Saša Janković. The ombudsman's report established that criminal activity and the absence of reaction by the police was part of a coordinated plan potentially involving several levels of government.[60]

After the publication of the ombudsman's report, the increasing popular outrage was further aggravated by the relatively mild and indifferent reaction of the Office of the City Mayor, Ministry of Interior and Government. Following up on this development, in a matter of only a few days, NDB organized a protest on 11 May 2016. This event marked the beginning of a mass anti-establishment protest wave that went on for the following two months, representing one of the most significant mass mobilizations in the recent history of the country.

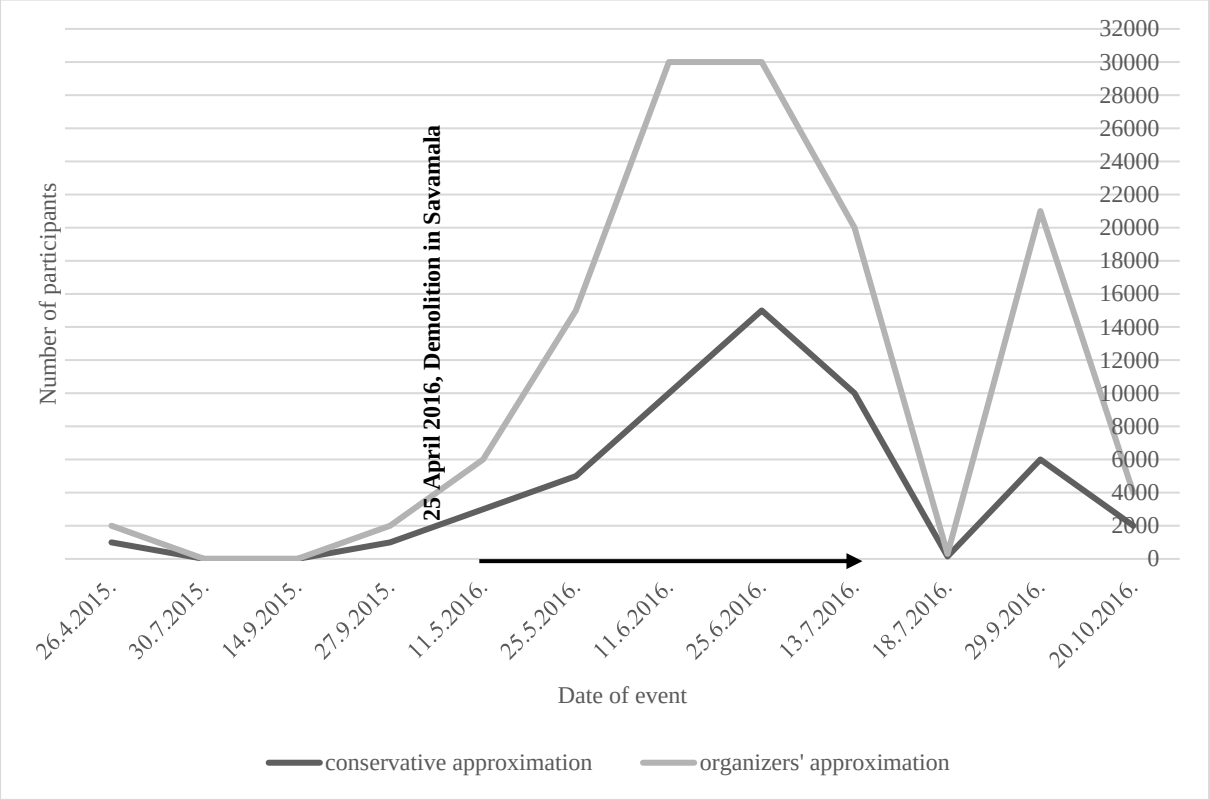
[60] Zaštitnik građana (2016, May 9: 2)

Over the course of the wave, Belgrade saw five mass protest events. The first event, conceived as a march between the City Assembly and the seat of the Government of Serbia, attracted more than 3,000 participants. Two weeks later, on 25 May, approximately between 5,000 and 10,000 participants joined the demonstrations. Another two weeks later, on 11 June, approximations ranged between 10,000 and 20,000 participants. Similar was the event on 25 June, with more than 15,000 participants marching for several kilometers and protesting in front of the Ministry of Interior. The last one in the series of mass demonstrations took place on 13 July, when again more than 10,000 people protested in front of the City Assembly and the investor company's local headquarters. Although the protest mobilization receded during the summer, another event of comparable size was organized on 29 September, when between 6,000 and 15,000 people gathered. With the exception of the concert that took place on 20 October, marking the 72nd anniversary of the Liberation of Belgrade of October 1944, and an additional protest that took place on 15 February 2017, the protest activity remained at a low level.

For the most part, the institutions and their highest officials managed to keep an ignorant stance toward the protest wave. Even with tens of thousands in the street demanding resignations and dismissals, the regime was able to retain control over the situation. Thanks to the governing party's tight grasp over key positions in most of the publicly and privately owned media, the protest events remained unreported or misreported. This also included a very explicit defamation strategy claiming that the protest wave was financed and managed by various states and other external actors. The defamation strategy became particularly pronounced as the wave was gaining momentum at the beginning of June. One of the more notorious smear campaigns was steered by Informer, the tabloid with the largest circulation in Serbia, closely related to the governing party. Under the title "Killing of Vučić" splashed across the cover, the paper cast activists of NDB as extremists funded by the Embassy of the United States and the European Union with the aim of a violent takeover of institutions.[61]

[61] Informer, issue no. 1250, 9 June 2016

Figure 6.2 Protest events within the 2016 protest wave in Serbia



As the 2016 protest wave was fading out, none of the demands, including the one about the investigation and prosecution of crimes committed on 25 April 2016, was met. As the NDB protest wave faded out, the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017 in Serbia were marked by the presidential election announced for April 2017. The electoral campaign was, once again, dominated by prime minister Aleksandar Vučić, who simultaneously became the presidential candidate of the Serbian Progressive Party. His two key counter-contenders were Saša Janković, the ombudsman who was, as already mentioned, among rare public officials shedding light on the Savamala demolition case immediately in April and May 2016, and Luka Maksimović, a parody candidate competing under the pseudonym and fictional character of Ljubiša Preletačević Beli. The presidential election was resolved already in the first round, with Vučić attracting more than 55% of the electorate, leaving well behind two other contestants, Janković (16.35%) and Maksimović (9.42%).[62]

[62] Republic Electoral Commission, archived website, http://arhiva.rik.parlament.gov.rs/latinica/izbori-za-predsednika-republike-2017-konacni-2004.php

In reaction to the electoral victory of Vučić, burdened by many reports of electoral fraud, another extraordinary protest wave started. Named "Against Dictatorship", the protest was initiated through Facebook on election day, immediately after the polling results started to show that the victory of Vučić was imminent. The next day, on 3 April 2017, more than 10,000 participants[63] gathered for a demonstration in front of the National Assembly of Serbia in Belgrade, as well as in the streets of two other big cities Niš and Novi Sad. Over the next two weeks, "Against Dictatorship" protests diffused around Serbia in at least 26 different cities, and protests in Belgrade were organized almost without a single day of recess but soon subsided without achieving any concessions from the government. Even more so, the government has once again utilized its extensive media machinery to at times ignore and, at times, openly discredit the participants of the protest wave.

Instead of direct engagement in the 2017 protest wave, NDB mostly participated in offering resources and support (Interview B16 with Bogdan). The important exception was the protest event on 25 April, when NDB organized a protest marking the first anniversary of the Hercegovačka demolition in 2016, managing to attract more than 10,000 participants, briefly reviving what seemed to be a fading mobilization wave.[64]

6.2.2 Organizational basis and framing of protest waves

In terms of organizational basis, although both protest waves can be characterized as anti-establishment, there are important differences in the organizational basis of the two. The 2016 protest wave was relatively more coordinated, dominated primarily by the activists of NDB, meaning that they invited participants to events, organized the logistics of each protest, and controlled most of the protest framing. Compared to the 2016 protest wave, the 2017 wave did not have any coherent or coordinated organizational basis but rather represented a case of digitally enabled collective action of many different actors with limited resources (Pešić 2017, Petrović and Petrović 2017).

Although different in terms of organizational basis, given their size and significance in the media, at least within the oppositional public sphere, both the 2016 and 2017 protest waves served as a ground for contests over the protest framing related to the authoritarian government

[63] Danas (2017, April 4). Više od deset hiljada mladih u protestu protiv diktature. pp.1 and 23

[64] Danas (2017, April 26). Tamo gde vladaju fantomke nema ni pravne države. pp. 1 and 3–5

of SNS. Based on the general anti-Vučić platform, the protest waves, and in particular the 2017 wave, attracted activist groups from across the ideological spectrum. [65]

In the first wave, for part of the opposition figureheads and supporters, the primary focus was on the SNS regime's authoritarian behavior and the absence of the rule of law. A good illustration of such framing can be found in the speech of a notable liberal political activist Srbijanka Turajlić, who was invited to address the participants of the fifth mass protest within the 2016 wave:

> I would like to tell you that this is a really bad eightieth day that you have been living on the territory on which once used to stand the state of Serbia. The state – or at least those features that are necessary for a certain territory to be called a state – has been long gone. The state vanished during one night in Savamala, with balaclavas, the help of bulldozers, and most importantly, the help of the police. (…) All that we demand is an organized, legal, decent state. (Srbijanka Turajlić, protest speech, 13 July 2016)

As can be seen in the quote above, the key issue for liberal actors was the authoritarian overstepping of power limits. Putting an emphasis on the issue of the corrupt and authoritarian incumbent government, the discussion about the neoliberal political economy as the systemic cause of the BW project remained secondary. Within that approach, the demolition in Savamala was primarily seen as a matter of an attack on the right to property and the state's failure to protect this right.

Within the 2017 protest wave, the focus on the governing party's electoral fraud (and Aleksandar Vučić) naturally emphasized, similar to the protest wave of 2016, the issue of degrading institutions. The main initial demand of the protest was for the institutions to officially recognize the election as fraudulent and repeat it.

6.2.3 New left framing strategy within the 2016 and 2017 protest waves: Beyond corruption and state capture

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[65] Danas.rs (2017, April 6). Četvrti dan: Protesti protiv vlasti se nastavljaju https://www.danas.rs/politika/cetvrti-dan-protesti-protiv-vlasti-se-nastavljaju-video/; Slobodna Evropa.org (2017, April 13) Mogu li 'Protesti protiv diktature' postati masovni? https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/protesti-protiv-diktature-drustveni-slojevi/28428001.html

Given that the 2016 protest wave came in direct response to the Savamala demolition event described above, the majority of demands leveled by NDB revolved around the resignation of the key figureheads of the governing Serbian Progressive Party: the mayor of Belgrade Siniša Mali, the minister of interior Nebojša Stefanović and, finally, the prime minister Aleksandar Vučić. These demands were repeated in every event, playing a central role in the mobilization of protest participants. As already illustrated in the previous section, given that the demands were strongly focused on corruption and state capture within the specific incident, strategic framing was constrained from the very beginning.

In such circumstances, as confirmed in several interviews, it was challenging to keep the focus on broader and more systemic problems of the BW project, such as the enclosure of public space, increasing economic inequality and favoring of private investments over public interests and commons. One of the activists recounted how the main opposition parties, who were only moderately critical of the BW project until the Hercegovačka demolition, framed the protest wave primarily as a response to degrading state institutions:

> I was afraid that the opposition parties would use the opportunity and problematize the Hercegovačka demolition only through the demands for the rule of law and responsive police. I mean, of course, everyone wants responsive police, even the voters of the Serbian Progressive Party. But, except for the fundamental issue of security, the opposition parties had no value attitudes [toward the BW project]. (Interview B01 with Tijana)

More specifically, as elaborated by the interviewee, oppositional parties did not have the ambition to offer a framing that would go beyond diagnosing the problem through the lens of corruption and state capture. This is where the activists of NDB saw the need to emphasize the socioeconomic dimension of the BW project and relate their struggle to other struggles. A speech by one of the activists made during the fourth mass protest illustrates the activists' attempts at strategic framing:

> It is our duty to create a city in which there is room for those weaker than us. A city in which somebody can check your health when you're ill, in which you have a roof over your head, in which public transportation works, in which you're paid for your work, in which you're not exploited or used, in which there are common and public spaces, and not forbidden cities for the privileged. Is that

> too much? Is it really so unthinkable that we want to live decently? (Radomir Lazović, protest speech, 25 June 2016)

Within the excerpt above, protests against BW are connected to a number of specific socioeconomic grievances, emphasizing the issues of inequality and degrading public services. Another similar example of strategic framing can be found in the following excerpt as well:

> We do not accept that the citizens of Belgrade, Senta or Vladičin Han pay for the construction of sewers for a *fancy* Belgrade neighborhood and, at the same time, be without warm water in their own houses, medicine in their hospitals or education for their children. And we do not accept a life in which we are uncertain if the government will destroy our house in the middle of the night or if the police will come when we call them. (Ksenija Radovanović, protest speech, 13 July 2016)

In the speech quoted above, the speaker frames the issue of demolition in Hercegovačka within the broader spectrum of issues related to socioeconomic deprivation and inequality in access to public services. Although in the latter part of the quote, the activist mentions the lacking rule of law, these grievances are presented on par with socioeconomic grievances related to inequality.

The activists of NDB were using different channels of influence in order to promote the emphasis on socioeconomic issues. In the electoral campaign for the 2017 presidential election, the main oppositional candidate was Saša Janković, a former ombudsman who played an important role in reporting on the Hercegovačka demolition event. Although his presidential bid was supported by a number of mainstream political parties, civic associations, intellectuals and other public figures, the activists of NDB were at first hesitant to give their support. However, as an activist explained, given the fact that the election served to further consolidate the powerful position of SNS on the one hand and the fact that NDB became one of the most influential mobilizational actors, it was hardly possible to stay indifferent (Interview B11 with Vuk). For this reason, they supported him but also used their public declaration of support to emphasize that his promotion of the rule of law and democratization needed to go hand in hand with addressing the needs of the most economically deprived citizens. The declaration also listed a variety of socioeconomic grievances, such as growing inequality, intensifying

privatization, as well as low quality of public healthcare and public education (Ne davimo Beograd 2017).[66]

The 2017 protest wave, named "Against Dictatorship", which ensued after the presidential election, also served as a space for a variety of actors who tried to dictate the key messages of the protest. Although, as noted earlier, NDB did not have a central role in this wave, part of new left activists reclaimed the framing of protest in a way similar to the 2016 protest wave. One of the more visible actors trying to claim the framing was Seven Demands (Sedam zahteva), an ad hoc group of left-wing activists who aimed to articulate the protest within socioeconomic framing, emphasizing grievances such as high unemployment, bad working conditions, exploitation of workers and similar. One of the key individuals engaged in Seven Demands explained their strategic reasoning:

> Part of us from the left had a deal from the very beginning to create banners, as we saw that the media were covering the messages on banners every day. We didn't want this to be another "Kosovo is Serbia" protest, and we created messages such as "We don't want to be a cheap labor force", "The people are starving, the elite is enjoying". And we wrote these messages on the biggest banners possible. (Interview B12 with Ivana)

After eight consecutive days of protesting, on 10 April 2017, Seven Demands managed to draw greater attention by publishing seven 'Unified demands of students'[67] Three of these demands went beyond the issues of the rule of law, explicitly articulating socioeconomic issues: (1) protection and advancement of workers' rights, (2) protection of the standard of living, and (3) publicly financed and widely accessible education and healthcare. This was perceived as a success by activists in the sense of not only contesting the SNS regime but also contesting the discourse of oppositional parties who were putting the emphasis on the issues of corruption and failed democratization of Serbia and who were often articulating their demands within the nationalist framework (Interview B12 with Ivana, Interview B16 with Bogdan).

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[66] Insajder (2017, January 25). Inicijativa Ne da(vi)mo Beograd podržala Sašu Jankovića https://insajder.net/sr/sajt/vazno/2897/

[67] Sedam zahteva (2017, April 10)

In terms of framing, therefore, the protest did represent an innovation to the usual oppositional framing, even if at times limited. This confirms previous analyses that point to the NDB's capacity to connect various struggles, constructing the problem through the lens of the rule of law as well as the critique of neoliberal urban development (Matković and Ivković 2018, Fiket et al. 2019, Morača 2016). From the perspective of NDB, but also wider left-wing context, these waves have signalized that potential for collective mobilization around left-wing issues exists.

6.2.4 The impact of protest on cognitive change among activists

The anti-establishment protest waves of 2016 and 2017 represented an opportunity opening that provoked NDB activists to rethink their strategy. The evidence for this change does not stem only from the sequence of the protest waves and elections but also from the narratives collected through the interviews.

Returning for a moment back to the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016, activists of NDB felt that their contention against the BW project was losing momentum. At that point, they had already used many different tools of the protest repertoire: advocacy campaigns, participation in public consultations of legislative proceedings, disruption of the same proceedings, and street demonstrations. As already recounted in chapter five, one of the possible "next steps" mentioned by another interviewee included looking for new problems that could serve as more successful focal points of mobilization:

> Before the demolition in Savamala happened, we thought that the contestation of the Belgrade Waterfront had reached its peak in terms of mobilizing potential and awareness-raising. And we simply thought: "Ok, screw it, Belgrade Waterfront is going to be built, and that's it." And at that point, at the turn of 2015 and 2016, we started to develop different scenarios about what could be our next topic. And we said: "Then, in 2020, people will have to go to elections." (Interview B02 with Luka)

Due to the force of the unexpected 2016 protest wave, the events did not unravel according to what activists expected. First, instead of taking over the new topic, the protest wave motivated the activists to keep their focus on the BW project and keep the identity of the initiative NDB. Second, as it is stated in the quote above, before the protest wave, the idea of "electoral turn" had been entertained only as a long-term possibility and something to be considered four years from that point. Both of these potential moments of strategic change - keeping the focus on the

BW and “electoral turn” - were crucially influenced by the powerful protest wave. From being potential, they suddenly became realistic and something to be immediately decided upon.

The mobilizational power of the 2016 and 2017 waves served as an important signal of political opportunity opening also in the broader field of left-wing activists and activist groups. I elaborate on what happened in the broader left-wing field in the following chapter, where I look specifically at the dynamics of alliance building in relation to the “electoral turn”.

6.3 Summary

In this chapter, I focused on investigating the impact that mass anti-establishment protest waves had on movement party formation. Powerful and unexpected, the protests have probably changed the course of the groups’ trajectories principally by signaling the opportunities. These opportunities were not, however, self-evident.

As was shown in the chapter, protest waves involved a wide variety of actors with different discursive and ideological positions. In both cases, one part of the participating protest actors framed the protests through criticism of corruption and the degrading rule of law, without mentioning the critique of neoliberalism, inequality or other socioeconomic grievances. Therefore, from the perspective of new left actors analyzed - DPU (IDS) in Slovenia and NDB in Serbia - one of the challenges was to “push” protest framing beyond the framing that relies on the critique of corruption as promoted by liberal actors. This is clear even in the case of the Slovenian protest wave that lasted between November 2012 and March 2013, and that was most closely related to the cross-European anti-austerity wave. All of the already existing Slovenian political parties and part of the liberally leaning protest actors put the emphasis on the issue of corrupt and authoritarian individuals and political parties capturing state institutions, not so much on the neoliberalism-induced social injustices. The fact that left-wing actors experienced some success in promoting left-wing strategic framing within the protest wave crucially motivated them to reassess the possibility and legitimacy of electoral strategy.

As the activists themselves testify, if not for the protest waves, they would have probably changed the focus of their activity or would venture into electoral politics much later. While it is impossible to definitively establish whether the activists would engage in movement party formation in the absence of mass protest waves, it is clear that the protest waves, at the very minimum, catalyzed the shift from nonelectoral to electoral activism. The specific mechanism that best describes the cognitive change in the cases of both IDS and NDB is cognitive liberation. The concept of cognitive liberation was first introduced to social movement studies

by Doug McAdam, who noted that expanding political opportunities need to be subjectively perceived as such by collective actors in order to move them to action (1982).

Although protest waves in both countries did represent a certain rupture, I think we need to be careful not to overstate their significance. This becomes clear when we look at the electoral winners in the elections following the protest waves. In Slovenia, in the parliamentary election of 2014, the winner was the newly established Party of Miro Cerar (Stranka Mire Cerara, SMC), that gained 36 out of 90 mandates in the Slovenian parliament, which was at that point, the best result in the electoral history of independent Slovenia. Named after its leader, a prominent university professor and constitutional scholar, the party offered a centrist liberal program, emphasizing moderation, technocratic appeal, and the re-establishment of the rule of law (see Krašovec and Haughton 2014). While this election was also a breakthrough for the newly established United Left coalition, headed by the Initiative for Democratic Socialism, its result was less significant relative to the breakthrough of SMC.

In Serbia, in the first election succeeding the protest wave, the presidential election of 2017, the strongest counter-contender to Aleksandar Vučić was Saša Janković. Although still far from beating Vučić, who won more than 2,000,000 votes (55.06%), Janković was able to attract almost 600,000 votes (16.35%). Running as a candidate of a broad coalition, including the Democratic Party (DS), Janković put an emphasis on the rule of law and reconstruction of the state institutions (Milić 2017). The third came the parody candidate, Luka Maksimović (running under the satyrical pseudonym of Ljubiša Preletačević Beli), who attracted a bit less than 350,000 votes (9.42%). None of the candidates, not even marginal ones, endorsed a policy emphasizing socioeconomic grievances or change in the developmental trajectory of Serbia.

Of course, the difference between Slovenian and Serbian protest waves exists. While in Slovenia, the anti-neoliberal and anti-capitalist framing was relatively more present than in Serbia, in both cases, the activists perceived that they needed to strategically reclaim the socioeconomic framing of protest. Also, while in Slovenia, the elections following the protest wave saw the entry of IDS and their coalition partners into parliament – in Serbia, not even a single presidential candidate actively endorsed any of the left-wing protest demands. Notwithstanding these differences, it is important to note that the new left in both contexts had to strategically position itself toward the pre-existing centrist and, in particular, liberal actors, who continued to maintain major influence in the party systems. In both contexts, the continued prominence of previously established centrist and center-right liberal actors and political

parties has to do with anti-authoritarian consensus, in which all of the opposition parties are motivated to collaborate against a right-wing candidate with authoritarian tendencies and a relatively stable electoral base – Janša of SDS in Slovenia and Vučić of SNS in Serbia. Notwithstanding differences in intensity, the new left in both contexts needed to negotiate its relationship to this polarity within the electoral arena. I turn more specifically to this issue within the process of movement party formation, which I address in the following chapter.

7 Crossing the Boundary and Changing the Boundary - How the Activists Take and Communicate the "Electoral Turn"?

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, anti-establishment protest waves had an immense impact in terms of activists' cognitive change. But what was the effect of this cognitive change? In this chapter, I outline more closely the activists' strategic decisions and actions during and after the protest wave. I analyze, in particular, the dynamics of strategic alliance building as well as strategic framing related to the movements' shift between nonelectoral and electoral activism.

Each of the cases is described through a four-level structure. First, I describe the activists' decision-making about the "electoral turn" and what it meant for them. Within this section, I also describe the way in which activists positioned their movement party projects toward the legacy of left-wing politics, and in particular, the legacy of socialist Yugoslavia. Second, I look at strategic alliance building, where I describe strategic assessments of actors in the environment, including actual and potential allies that supported or directly joined the "electoral turn". Third, I turn to discursive work that the activists created with the purpose of justifying the "electoral turn" in the broader activist base and the general public. Finally, I offer insights into individual-level perspectives of activists engaged in the movement party formation. In particular, the aim of this last section is to illustrate how the experience of "electoral turn" fits into the narrative of their previous activist experience.

7.1 IDS

7.1.1 Deciding for "electoral turn" and positioning in relation to Yugoslav socialism

The government formed in February 2012, after the ousting of the Janša cabinet, was unstable from the beginning, which motivated the potential new electoral actors to immediately start preparing for their participation in the following electoral cycles, including the 2014 European Parliament election, and the following national parliamentary election, that was supposed to happen not later than 2015. Given the instabilities of the ruling party, the parliamentary election happened already in July 2014.

As was already discussed in chapter six, even before the outbreak of mass protests in Slovenia, the activists of DPU were trying to rethink their strategy through the Working Group on Political Strategy. However, as recounted at the end of the same chapter, before the protest

wave, the option of organizing into a political party did not seem to be feasible. Mass protest signalized to the activists, but also political elites in general, that the citizens feel frustrated and unrepresented, and that, after all, there may be space for new political parties within the party system.

One of the main motivations that brought activists of DPU to consider the "electoral turn" and register a political party was the possibility of consolidating their activity and obtaining the necessary resources for their future work. When asked about their motivation at the time, one of the core activists contended:

> Our goal was primarily to get into the election and gain some financing and structure that would enable us to do politics in a more organized and systematic way. (…) That was the primary objective. To use such financial resources for groundwork and for political work. Not to be dependent only on NGO fundraising, and at the same time, to gain some responsibility and some media visibility in order to promote our ideas. The discussion that we had was not about getting into the state apparatus, taking over the government, and so on. That was absolutely not the objective. (Interview S06 with Jure)

This narration can be further corroborated by all other interviews. Other activists from the core group equally claimed that the electoral result came to them as a surprise (Interview S02 with Robert, Interview S03 with Aleš, Interview S05 with Peter) or was unexpected until only a few days before the end of the parliamentary election campaign (Interview S07 with Alenka). Indeed, the opinion polls for the 2014 parliamentary election in Slovenia forecasted the potential entry of the coalition United Left, headed by IDS, into parliament only after the last round of polling, the results of which were published just two days before the election day.[68] One of the activists claimed that low expectations were also the reason for not creating all the party-level and coalition-level regulations related to the parliamentary activity before the election, for instance, not even setting the fee for party members holding parliamentary seats (Interview S07 with Alenka).

[68] Mladina (2014, July 11). Zadnji »tracking poll« Mladinine predvolilne ankete: zmaga Mira Cerarja in preboj malih strank. https://www.mladina.si/158428/zadnji-sesti-tracking-poll-mladinine-predvolilne-ankete/

Perception of electoral engagement as the source of stability comes from the institutional openness of the Slovenian electoral system, which proactively supports new contenders, in particular with regard to financial support. As already mentioned in chapter three, in order to obtain public funding, a political party does not need to win parliamentary mandates and does not even need to pass the electoral threshold, which is set at 4%. It only needs to obtain more than 1% of votes in parliamentary election (1.2% and 1.5% for two-member and three-member coalition lists), which already gives them a monthly allowance of several thousand euros.[69] In other words, the activists were aiming to go beyond 1% in order to get public financing but were not expecting to pass the 4% electoral threshold.

Another aspect of decision-making relates to symbolic and ideological articulation. What was the reflection behind opting for the specific articulation of 'democratic socialism'? Although in the Slovenian context, the legacy of socialism is perceived as relatively positive compared to other former countries of Yugoslavia, the activists saw the need to adapt their position:

> We discussed this a lot in assemblies and meetings. There were many ideas for party names, even for using only 'socialism'. This idea of "democratic socialism" is a sort of pleonasm because it emphasizes something that socialism should already be. (…) Since, in Slovenia, the disintegration of Yugoslavia was not such a collective trauma [as in other countries of former Yugoslavia], it is possible to reintroduce socialism into the public discourse. At the same time, however, not everyone relates positively to socialism. (Interview S07 with Alenka)

> We knew that if we said only socialism, our enemies would be pointing their fingers at autocracy. This is why we opted for democratic socialism as a new type of socialism. (Interview S03 with Aleš)

For activists, the articulation of the movement party through the notion of *democratic* socialism served to preempt any attacks that would discredit their activity on the basis of antisocialist rhetoric. It is significant that even in a context that activists themselves assess as relatively

[69] For instance, in the 2014 Slovenian parliamentary election the Pirate Party obtained 1.34% of the electoral support, meaning 11,737 votes on the national level, which enabled it to take 6,977 euros of direct public funding a month. Source: primorske.si (2014, July 22). Do proračunskega denarja tudi stranke izven parlamenta. http://www.primorske.si/novice/slovenija/do-proracunskega-denarja-tudi-stranke-izven-parlam

positive in relation to the legacy of Yugoslavia, they found it necessary to avoid an immediate relationship to socialism. As stated by one of the group's leaders at the first public presentation of the Initiative for Democratic Socialism on 30 April 2013:

> Of course, we are aware of the mistakes of past socialist systems. We started this initiative to answer two problems: the problems of capitalism on the one side and the problems of autocratic socialism on the other. And to start building new socialism, this time a democratic one. (Luka Mesec, speech on the occasion of the first public presentation of IDS, 30 April 2013)

7.1.2 Strategic alliance building

The period during and after the 2012 – 2013 protest wave was marked by intense brokering and negotiations among diverse actors. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the media started to discuss new potential actors that would be able to channel mass protest mobilization into the electoral arena. Such an open media landscape represented an important opportunity for the activists of DPU, but it also increased expectations about creating a unified center-left electoral coalition.

In the initial public statements about their strategy, the activists of DPU were still not explicitly disclosing any specific plans, but their tendency toward electoral strategy was more than clear.[70] The strategy was eventually articulated with the establishment of the Initiative for Democratic Socialism, which was publicly presented on 30 April 2013 as a new political initiative that will try to transform calls for change into a "vivid and permanent political force". In its manifesto, published on occasion, IDS reiterated that the "ideal position" is the unification of, on the one side, movements "who act from below and change the existing social relations" and, on the other side, political parties, "who within the formal political space change the policies top-down" (IDS 2013).

In parallel to IDS, encouraged by positive political opportunities, after the protest wave, the members of DPU in 2014 decided to reorganize their work in a separate organization called Institute for Labour Studies (Inštitut za delavske študije IDŠ). [71] Here it is important to

[70] Mladina (2013, January 18)

[71] Inštitut za delavske študije (2022)

remember that DPU was not a self-standing organization but an educational program autonomously organized under the auspices of the Ljubljana-based Peace Institute, as mentioned in chapter five. Organizing into IDŠ allowed the activists to obtain a greater level of autonomy and politicize their activity.

As IDS was being developed throughout 2013, the activists were trying to build alliances with a variety of left-wing actors. Indeed, as recounted in several interviews, the imperative was to "unify" the genuine left-wing voices in parliamentary and extraparliamentary politics. The move of IDS toward electoral strategy also meant distancing between IDS and anarchist collectives with which they used to cooperate before. Consistent with their long-term values and position, and partly already discussed in chapter six, anarchists organized in the Anti-capitalist Bloc were rejecting the "electoral turn". This position was clearly articulated already during the 2012 – 2013 protest wave within the transcripts of a discussion organized by the Anti-capitalist Bloc on 21 February 2013 in A-Infoshop, only two weeks after the Third Uprising, that tackled specifically the issue of representative democracy and electoral strategy (Zdravković 2014). As can be seen from the transcripts, participants were highly critical of the electoral strategy for at least two reasons. First, its tendency to pacify social movements and make them follow top-down structures of participation. Although several participants did not categorically oppose the building of new organizational structures that could meaningfully connect both movements and parties, most of the participants expressed their skepticism about any attempts to follow the rules of parliamentary struggle. Second, more fundamentally, participants were critical of a type of "reductive" defining of politics as something that happens exclusively within the parliamentary sphere. For several participants, a more meaningful approach to politics was supposed to happen through horizontal activity in communities rather than through large-scale state-level activity (Zdravković 2014).

In addition to IDS as the electoral initiative in the primary focus of this thesis, during the protest wave, another left-wing electoral initiative was created under the name Solidarity. A bit more than a year after the protest wave started, in December 2013, Solidarity was officially established by the members of the Pan-Slovenian People's Uprising (Vseslovenska ljudska vstaja VLV), Committee for Just and Solidary Society and part of the members of Network for Direct Democracy.[72] In its founding program, Solidarity declared as its two overarching goals

[72] Mladina (2013, December 14)

(a) the development and strengthening of democratic participation and (b) the promotion of social justice as an alternative to neoliberalism. Its program also included specific goals, such as the protection of commons, economic sovereignty, social justice and just redistribution (Solidarnost, 2014). Although Solidarity clearly positioned itself as critical of neoliberalism and offered some general points that make it classifiable as a new left party, in practice, its mobilization strategy was focused on the liberal and centrist parts of the ideological spectrum. Different to IDS, Solidarity decided that, instead of building an independent electoral force on the left, unification with pre-existing parliamentary parties represented the best way forward. The preference for this strategy is not surprising, as the initiatives behind the foundation of Solidarity were among those protest actors that insisted on the unification of protest demands under the banner of VLV, already described in the previous chapter. However, in 2014, Solidarity did not manage to win a mandate either in the EU parliamentary election, in which it independently attained 1.67% of the vote[73]or in the parliamentary election, in which it cooperated with Social Democrats.

After initial attempts at building alliances with a segment of the protesters that would later go on to establish Solidarity, the activists of the newly established IDS soon reoriented toward two already existing political parties: Sustainable Development of Slovenia (TRS) and Democratic Labour Party (DSD).

TRS was established in 2011 by a group of activists focusing on the issues of sustainable development and environmental protection. The leading political figure of TRS was the former Slovenian ombudsman Matjaž Hanžek. In its initial electoral run, in the 2011 parliamentary election, TRS managed to obtain 1.22% of the vote, becoming eligible for direct public funding of its activities.[74] DSD was established in 2010 by Franc Žnidaršič, a member of parliament for the Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DeSUS). DSD program was putting a strong emphasis on the protection of workers' rights, fairer redistribution of social wealth, and promoting innovative forms of workers' self-management. Initially participating in the 2011

[73] State Election Commission of the Republic of Slovenia, archived website https://www.dvk-rs.si/arhivi/ep2014/

[74] State Election Commission of the Republic of Slovenia, archived website https://www.dvk-rs.si/volitve-in-referendumi/drzavni-zbor-rs/volitve-drzavnega-zbora-rs/drzavni-zbor-rs-predcasne-volitve/

parliamentary election, DSD attained 0.65% of the vote, failing to qualify for public financial support.

For IDS, creating a coalition with TRS generally represented a sound strategic option, not only because of ideological connection but also because TRS already had some resources and public visibility (Interview S01 with Igor, Interview S03 with Aleš). On the other hand, creating a coalition with DSD was perceived as much more controversial and mostly motivated by strong incentives that were coming from the Party of European Left (PEL), which followed the negotiation processes in the aftermath of the protest wave (Interview S02 with Robert). For IDS, one of the key reservations was related to the membership base of DSD, which involved a number of individuals with long-term experiences related to DeSUS, and IDS was overall afraid of lacking organizational structure and loyalty of DSD members.[75] Finally, on 1 March 2014, the three parties formed a coalition under the banner of United Left (ZL) in spite of all the differences.

7.1.3 Discursive work in "electoral turn"

In order to utilize the potential of the protest wave successfully, however, the activists of IDS used the framing through which they emphasized their difference from the established political parties. More specifically, they claimed that they wanted to innovate political party organizing through movement party:

> The challenge of the uprising was how to articulate a political party that could work as a movement party. We are trying, to an extent, to get inspiration from the cases from other countries, such as Syriza, Die Linke or Front Gauche. It's not that these can be simply translated into Slovenian context, but still. The point is that the uprising movement should not be left in front of the parliament but rather that the dynamic from the street - the demands and the content - should be moved into the parliament. (Anej Korsika, in interview to Radio Študent, 7 March 2013)

[75] Two interviewees from IDS even claimed that very soon after the 2014 local election, several DSD members got out of the coalition and gave their support to other political parties on local level (Interview with Igor, Interview with Peter).

The concept of a movement party, as can be seen from the quote above, was also used as a rhetorical device that could distinguish the potential new actor from the already existing parties. On the occasion of the formal establishment of the political party, a year later, on 8 March 2014, the activists reiterated that they refused to be a personalistic party and that they opted for collective leadership. They also reiterated that they want to adopt safety mechanisms that would ensure the continuous connection and cooperation between movements and the party.[76] The party statutes, therefore, obliged the party to hold annual elections for party offices and limited the number of times an individual could be re-elected for the same position to four times in a row. The membership of the central body of the party - the Party Council - was defined as consisting of both delegates elected at the party congress and delegates of local branches.[77]

The same imperative of movement party organizing was partly followed within the broader coalition - the United Left. In addition to the three coalition parties, a special "fourth" coalition partner ("The Fourth Group") was formed out of a number of civil society organizations, including Movement for Just Society, Cultural Political Society Freedom - Straža, List Together for just community - Maribor, and a number of individual activists.[78] In hindsight, interviewees assessed that, at the point of creating the United Left, it seemed important to find a way of cooperating with those who did not want to be part of a political party. But, it soon turned out that they could not address the growing contradictions between being part of a political coalition and keeping to the nonpartisan identity (Interview S06 with Jure). More generally, one of the core activists of IDS evaluates that it is important to find a way to nurture cooperation between the NGOs and the political parties:

> We found out very fast that with civil society or (nonpartisan) activist groups we can cooperate in other ways, like related to specific topics or specific protest events, without making them enter the electoral activity, as it can be detrimental for them. If you're a civil society group or anarchist or whatever, it cannot be good for you if you are directly associated with a specific political party. They

[76] Press conference on the occasion of the founding of IDS (2014, March 8)

[77] The statutes of the political party Initiative for Democratic Socialism

[78] Združena levica (2014)

> address the whole society with their demands. And if you are part of a political party, it can be problematic. (Interview S07 with Alenka)

The interviewee's perspective contains elements of the civil society discourse (see Mastnak 2005), whereby civil society groups are taken to be nonpartisan or unbiased, at least as perceived by the public. They are claiming their demands as universal, addressing the whole society, which means that they have to take distance from associating with any specific political party.

7.1.4 Individual-level perspective on electoral engagement

This thesis deals primarily with group-level processes of strategic change. However, these group-level processes often mirror individual biographical narratives, which I turn to here in order to further illustrate the impact of movement party formation on activists themselves. In the case of Slovenia, one interviewee was particularly elaborate about what putting her name on the ballot meant in the context of her life. Although overall proud of her previous work, she also underlined very clearly the frustrations she felt about some of them. One of her personal experiences was related to the work on an NGO campaign about the *Erased*.[79] Within this campaign, she took part in collecting evidence and information about the violation of human rights, as well as in advocating for the cause in public. Reflecting on the campaign, she said:

> For me, this was a horrible experience. Traumatic. Because I was coming out of a pure activist position. I studied human rights and had an idealist vision of the world. I was sure that if the truth about the Erased got out to the public, and if the public saw the abject violation of human rights of the Erased, something would immediately change. And I was horrified to find out that nothing happened. (…) You can absolutely have laws and justice on your side, but in the end, this does not change the social and political situation. (Interview S04 with Eva)

[79] As mentioned in chapter 4, the *Erased* is a term used for the group of permanent residents of Slovenia who were secretly and illegally erased by the government from the register of permanent residents on 25 February 1992, effectively losing all social and economic rights related to the permanent resident status that they enjoyed during Yugoslavia (see Jalušič and Dedić 2008, Pistotnik and Brown 2018).

As can be seen from the quote, the interviewee expressed disappointment with her previous experience. She cared deeply about the cause in which she was engaged, but it seemed that politics and society just went on as if nothing had happened. She made two types of observations on her work in NGOs. On the one hand, she perceived it as caused by the NGO framework in which, as she said, "the only thing you can get is a burnout" because you are going against way more powerful structures with much more resources (Interview S04 with Eva). On the other hand, she perceived it as caused by a particular type of group dynamic that does not permit the activists to go "beyond" their usual audience:

> You can be this kind of activist for some time, but by getting older you become aware that you have to work with other parts of society. We loved hanging out, demonstrating together and venting our common frustrations, but at some point, when I became a parent, I started to think: What's the point of keeping my beautiful pure soul while the rest of the world goes to hell? (Interview S04 with Eva)

As the activist sarcastically notes, the activist circles she was part of were often prioritizing the articulation of their group belonging and identity over broadening their influence. In other words, making sure to stay true to the group's core beliefs, but without an efficient strategy on how to achieve the group's goals. Reflecting on his personal experience, one of the core activists noted how, for him, the activist life before forming a political party was both frustrating and precarious for some five or six years:

> This movement – that movement. From one failure to another failure. And then another failure [laughter]. And we saw establishing a political party as a possibility of getting out of this vicious cycle, which started to depress us more and more as we were finishing our studies. It allowed us to get out of this and not become some sad office workers that would, until their thirties, forget about their political ideals. We wanted to advance this activist struggle, which was already losing its breath, into more mature years. (…) I think I can say that our struggle survived because of the party. Actually, without forming a party, our struggle would probably maintain itself on the margins within the Institute for Labour Studies. (Interview S03 with Aleš)

In this quote, the sense of inefficiency and frustration comes out sharply. Reflecting on the decision to form a political party, the activist goes so far as to claim that they would have

probably failed to keep on going without the "electoral turn". However, when he mentions that their struggle would probably have remained on the margins, he implies that the political party helped them to move their topics from the margins and into the mainstream.

None of the activists I interviewed mentioned any problems in their workplace or professional career. However, an activist mentioned an exchange with one of her colleagues, who claimed he would have never joined any political party because nobody would take him as an independent expert anymore. The interviewee said that such reactions made her angry and that she believed them to be part of "the worst ideology – the one that makes people think that they overcame the ideology" (Interview S04 with Eva).

7.2 NDB

7.2.1 Deciding for "electoral turn" and positioning in relation to Yugoslav socialism

As already established in the analysis of eventful protest waves in the previous chapter, the experience of successful participation in popular mobilization encouraged the activists of NDB. The protest wave did not bring any achievements in the sense that all levels of government completely refused to meet the protesters' demands and attempted to discredit the protest organizers. Instead of demotivating movements, the lack of results further motivated the activists to engage in electoral competition.

It is not possible to "pin down" exactly the point in time at which the activists started to entertain the idea of "electoral turn" and articulate participation in elections as a potential future strategy. Once the protest wave was over, at the end of 2016, the strategy started to consolidate through a series of meetings among the core group of activists. In one such meeting, which took place in November 2016, the core group achieved a relative consensus about the next step being the electoral competition. Based on the analysis of the minutes of the meeting, it is possible to trace a number of threats and risks that the activists have perceived as relevant to the decision.

First, several meeting participants pointed out that taking the "electoral turn" may end up in a failure and, at the same time, mean complete discreditation of NDB as "just another political party". Second, related to the first, everybody agreed that once the process of "electoral turn" is started and publicly declared, it is impossible to reverse it, meaning that the "electoral turn" is a one-way "irreversible" process and that it is extremely complicated to combine it with nonelectoral activism. Third, engaging in elections means risking resources, as it will be much

more complicated to ensure financing for party-political activities than it is for the usual NGO-related activities.

These threats motivated the assumption that it is necessary to organize future activities in a dual manner, with one branch participating in the electoral mobilization as an electoral initiative and the other branch maintaining advocacy and research as its primary activity. This dual form of organizing was also perceived by several activists as a way of structuring the relationship of accountability between the nonelectoral and the electoral arm. It is important to note that the activists at no point thought that they would take over the city government but were more than satisfied with the goal of attaining a handful of mandates in the Belgrade City Assembly. All in all, the decision to take the "electoral turn" was not easy, as it involved a number of risks and threats.

Although part of the initiative drew intellectual inspiration from the legacy of Yugoslav socialism, in particular the principles of communal self-management (Milan 2022), in its strategic framing, NDB did not explicitly associate with the legacy of Yugoslav socialism or any other ideological positions. Given that in the Serbian context, the legacy of socialism is very complex and ambivalent, as mentioned in chapter four, by keeping their distance from explicit socialist symbolism and rhetoric, the activists attempted to prevent any possible sources of discreditation. In the following two quotes, this position is explained by one of the core activists and one of the activists who joined the movement during the 2016 protest wave:

> Our idea was not to take any labels but to insist on values. If, based on our values, somebody labels us as communists – fine. He got it. Whatever. At the same time, insisting on ideological labels creates a lot of noise, and it's way easier to communicate values. And it generally puts you in a relationship with the past, where the narrative is out of your hands. (Interview B11 with Vuk)

> I'm not here because of the name but because of the substance. If we agree that the public good is important and if, in the program, there are many things that are progressive for our context, it's much more important than naming it socialism. (…) We had part of the program about labor issues. We proposed strengthening the labor standards inspection and canceling contracts with those who break workers' rights. (…) This is way more important than labeling it as socialism. (…) You have to be able to explain a specific better solution to your friends who are not politicized around left-wing issues. You have to name the

> problem that they have, criticize it and offer something new instead of insisting on the label of socialism. (Interview B17 with Stefan)

As both of the activists mention, the ideological label of socialism represented a risk in two ways. First, on the level of the general public, using the label of socialism would make NDB easy prey for various political parties who would try to discredit them on the basis of the historical experience of socialist Yugoslavia or Yugoslavia under Milošević. Second, on the level of direct organizing practice, the label would probably make it much harder for activists to engage with different audiences in their environment.

7.2.2 Strategic alliance building

From the very beginning of the strategic shift toward electoral engagement, the activists were very much aware that it was necessary to engage in broad alliance building activities. For the activists of NDB, this entailed two main target groups: similar other local initiatives across Serbia and ideologically proximate new left groups mostly based in Belgrade and other big cities.

Already before the end of the 2016 protest wave, NDB started to co-organize an alliance that involved other local groups.[80] Several months later, in October 2016, the alliance was established under the name Civic Front (Građanski front), involving NDB and six other actors: Local Front of Kraljevo, Association of Free Tenants of Niš, Support Radio Television of Vojvodina (Novi Sad), Bureau for Social Research (Belgrade), Roma League, and Multiethnic Center for the Development of the Danube 21 Region (Bor). NDB's efforts in creating the Civic Front were in line with the assumed emancipatory potential of local level politics, which aims to avoid divisive national-level questions and the dominant cleavages (see Fiket et al. 2019, Milan 2022). However, entering an alliance with other local level movements was also a way of maintaining national-level significance. Although described as left-leaning, the ideological coherence of the Civic Front mostly remained implicit, always delimited by the issues they focused upon. In their purpose statement (Građanski front 2016), the members of the Civic Front emphasized as their main areas of interest, among other things, the protection of dignified living standards through equal access to healthcare, education, and culture; and

[80] IST Media (2016, June 7). Građanski pokreti: Formiraćemo Građanski front Srbije https://istmedia.rs/gradanski-pokreti-formiracemo-gradanski-front-srbije/

protection of public resources (commons) and increase in citizens participation in their management.

Alongside organizing the Civic Front, NDB aimed to build alliances with other actors in the broader left organizational field, including organizations to the left of NDB, such as the Left Summit of Serbia (Levi samit Srbije LSS), Marx 21 and Social Democratic Union (SDU). For activists of the this sector of the left, the electoral strategy was not the main source of controversy. As one of the more experienced left-wing activists stated in an interview, among these organizations, the idea of party-political organizing was always present:

> I think anti-partyism was never particularly present on the anti-capitalist left in Serbia. In my circles, with the exception of anarchists, there was no resolute anti-partisanship like "we are only social movements." This did not exist. I wouldn't say it existed on the anti-capitalist left in Belgrade in the 2000s or later. There was more of an attitude that political parties would demand a strong base, which has to be built before and organically. (Interview B07 with Sara)

The claim that electoral strategy was always a possible option for socialist left organizations can be corroborated by different episodes of their past activity. As already mentioned in chapter four, in 2013, several workers and student organizations decided to form LSS as a left-wing umbrella organization. One of the interviewees, who used to be active in the student movement and later took part in the foundation and organizing of LSS, vividly described a type of shift in the experience of organizing that LSS represented for him and others from the student movement:

> Up to that point, we were representing students or young urban workers in nonindustrial sectors. And this [LSS] put us in contact with industrial workers who remained from socialist Yugoslavia and survived the 1990s. Those people did not tell big stories. If they mentioned left narratives, they were motivated by concrete needs and struggles. They did not first hear of Mondragon, but they first fought for their shares and then somebody told them that there was something similar abroad. For us, this approach was new. (Interview with B16 Bogdan)

LSS represented an important step forward for the activists, especially in terms of connecting with organizations and collectives beyond the student milieu. Within this context, the idea of electoral strategy was indeed entertained, in particular in 2014 and 2015, as the activists were following the rise of Syriza in Greece and IDS (within the United Left) in Slovenia (Interview

B16 with Bogdan). This is also clear from the program of a conference organized by LSS in September 2014, which had a representative of IDS from Slovenia as a guest speaker.[81] Despite the enthusiasm, however, the "electoral turn" was never perceived as a truly feasible strategic option in that period.

Another complementing evidence of the claim that organizations positioned to the left of NDB did not categorically reject the "electoral turn" as an option can be found in the case of the Serbian Left (Levica Srbije LS), a splinter party established in 2015 by Borko Stefanović, a former member of the centrist Democratic Party (DS) who had held several high governmental offices in his career. Stefanović invited several members of various socialist left organizations to join him. While some organizations, such as Marks 21, explicitly rejected cooperation[82], at its peak, some thirty individuals from anti-capitalist left organizations[83] were participating in the party organizing. However, LS failed in the 2016 parliamentary election, obtaining only 0.97% of the vote, and after the 2017 presidential election, Stefanović explicitly rejected the possibility of building a unified left-wing initiative that would, among others, include NDB. Soon after, radical left activists decided to leave the party, citing as reasons the lack of intra-organizational democracy and ideological incoherence.[84] In addition and partly in parallel to the process of entering LS, part of the radical left also tried to revive the Social Democratic Union (Socijal demokratska unija SDU), an inactive political party established in 1996 as representative of social liberalism within the democratic opposition.

From 2016 onwards, various groups on the socialist left started to reassess their strategy and suggested the building of a unified front that would include NDB. The importance of alliance building was further reaffirmed through the 2017 protest wave "Against Dictatorship", already discussed in chapter six. Not only did this protest wave show the left's capability to impose socioeconomic demands within a mass protest wave, but it also represented an experience of positive cooperation among left-wing actors. Therefore, the protest waves created new coordination as the idea of reuniting various voices on the left started to gain currency. This is

[81] Levi samit Srbije (2014)

[82] Marks21 (2015, December 10, December 24)

[83] noviplamen.net (2017, June 12)

[84] noviplamen.net (2017, June 12)

significant as left-wing organizations in Belgrade have rarely been united, rapidly shifting between, as one interviewee explained, "the paradigm of conflict and the paradigm of cooperation" (Interview B17 with Stefan).

One of the members of Marks 21 recounted the positive effect in particular of the 2017 protest wave on the coordination among left-wing activists:

> That protest dynamic and dynamic of cooperation, which brought to the formation of Seven Demands, and the fact that we chased the right wing away from the protest in a matter of a week. It all had a healing influence on the cooperation dynamic. For the first time, after several years of a toxic relationship with other left-wing groups, we felt like we were on top of the world. No hate, no bullshit. We all communicated directly, and it worked well. (Interview B09 with Lazar)

Although the activists' narratives are only partial and could be influenced by the dynamic of cooperation at the moment of interviewing, the assessment that both waves, and in particular the 2017 "Against Dictatorship" wave, served as a space for cooperation and alliance building is consistent across the interviews.

For one part of the local left-wing milieu, the key reservations came from the fact that NDB was never explicitly identifying itself with the socialist left. More specifically, in two interviews, the activists testified that the issue of joining the "electoral turn" was a matter not only of deciding over the electoral dilemma but also of ideological positioning on the local left scene (Interview B8 with Mihajlo, Interview B14 with Dragana). Nevertheless, the opportunity opening had an effect on the strategic assessments in the broader left-wing milieu, which motivated organizations such as the Left Summit of Serbia to support the initiative in spite of some reservations (Interview B16 with Bogdan).

7.2.3 Discursive work in "electoral turn"

Considering the overall disdain for party politics in the general public, the issue of communicating the "electoral turn" was one of the important concerns for activists of NDB (Interview B03 with Milica). The symbolic importance of this moment was elaborated by an activist as follows:

> By that time, it was already clear to everyone in the activist milieu. The thing that was problematic, and that we talked about a lot, was how to explain to the

> wider public that we are getting into the election. Because in the wider public, there is definitely an anti-party sentiment. Meaning that, from the moment you cross the boundary, you are not clean anymore and you become discredited. (Interview B08 with Mihajlo)

What was the activists' way of dealing with crossing the boundary? Paraphrasing the words of Flesher Fominaya (2020) in her study of Podemos, it may be easy to discursively identify problems related to democratic deficiencies, but it is a completely different thing to infuse this analysis with potential for alternatives and affirmative meanings. In what follows, I offer insights about the discursive work of the activists of NDB that, in part, confirm the preceding discourse analyses undertaken by Matković and Ivković (2018) and Balunović (2020).

The key affirmative element of framing that can be traced in the work of NDB is the resignification of politics and political. The main efforts here were invested into claiming that politics is not essentially related to something wrong or immoral. In the statement following a performance in which the activists symbolically "sent the parties down the river", an activist said:

> Citizens were purposefully excluded from political activity. Politics was made despicable; for citizens, it represents mud - something you don't want to get into because you will get dirty. (Radomir Lazović, statement to Južne vesti, 1 July 2017)[85]

In order to be able to resignify politics, the activists had to discursively disconnect meanings between politics and corrupt activity. In a way, they attempted to "rescue" the meaning of politics by distinguishing it from the meaning of party politics. For instance, emphasizing in the protest speeches that they "reject the representation of politics as a fight for somebody else's interests" (Ksenija Radovanović, protest speech, 13 July 2016) or that "parties have no monopoly over politics" (Natalija Simović, protest speech, 25 June 2016). The key example of such rhetoric can be observed in the following speech made by one of the movement supporters:

> The political class of this country, together with their tycoons, hijacked the lives of our parents and gave us a reality show of their political dealership. And now

[85] Južne vesti (2017, July 1)

> they want to give us the future in which all the decisions will have already been made. In which all that can be redistributed will have already been redistributed. That politician class wants to make us believe that, since they betrayed us - we should not believe each other. That, since they can be bought for a price - everyone can be bought for a price. That, because they switch their party affiliations - we have a bad memory. We are here today because we refuse the mistrust in a fellow human being. Because we believe there exist the right people. Because we remember. We are here because politics is not a trade in the background. This event here today - this is politics. (Srđan Keča, protest speech, 13 July 2016)

The pejorative meaning of politics is discredited as something created by the "political" class. As an alternative, the activist claims that the protest event itself is politics. This quote can serve as a good illustration of the strategy of *frame transformation*, i.e., "changing old understandings and meanings and/or generating new ones" (Benford and Snow 2000: 625). This insight confirms one of the previous discourse analyses of NDB, in which this phenomenon is discussed as an example of *value conversion* (see Balunović 2020).

Still, the resignification of politics was not enough. Given their strong distancing from party politics, the activists had to find a way to make electoral organizing a plausible strategic option. Throughout 2014 and 2015, NDB emphasized on several occasions that it is a nonpartisan initiative.[86] Evidence of such nonpartisan emphasis can be found in the Facebook post announcing the protest against the ceremonial laying of the cornerstone of the Belgrade Waterfront on 27 September 2015:

> What makes us worried is the behavior of oppositional parties. Instead of engaging their resources in research on the legal implications of the destruction of the city, submitting prosecution claims or mobilizing citizens, they were surprised and not fit for the situation. "Do Not Let Belgrade D(r)own" is a *civic* initiative, which calls for common sense on behalf of citizens who disagree with

[86] The term 'nonpartisan' is used as the most precise translation of the original-language word 'nestranački', which narrowly describes the lack of relationship to political parties, and does not entail broader meaning of being neutral or free from bias.

> this project, and *in no way* is it connected to a political party - now or ever in the future. (Facebook announcement of a protest event on 27 September 2015) [87]

Indeed, their attempts at keeping detached from the existing political parties, including opposition parties, had to do with the fact that the established opposition never really showed much interest in the Belgrade Waterfront project, as described in the section on early contestation against BW in chapter five.

Considering the generally low level of trust in political parties in Serbia, any association with political parties would represent a liability, especially once the mass mobilization took off. During the mass demonstrations of 2016, NDB strictly requested that any flags or banners with party symbols should not be brought to demonstrations. In spite of this, it seems that political parties kept trying to claim some visibility within the protest wave. For instance, one of the speakers addressing the protest commented on this issue at the very beginning of his speech:

> And I also have a short service message for the oppositional parties. We asked you not to come with your symbols and labels. Today it was not only the government trying to undermine this protest, but also the activists of the Democratic Party, with their well-known symbol, attempting to claim protest for themselves in spite of our request. I hope they will listen to us this time. (Luka Knežević Strika, 16 June 2016)

Losing a nonpartisan identity was also seen as a potential loss of credibility. At the same time, some of the interviewees claimed that, in spite of putting emphasis on the nonpartisan nature of the protest, their collaboration with some NGOs became much more complicated.

> They could not use the argument "we are not allowed to associate with political parties" because we were a civic movement, one of those movements that most of the NGOs would support. But we surfaced in the political arena and were cast in the role of political contenders to the regime. And now they will often say: "We cannot act politically. We cannot support political activism." (Interview B01 with Tijana)

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[87] Facebook announcement for the protest event on 27 September 2015. https://www.facebook.com/nedavimobeograd/photos/gm.915889405155581/524409531069890/?type=3&source=44 (accessed: 2 May 2021).

To an extent, such interactions further reiterated the risk of becoming discredited and weakening the mobilization momentum. A similar tendency among some NGOs has also been noted in the work of Fagan and Ejdus (2020). Soon, however, the tables turned:

> At some point, we became more important than all previously existing political parties. But we had been talking all along that politicians are given more attention than they should and that we think it's wrong. And now, suddenly, we've become the object of the same attention. (Interview B05 with Dušan)

As the quote above shows, by the end of the 2016 protest wave, activists found themselves in a somewhat contradictory position. One of the central messages of the wave focused on criticizing the influence of political elites and leaders in the public life of Serbia. On the other, as NDB became one of the key mobilizing forces in the oppositional public, its leading members gained a similar type of attention. With expectations building up, they had to decide how to communicate their shift toward electoral strategy.

While the resignification of politics took place already in the mass protest wave, the activists had to emphasize that they do not reject political parties as such. Their main point was that the organizational form of the political party is currently in crisis, as elaborated by an activist in a TV interview:

> And I do not think that political parties as such are problematic. It's a form of organizing like any other. The problem is their internal structure in which there is no serious democracy and activity, except for some deals and negotiations. (Dobrica Veselinović, in the interview with TV Šabac on 23 April 2017)

The point was not to simply discredit parties in a blanket manner. Rather, the activists' aim was to argue for envisioning alternative ways of party-political organizing. In their official statement on the occasion of announcing the electoral nomination, the activists noted that "different to the beliefs of usual pundits, neither the crisis of democracy nor the wrong direction of development, are going to be resolved by rebuilding people's belief in politicians, but rather by people themselves re-entering politics."[88]

[88] Aksentijević (2017)

Although it certainly influenced the more specific movement-related audiences, as well as various sympathetic movements and organizations around them, the question of whether NDB managed to successfully utilize its framing strategy remains open. One of the activists claims that the controversies about "doing politics" still remain visible in their work, even though at the moment of interviewing, more than three years had passed since the election:

> The thing that we were trying to achieve, but never succeeded in, was to make people understand that it is all politics. That politics is even how we live on the level of our city borough. (…) It happens even now that activist initiatives related to us reject cooperation because they sense that we are overtaking their space, and they say: "We don't want politicians." (Interview B18 with Dunja)

Notwithstanding several years of experience in electoral organizing and the fact that the initiative clearly declared its plan to keep engagement in electoral participation over the years to come, the challenge of "crossing the boundary" between nonelectoral and electoral activism, mentioned at the very beginning of this section, remains relevant.

7.2.4 Individual-level perspective on electoral engagement

For several of the activists interviewed, putting their names on the ballot was something they had never imagined before. A lot of them created their previous identity through non-governmental organizations, collectives, social movements and other forms of nonelectoral activism, acting in opposition to political parties and the state. Therefore, activists' personal stories of the decision to take part in an electoral initiative, and especially of those who put their name and surname on the voting ballot, were far from straightforward. One of the activists remembered very vividly what her initial reaction to the idea of party-political organizing was, even long before the idea was even strategically assessed:

> It was much earlier, sometimes at the end of 2013, the beginning of 2014. (…) And I remember, we are sitting, having a beer, and one of our friends asks: "When are you going to become a political party?" His question caught me by surprise. Man! It gave me the creeps! "No, why would we ever want that," I said. Not knowing that one day this would come. (…) I don't know. I really felt disgusted. And I still have this feeling of disgust toward the party system. Because they [politicians] turned it into a 'background deal'. (Interview B03 with Milica)

While many activists articulated a similar type of general resentment toward political parties, the issue of distance toward party politics has other aspects as well. One of them is how the identity of a political candidate fits in a specific professional context, which can critically affect an individual's willingness to join the ballot. For some, for instance, the situation was not particularly threatening. When asked whether she confronted arguments that categorically refuse party-political organizing, one of the interviewees, who worked as a university professor at the time, responded:

> In my milieu, at this faculty, many professors and assistants are engaged in electoral politics. Although I can understand those arguments [against party politics], and I would have probably endorsed them if you asked me some five or six years ago, in my milieu, there were no such challenges. (Interview B13 with Anđela)

As mentioned by the interviewee, her professional milieu did not find the question of personal electoral engagement particularly controversial. On the contrary, it was a relatively usual type of activism among her colleagues on the faculty. She did not feel pressured into staying away from electoral engagement. The same, however, cannot be said of all activists, especially those who were confronted with a less understanding professional milieu.

The consequences on professional life were, however, also related to one's public and professional image, especially for those actively representing NDB in public. One of the interviewees shared with me an anecdote in which one of the friendly media, which regularly covered the activity of NDB, rejected her as a potential interviewee due to her association with the electoral campaign of NDB. In this specific situation, the journalists were covering one of the less known cases of historical heritage threatened to be demolished in the interviewee's own neighborhood, and they were looking for an architect and a resident to find out more about the case. The interviewee recounted her phone conversation with a journalist:

> This journalist phoned me and told me that they are doing a story on the case of this building. She asked me for the phone number of anybody who lives there. And I said: "Sure. I live there. I can come to your show." She responded: "Yes, but we wouldn't like to make it openly political." (…) The journalist's next question was: "Do you know an architect who could put this issue into context and say something about the urban development of Belgrade?" I said: "Yes, I'm

> an architect as well." And she responded: "Yes, but we can't do this." (Interview B01 with Tijana)

As this interaction with a journalist from one of the friendly news outlets illustrates, public exposure in the electoral campaign can, at times, change the public image of an activist. Due to public association with a political party, the interviewee was blocked from acting publicly as an expert or even as a local resident. She was perceived as somebody whose presence would make the news "openly political", which meant that she was effectively barred from expressing her opinion. Although this is the case of one of the activists who was particularly exposed in public and may, in that sense, serve as an extreme case, it is still a telling example of the consequences that electoral engagement may create.

Apart from the abovementioned aspects of personal consequences, some activists of NDB were confronted with direct physical threats, and some reported being secretly followed and stalked by strangers (Interview B01 with Tijana, Interview B03 with Milica). This started already in the period during and after the 2016 protest wave.

In cases of some activists who felt disdain related to electoral engagement or specific strategic framing, the personal dilemma of whether to join the electoral initiative was resolved through the existence of the intra-group trust. The activists negotiated their own position of distance to electoral engagement in relation to the position of fellow activists. The following quote can serve as an illustration of the significance that intra-group dynamic holds within strategic shift:

> I think that in situations like this, which cannot always be ideal, you simply choose to be strategically naïve, to close your eyes to things that bother you or to things that are not perfectly in accordance with your values and visions. On the one hand, there are things about which I take a very firm stance. On the other hand, I also trust that other people can assess, sometimes better than myself, what the best moves in the political arena are. Simply, my values and attitudes can sometimes be unproductive. In that sense, it was a combination of a bit of trust and a bit of awareness that not everything is always perfect. And that we had never had a chance like this before. (Interview B06 with Gordana)

As described by the interviewee, trust in other activists was fundamental for her engagement in movement party formation and putting her name on the ballot. The intra-group trust allowed her to get over doubts and dilemmas about the strategic circumstances and her own values.

7.3 Summary

This chapter focused specifically on the immediate process of movement party formation during and after the anti-establishment protest waves in Slovenia and Serbia. The comparison of the two cases points to several preliminary conclusions.

For the activists in Slovenia, the "electoral turn" represented a way of obtaining more stable resources, as well as an opening for public promotion of the cause of democratic socialism. It was supposed to allow the activists to go beyond their organizational basis in the urban student population and give them a possibility to introduce their ideas into the mainstream. For the activists in Serbia, movement party formation was relatively more perceived as a source of threat and destabilization. It was in no way an opportunity for routinization, moderation or professionalization - all processes typically related to the process of institutionalization. Quite the contrary.

It is important to note that in both cases, activists were invested in strategic alliance building, as they thought that taking an "electoral turn" on their own would lower their chances. The mechanism of strategic alliance building was, in both cases, facilitated by the opportunity signaling that happened due to the mass protest waves. Strategic alliances involved groups with diverse ideological positions, as well as different organizational capacities. Although these differences represented a risk and meant potential compromising, in both cases, left-wing actors were ready to be pragmatic and leave aside ideological and organizational differences in order to build alliances and attain a better electoral result. The imperative of unification was strongly present.

In Slovenia as well as in Serbia, the activists had to engage in discursive work through strategic framing in order to make the electoral strategy feasible as well as legitimize themselves in relation to the pre-existing political parties. In Slovenia, they explicitly used the framework of the movement party and attempted to systematically involve nonelectoral actors ("The Fourth Group") in the ZL coalition. In Serbia, the activists of NDB claimed their position in electoral competition while reclaiming the meaning of politics and the political in their public statements and speeches. Overall, however, in the case of Serbia, the activists' discursive work in legitimizing the "electoral turn" was much more elaborate. This can be explained by the path dependency of the previous strategy. Given that NDB was from the very beginning trying to keep party politics out of the protest and explicitly attempted to frame protests as nonpartisan, they perceived movement party formation as a more significant challenge.

As already described on several occasions in the previous chapters, the activists were influenced by the transnational diffusion dynamics that, at least to an extent, shaped the ideological articulation of IDS and NDB, both in the long and short term. The activists were for years participating in international meetings and gatherings of various groups and political parties and were well-networked on the European level (see also Milan 2022). Although not of principal importance in deciding about the "electoral turn", transnational diffusion did have an influence on the activists' ideological articulation.

While the aim of this chapter was not to give a systematic account of individual activist narratives, and although it is not possible to make strong cross-case comparative inferences about the individual-level motivation of activists, some important similarities and differences emerged through several in-depth interviews. One of the clearest differences is related to the focus of activists' narratives. While in Slovenia, the activists of IDS did not mention any significant personal consequences, the activists of NDB mentioned a variety of consequences that electoral engagement had on their professional, private and public lives. Engaging in electoral politics, especially for those activists who became leading candidates, meant that they had to renegotiate their professional identity.

8 Discussion and Conclusions: Unpacking the Electoral Turn

The main aim of this thesis was to advance our understanding of the processes of new left movement party formation through a detailed analysis of two cases of new left movement parties in post-Yugoslav space. It aimed to specify the process in the background of movement party formation and how this process is shaped by the activists' attribution of threats and opportunities in relation to their respective political contexts. This chapter summarizes the main findings of the thesis and discusses their implications for two research areas: studies of activism in postsocialist Europe, and studies of social movement strategy and movement parties more broadly. Furthermore, it offers a perspective on potential future avenues of research and, finally, reflects on the past and the future of the movement parties investigated.

8.1 Movement party formation, its background and its context

Although Slovenia and Serbia represent two rather disparate contexts in terms of institutional openness and discursive opportunities for new left electoral actors, the processes of new left movement party formation in both countries showed certain similarities on the level of mechanisms that motivated long-term nonelectoral activists to engage in electoral competition. These two mechanisms are strategic learning and cognitive liberation.

8.1.1 Strategic learning

As discussed in the theoretical framework, explanations of strategic change in activist groups can profit greatly from historical and genealogical approaches to social movements (Flesher Fominaya 2015, see also Blee 2012, Rossi 2016, 2017). The findings of this thesis, especially the part of the analysis focusing on the history of groups behind movement parties in chapter five, enable me to describe how strategic learning changed the activists' approach to strategy and how they gradually moved closer to electoral strategy.

In both contexts, it is possible to observe that the investigated activist groups, since their emergence, continuously experimented with their tactics and strategies. Instead of following in the footsteps of organizations and collectives in which many of the core activists were initially socialized, they looked for new ways of doing activism. They were creating and testing various types of protest tactics, moving from less confrontational ones to more confrontational ones and vice versa. They were experimenting with ways in which demands could be articulated and framed in public. They were reflecting on the problems of "horizontalism" and "verticalism"

in organizations and were trying to think of how organizations can nurture participation while not losing the efficiency and capacity to act. They were looking for ways of building broad alliances and sustaining them. They were attempting to build cooperation with already existing political parties and other established actors.

All of the abovementioned elements point to the analyzed groups' overall propensity for strategic action. The activist groups behind both IDS and NDB were continuously reflecting on the direct effects of their action on their political context and, based on this, engaged in strategic learning. In my analysis of groups' genealogies, I was able to trace several such moments. The Working Group on Political Strategy in the case of IDS or early discussions about the purpose of campaigns related to cinemas in the case of NDB are both very good examples of explicitly strategic behavior and strategic learning.

Strategic learning is also related to the biographical characteristics of core members - their identity, their position in networks, and their knowledge of various tactics (Ganz 2009). Although this thesis has not focused on the life histories of activists, it is possible to point out some of these activists' biographical characteristics that have contributed to their strategic actions. First, both IDS and NDB core activists were relatively young, most of them in their late twenties and early thirties at the moment of establishing the movement party. Second, although some of them were initially socialized within social movements and NGOs, they identified with them only conditionally and were critical of the limits that the civil society framework imposes upon activism. Third, the activists were part of a well-networked environment, maintaining regular contact with other sectors of left-wing organizing. Fourth, they were open to engaging in a variety of protest tactics, including more conventional and less conventional ones. These observations, at least in part, confirm the importance of observing features of activists' generations (see Stubbs 2012).

Strategic learning, however, does not happen in a rapid fashion but is rather a gradual process of consolidation of experiences accumulated by the activists through a certain period (Rossi 2016, 2017). Based on the analysis of interviews with activists, there are two types of experience that shaped such strategic learning: endogenous experience (organizational) and exogenous experience (environmental). Although these two types of experience are intertwined, as environment and organization are continuously interacting, they can be delimited based on the immediate source of learning as described by the interviewees.

Endogenously, the activists experienced organizational inefficiency related to the outreach of their activities. Instead of engaging with the broader population, their activities through social movements and NGOs mostly attracted "the usual suspects" - individuals from highly urban milieus of middle-class students and professionals. Engaging more directly with people from other contexts was limited and rarely sustainable for longer periods of time. Exogenously, no matter how successful they were in protest mobilization and strategic framing, their values and goals had no representatives among existing electoral actors and were, for this reason, of marginal importance in parliamentary politics and the mainstream media. The strategy of movement party formation resonated well with both the abovementioned aspects of the activists' strategic learning.

8.1.2 Cognitive liberation, strategic alliance building and discursive work

While the mechanism of strategic learning was present in both cases, it was not on its own enough to motivate the activists for movement party formation. Equally important was the experience of anti-establishment protest waves, which stood out for their unprecedented mass mobilization. As is very often the case with such eventful protests, they represented a type of external shock that, at the time, seemed capable of fundamentally transforming the political context. In that sense, it is correct to say that activists sometimes stumble on an opportunity rather than make an opportunity (Koopmans 2006). It is important, however, to understand them not solely as moments of opportunity opening external to the groups but rather as an interactive process in which actors can proactively shape the eventful protest, in particular in terms of protest framing (see Della Porta 2008b, 2018).

Initially, the effect that eventful protest had on activists can be best described as opportunity signaling. Although already before the protest waves, the activists went through a long-term strategic learning process, through which they grew increasingly critical of their previous activism, the eventful protest had an important role in changing the perception of possibilities. Protest waves had a dynamic of a positive feedback loop, meaning that the visibility of mobilization further supported ever greater numbers of participants to join in (see Biggs 2003). The protest waves' perceived unexpectedness and rapid growth in participant numbers served as a clear signal of opportunity for a number of different actors, including new left activists.

In order to make use of this signalized opportunity, new left activists engaged in strategic interaction, coordination and competition with other actors participating in the protests. As shown in the analysis, anti-establishment protest waves in both countries were strongly marked

by general anti-corruption and anti-authoritarian framing. In that sense, protest waves analyzed in this thesis are not exceptional in the broader regional context. As contended in one of the recent overviews of protest waves in Southeastern Europe: "the dissatisfaction of protesting citizens was less ideological, but focused on the evident state capture by predatory political elites" (Brentin and Bieber 2018: 4). Therefore, it should not be taken for granted that these protest waves were *per se* conducive to the development of new left movement parties. On the contrary, in both contexts, new left activists had to invest concentrated strategic efforts in framing the protest waves as the fight against neoliberalism, social injustice and inequality. This was an attempt by new left actors to develop the protest framing beyond the problematization of high-profile corruption and the lacking rule of law, which was well-represented in the mainstream.

The fact that socioeconomic grievances were not by default the most dominant ones in the protest waves makes for an important distinction to the paradigmatic cases of post-2008 anti-establishment protest waves in Southern Europe, such as those in Spain, Greece, and Portugal. Most of the protest activity in Southern European cases discursively revolved around the crisis of neoliberal capitalism and the crisis of representative democracy – both embodied in the policies of austerity (Della Porta 2013c, 2015, Della Porta et al. 2017, Flesher Fominaya 2017). The master frame of anti-austerity strongly resonated with the realities of crises in various national and organizational contexts, contributing to counter-hegemonic organizing across Europe (Scholl and Freyberg-Inan 2018). It is, therefore, understandable that in the aftermath of such protest waves, we saw the rise of big and strong radical left electoral alternatives that shook the well-established social democratic parties. Radical left movement parties such as Podemos and Syriza, at least in the election immediately following the anti-austerity protests, clearly profited from protest activity that was predominantly framed as a reaction to the crisis of neoliberal capitalism (Della Porta et al. 2017). The position of actors that formed Podemos and Syriza was, in that sense, significantly different from the position of actors that formed IDS and NDB.

How can we best describe the impact of these protest waves? Using the explanatory toolkit of social movement studies, I argue that the impact of eventful protest on the perception of new left groups can be best described through the mechanism of cognitive liberation. The concept of cognitive liberation was proposed by McAdam (1982), building on the work of Piven and Cloward (1978), to explain the transformation of consciousness through which actors start to perceive newly emerging political opportunities in their context. Based on this reinterpretation

of their political context, the actors can subsequently act upon their context through diverse types of strategic framing, forms of organizing and contentious repertoire. In that sense, in both cases covered in this thesis, cognitive liberation was a precondition for engagement in movement party formation (McAdam 2013), motivated in part by the observations of the cases of movement parties from abroad (Toplišek 2019, Milan 2022, Balunović 2018). However, cognitive liberation on its own was not enough. It is also possible to trace how the activists engaged in discursive work in order to justify and promote the "electoral turn". There are, however, important differences between the Slovenian and the Serbian case of the new left movement party, in particular with respect to the intensity of framing that new left activists used in discursive work, as described in chapter seven.

In addition, the experience of eventful protest reinvigorated strategic alliance building among left-wing organizations and collectives. The experience of highly mobilized protest waves, on the one hand, allowed the activists from diverse groups to be in direct contact and collaborate more often. At the same time, given that the protest waves represented a sense of immediate and extraordinary opportunity opening, the actors were motivated to collaborate strategically. Extant social movement scholarship has shown that both opportunities and threats can greatly motivate activists to engage in strategic alliance building (see McCammon and Minyoug Moon 2015). In the cases at hand, the positive influence on the alliance building dynamic came predominantly from opportunity opening that was associated with eventful protest.

To sum up, in both cases, the activists' perception of the "electoral turn" was influenced by the experience of protest waves: first, the protests provoked cognitive liberation among part of the activists by demonstrating the potential for left-wing mobilization; second, in parallel, they motivated the activists to engage in coordination and alliance building (see Figure 8.1). In addition, the fact that in both cases, protests did not bring success from the perspective of new left movements further changed the perspective on the "electoral turn".

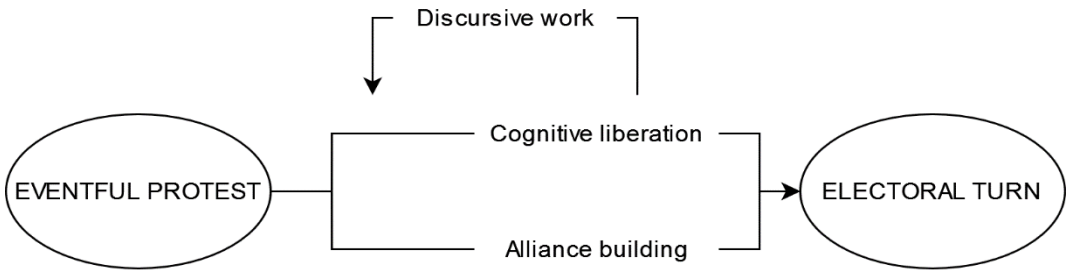

Figure 8.1 Schematic overview of the eventful protests' impact on the "electoral turn"

8.1.3 The relative importance of political opportunity structure in new left movement party formation in Slovenia and Serbia

One of the important benefits of comparing the cases of Slovenia and Serbia was the possibility of analyzing to what extent and how two divergent political contexts with their divergent political opportunity structures (POS) influenced the core strategic change of new left movement parties. In the theoretical framework, I outlined two principal elements of POS influencing the formation of new left movement parties: institutional openness for new electoral actors and discursive opportunity structure. I will now assess each of the two elements by first focusing on explaining the equal outcome of movement party formation and then focusing on explaining the divergence in their strategic articulation.

As already shown in chapter three, Slovenia and Serbia differ in terms of regulations related to the party system, electoral system, financing of extraparliamentary political parties, and threshold for the party establishment. In all four elements, Serbia represents fewer opportunities and more threats for new entries (see Table 3.1). Given the differences in institutional openness, we could assume that new left activists in Slovenia and Serbia would diverge in choosing to engage in electoral competition. Indeed, based on the interview data, it is possible to infer that they had a very different perception of the "electoral turn". Among the activists in Slovenia, the decision to engage in "electoral turn" was perceived as risky, but it also represented an attempt at stabilizing their long-term activity. Establishing a political party was seen as a source of heavily needed funding and guaranteed outreach into the political mainstream. Among the activists in Serbia, running in elections was perceived as a high-risk decision. First, turning from a nonelectoral to an electoral strategy was perceived as putting the credibility of NDB at significant risk in the broader public, but also among the already existing supporters and organizations that were funding their work. Second, the prospects of winning more than a handful of seats in the Belgrade City Assembly, which would be the best-case scenario, were relatively low. Even if they achieved such a result, they would not accumulate any significant resources.

So, how can we explain that in both cases, activist groups decided to enter the electoral arena? I argue that the outcome of the "electoral turn" in both cases shows that not all elements of political context had equal importance for activists. In Serbia, the low level of institutional openness and unfavorable discursive opportunities were not detrimental to the activists'

decision to shift from nonelectoral to electoral activism. The obstacles and risks of movement party formation were downplayed by the previous strategic learning, through which the activists became aware of limits related to nonelectoral activism. At the same time, eventful protests changed the activists' sense of possibility, provoking cognitive liberation.

And while POS had no impact on the decision on *whether* to take the "electoral turn", it had an impact on *how* to take the "electoral turn". In other words, their strategic articulation was diverse, which may help us to explain why did the Slovenian new left activists initially opt for a *national-level democratic-socialist pathway* while their Serbian counterparts opted for a *local-level green-municipalist pathway*?

Explaining the distinction between the national-level and the local-level pathway is relatively straightforward. The activists in Serbia adapted their electoral strategy to the threats in their context. First, given the low prospects of winning the seats in the national-level elections, presidential or parliamentary, the activist decided to compete primarily in the local election for the City Assembly of Belgrade. This is corroborated by the fact that they did not compete in the 2017 presidential election in Serbia and the activists' claims that their resources were too limited for engagement in the national-level election. Second, instead of establishing a political party, they opted to organize a citizens' list, which allowed them to avoid the costly process of political party registration. In Slovenia, where the activists did not confront similar obstacles but were rather motivated to form a political party as a way of organizational growth and stabilization, the newly established political party and its coalition ran in elections on all levels of government.

Explaining the distinction in the discursive aspect of strategic pathways is much more complex but, in greater part, explainable through the activists' perception of discursive opportunities. There are three specific points to make about this inference.

First, mass protest waves had a path-dependent impact on the activists' later strategy. In Slovenia, the protest wave was perceived by the activists as offering opportunities for the articulation of explicitly socialist symbolism. While in Serbia, the protest waves of 2016 and 2017 were also perceived by parts of the left as an opportunity for the introduction of explicit socioeconomic claims and critique of neoliberalism, given the protests' strong orientation on the issues of space and urban development, predominant framing was one of green and municipalist politics. This difference may also be related to the timing of protest and transnational diffusion from other contexts. While the period between 2011 and 2013 was

marked by the global presence of anti-austerity movements and the rise of Syriza as a potentially powerful radical left alternative, the period between 2015 and 2018 was marked by the rise of Podemos and a number of municipalist platforms, especially in Spain. The activists from Slovenia and the activists from Belgrade were therefore exposed to different sources of inspiration from abroad (see Dinev 2022b, Milan 2022).

Second, activists had different perceptions of discursive opportunities related to the legacy of socialist Yugoslavia, which still plays an important role in the political mainstream of both countries. Indeed, in interviews in both contexts, the activists shared their perceptions about the tactical necessity of distancing from the socialist legacy. However, the difference in the type and intensity of this distancing is significant. In Slovenia, the activists decided to expose their socialist identity but tactically emphasized their distinction by using the concept of democratic socialism. They also made a point of repeating in their public statements that the Yugoslav experience should neither be idealized nor demonized but rather used as a source of learning. Although partly inspired by the Yugoslav socialist model of local self-management (Milan 2022), the activists of NDB built the identity and public presence of their electoral initiative completely detached from socialism and decided to opt for municipalism as their ideological position. Given the specifically controversial and multi-layered legacy of Yugoslav socialism in Serbia, opting for non-socialist symbolism was perceived as the best possible option.

Third, in both cases, new left movement parties were effectively functioning as coalitions, including a broad base of activists coming from diverse ideological backgrounds: democratic socialist, green, and social liberal. This means that the ideological positioning was also influenced by the predominant subsector of the new left. While in the Slovenian case, the electoral initiative was led by the IDS, in the Serbian case, the electoral initiative was led by the activists of NDB. This difference in the relative strength of sub-sectors of the new left may be explained by the long-term development of new left actors in two contexts. As shown in chapter four, the development of postsocialist new left activism followed two very different trajectories in the two countries. Although in both countries new left actors were present before the protest waves, they had very different resources and relative influence.

8.1.4 *Argument in brief*

On the most abstract level, the findings can be summarized into two principal mechanisms that explain the activists' strategic shift from nonelectoral to electoral activism: strategic learning

and cognitive liberation. While these mechanisms can be further specified into various sub-elements, as I already showed, they have central importance in answering the research questions.

Strategic learning allows the activists to experiment with their strategies and tactics, observe their impact on the context, and reflect on their efficiency. In both cases analyzed in this thesis, strategic learning unfolded over several years, gradually building up the activists' disappointment with the efficiency of nonelectoral activism. Cognitive liberation, which in both cases happened through the experience of eventful protest, allowed the activists to strategically reassess their position toward electoral activism. It served primarily as an encouragement that the electoral strategy - be it democratic socialism in the context of Slovenia or green municipalism in the context of Serbia - could mobilize a broader population than what they had assumed before. Both mechanisms, although unfolding through different temporal perspectives, were therefore shown to work in combination to influence the activists' decision for movement party formation.

Comparison of two cases from two different contexts allows me to eliminate those elements of political context which did not influence the decision whether to engage in movement party formation. Based on the findings, it is clear that the unfavorable party system, electoral system and party regulation do not need to play a detrimental role in the post-Yugoslav new left activists' decision to engage in electoral participation. Similar goes for the unfavorable ideological structure of the electoral competition and the legacy of Yugoslav socialism. While we would expect that new left movement party formation would be demotivated by the unfavorable discursive opportunities, cognitive liberation motivated a reassessment of the prospects for electoral strategy. At the same time, as discussed in the previous section, POS did influence the strategic articulation of the new left, motivating the activists to adapt their selection of *pathways to politics*.

8.2 Contributions and their implications

The findings of the thesis, as summarized in the previous section, contain relevance for two broad bodies of literature: the study of activism in postsocialist Europe and the study of social movement strategy and movement party formation. I will now address the implications of this study for each of the two areas of research.

8.2.1 Implications for the study of new left activism in postsocialist Europe

One of the principal purposes of this thesis was to advance our understanding of the capacity for strategic change in activism in postsocialist Europe. Inspired by the literature that criticizes the claims about the prevalence of NGO-ized, nonelectoral and transactional activism in the region, its aim was to offer a more dynamic perspective on regional activism following the most recent theoretical advancements (Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2020, Baća 2021). By using in-depth qualitative case studies, it inductively traced the mechanisms that can help better understand the processes that bring activists to engage in movement party formation as a case of core strategic change.

In focusing on the meso level of analysis, dealing principally with activist groups and their environment, the thesis represents a logical continuation of the regionally oriented scholarship that recently started to theorize change in activism through a more macro-level analysis that primarily utilizes protest event data as the source of evidence and focuses on the macro-level analysis of "contentious practices" or "protest arena" (e.g., Baća 2018, 2021, Dinev 2020, see also Dolenec et al. 2020). The possibility to look at the long-term development of a more narrowly defined object of analysis, such as movement parties, allows more explicit theorizing about the process of strategic change. What is more, this approach allows drawing a relatively clear line between the activists' context and their perception of the context, pointing out the ways in which contextual factors, here conceptualized through POS, may or may not be present in the activists' reasoning about engagement in core strategic change.

By looking at the ways in which nonelectoral activism evolves into electoral activism within the region, the thesis tackles another important issue – the meaning of politics, party politics and the political for activists in post-Yugoslav but also broader postsocialist space. As well-noted in the literature, portions of left-wing activism in the region developed over the last thirty years within the predominant liberal conception of civil society, which reaffirms a strong dichotomy between civil society actors and the state, including the sphere of electoral competition (Baker 1998, 1999, Foley and Edwards 1996, Meiksins Wood 1995, White 1994). The continuous presence of this tendency was noted in a number of specific case studies, where part of left-wing activist groups limits their strategy to nonelectoral forms of political participation or purposefully perform their identity as *apolitical, nonpartisan* or even *antipolitical* (Bakardjieva and Konstantinova 2020, Jezierska 2015, 2018, Pudar Draško, Fiket and Vasiljević 2020, Puljek-Shank and Fritsch 2019, Stoyanova 2018). Building on these observations, in this thesis, I show that, at least for one part of left-wing actors, engaging in political competition presumed the creation of instruments through which they can negotiate

the meaning of politics and political on the level of groups, including discursive work through strategic framing. This process of change was particularly present in the case of NDB.

The process described in this thesis further qualifies previous tentative observations about the changing strategic direction of actors working within civil society (see Mikuš 2018, Morača 2016, Stubbs 2012). New left movement parties did not develop in a manner that is completely detached from the framework of nonelectoral activism and the liberal conception of civil society but have rather purposefully attempted to integrate and include in their platforms the ideas and values that could foster alliances with nonelectoral actors. Although new left movement parties came out of core strategic change, they do not represent a clear-cut discontinuity with preceding activist tradition.

Finally, the thesis demonstrates the capacity of the new left for strategic adaptation to diverse contexts in post-Yugoslav space. Slovenia, a functional multi-party democracy with a relatively open institutional structure, and Serbia, a dominant-party competitive authoritarian regime with an unfavorable institutional structure, both saw new left actors' strategic shift from nonelectoral to electoral activism. The fact that one of the contexts is unfavorable had no impact on the activists' decision whether to innovate their strategy beyond the nonelectoral activism. It had, however, an impact on the activists' strategic adaptation, both in terms of the selected level of competition and in terms of ideological articulation. This comparative insight adds up to the previous literature that already noted variation in the ways in which new left (and radical left) activism can be articulated in postsocialist Europe (see Abăseacă and Piotrowski 2018, Dinev 2020, 2022b, March 2011, Štiks 2015, Wennerhag 2019). The case of Slovenia is particularly instructive as there the new left was articulated through openly socialist symbolism (see also Toplišek 2019). Slovenia may be an exceptional case, but even as such, it complicates general observations about the overall discreditation of the radical left in postsocialist Europe (see March 2011). The case of Serbia, at the same time, is instructive in the sense that it shows the adaptive potential in contexts that seem very restrictive for any kind of oppositional contestation, let alone contestation coming from the new left.

8.2.2 Implications for the study of movement parties and social movement strategies

Although the body of knowledge on left-wing social movements' shifts from nonelectoral to electoral organizing, what I refer to as "electoral turns" in this thesis, has grown over the past decade, it mostly focuses on cases in which such strategic changes were met with a favorable political context. This thesis begs to differ, as it starts from the assumption that a movement's

decision to compete in elections is a relevant research puzzle on its own. Even more so, understanding the "electoral turn" is highly relevant in those contexts that are structurally unfavorable for new electoral entries and, in the case of this thesis, for left-wing electoral actors.

Within the context of the social movement scholarship, beyond the regional research on activism in postsocialist Europe, this thesis connects the growing academic production on movement parties to the literature on change and stability in social movement strategy. The thesis conceptualizes movement party formation as a type of social movement strategic change (Cowell-Meyers 2014). However, movement party formation is not just any type of strategic change but represents a change in core strategy, exposing movements to "liability of newness" (Minkoff 1999). This conceptualization was demonstrated in detail through two cases of movement party formation, in both of which the activists moved into the electoral arena. Utilizing Kitschelt's framework, for activists, the motivation for electoral engagement came from the strategic assessment according to which they had to move from the *logic of constituency representation*, dealing primarily with the ideological positions of core members and participants, toward the *logic of electoral competition*, which they saw as an opportunity to promote their causes in the mainstream (Kitschelt 1989). Combining movement party literature with a strategic framework then allows us to grasp more precisely the way in which movements evolve into political parties.

Following the assumption that social movement strategies are constrained through the sedimentation of activists' legacies and experiences (Blee 2012, Rossi 2016, 2017), the thesis outlines how sometimes it can take years of experience before the idea of engaging in core strategic change – in this case, the "electoral turn" – starts being entertained. It is only through the sufficient passage of time that the activists can engage in trying out different strategies, therefore gradually learning about what works and what does not.

The thesis discusses specifically the mechanism of cognitive liberation. The same mechanism was observed in two important recent studies on the case of Podemos, by Flesher Fominaya (2020) and Portos (2021), already discussed in chapter three, which point to cognitive liberation as one of the mechanisms that caused the rise of popularity of the electoral strategy among activists in the aftermath of mass protests. However, they do not concur in locating it in time. According to Flesher Fominaya, cognitive liberation happened due to the impressive electoral success of Podemos in the 2014 European Parliament election, which demonstrated that

"winning was actually possible" (Flesher Fominaya 2020: 246). For Portos, on the other hand, the mechanism of cognitive liberation can be identified in the immediate aftermath of the anti-austerity protest wave of 2011 and 2012. In this period, the activists were becoming acutely aware of the fact that, notwithstanding the unprecedented strength of protest, no institutional actors, including none of the political parties, wanted to genuinely address the grievances raised by the protest. This lack of facilitation on behalf of institutions strongly motivated the activists to further rebellion (Portos 2021).

The findings of this thesis concur with both Flesher Fominaya (2020) and Portos (2021) in their claims about the importance of cognitive liberation in movement party formation. Nevertheless, it is not easy to precisely delimit cognitive liberation to a specific moment simply because it is a phenomenon that unfolds over time (Nepstad 1997). At different points in time, therefore, cognitive liberation can have different importance with regard to mobilization. Within the scope of my thesis, I locate it specifically in the period of eventful protest, adding primarily to the way cognitive liberation was already discussed by Portos (2021). As confirmed in both contexts, the encouragement of successful mass mobilization, combined with a lack of palpable success, motivated the activists to engage in electoral competition. The spread of cognitive liberation among a greater number of people, however, depends on the capacity of activists to engage in discursive work through strategic framing (Nepstad 1997).

8.3 The generalizability of findings and their limitations

Within post-Yugoslav space, in addition to Slovenia and Serbia, the cases of new left movement party formation can be traced in Croatia, Kosovo and Macedonia (see Tables 1.1 and 1.2). The mechanisms traced in the cases of IDS and NDB cannot be directly generalized to the population, as within-case inferences about the necessity and sufficiency of conditions and mechanisms can be based only on evidence collected from each case (Beach and Pedersen 2013, Blatter and Haverland 2012). Further case studies and deductive testing, therefore, need to be undertaken in order to assess the explanatory weight of mechanisms in other cases.

At the same time, despite its limited capacity to generalize beyond the two cases and beyond the contexts of Slovenia and Serbia, the thesis bears relevance for our understanding of other cases of new left movement party formation in post-Yugoslav space. It showed that the formation of new left movement parties might represent an outcome of a long-term process that includes changing assessments of efficient strategy and, related to this, changing assessments of what is possible in terms of mobilization capacity. This has important

implications for assumptions about activism in postsocialist Europe as NGO-ized, transactional or incapable of strategic change.

By looking at two very different cases, the thesis showed that a diverse POS, which stems from diverse postsocialist trajectories, does not necessarily cancel out the possibility of a new left movement party formation. Mechanisms of strategic learning and cognitive liberation can, in that sense, influence activists' positive strategic assessment of even the most unfavorable contexts. At the same time, the activists' perception of political context makes them strategically adapt, which in part explains the divergence of strategic articulation across the cases of post-Yugoslav new left movement parties.

Furthermore, while cross-case analysis pointed to differences in perception of POS as important in explaining why in Slovenia and Serbia the activists opted for different strategic pathways, based on these findings, I cannot claim that strategic articulation is exclusively determined by respective political contexts. The main reason, already mentioned at the very beginning of the introductory chapter, is that none of the two types of strategic articulation can be exclusively related to only one context. A case in point is the context of Croatia, where several different new left movement parties were formed in the period between 2015 and 2019. Also, while in Slovenia and Serbia, the predominance of one strategic articulation is clearer than in Croatia, in both countries, it is also possible to trace a within-country variation of strategic articulations, such as TRS in Slovenia or PRL in Serbia (see Tables 1.1 and 1.2).

In spite of their limited generalizability, findings of in-depth case studies of IDS and NDB may be informative for prospects of new left movement party formation in other postsocialist contexts. For instance, the insights about the local-level green-municipalist pathway of the Serbian new left may resonate in contexts that overall deal with similar POS, namely conditions of competitive authoritarianism, such as Hungary or Poland (see Bochsler and Juon 2020). It remains to be seen if this can represent a fruitful strategy for establishing electoral new left in such contexts.

As already mentioned at the beginning of the thesis, this research dealt with a moving target. It is, therefore, important to emphasize once again that the cross-contextual inference relates to the *initial* strategic articulation of electoral strategy, which means that it does not explain strategic articulation in the long term. For instance, in the years succeeding their initial electoral entry, the activists of NDB started to coordinate into a national-level coalition that would later compete in the 2021 parliamentary election in Serbia.

8.4 Future avenues of research

As I argued in this thesis, post-Yugoslav space represents a unique context with great relevance for our understanding of new left movement party development. In that sense, one of the main aims of this thesis was to turn the attention to the cases of new left movement parties beyond the well-investigated cases of Podemos, Syriza or cases of municipalist platforms in Southern European countries. Although this thesis empirically focused only on post-Yugoslav space, in the future, it could be further developed by introducing more cases from postsocialist contexts beyond the countries of former Yugoslavia. Indeed, there is a growing need for a systematic overview of new left movement parties emerging in broader postsocialist Europe.

Specificities of postsocialism, however, do not mean that future work should not include more cross-regional comparisons. On the contrary, comparing cases from Eastern Europe to the cases from Western and Southern Europe could be of great importance in understanding the periodical revivals of electoral strategy among left-wing actors. What is more, it could be particularly useful to engage in cross-regional comparison that includes different other semi-peripheral areas, such as Latin America. Another possible future comparison could involve a cross-case analysis of left-wing and right-wing social movements that opt for movement party formation, following in the footsteps of research that analyses similarities and differences in left-wing and right-wing movements' relationship to electoral politics (Hutter and Kriesi 2013).

Although I argued on several points that we need to focus on movement parties as a case of important strategic change in activism, this is not to say that many other important strategic developments in regional activism do not deserve equal attention. One particularly significant trend has been the development of activism that bears the potential for organizing across class divides or urban-rural divides, such as housing movements, solidarity movements and environmental movements (e.g., Milan and Pirro 2018, Vilenica 2017, Vukelić et al. 2021). Furthermore, given the increasing saliency of environmental issues associated with climate change and related crises, democratic socialist and green political platforms are becoming increasingly intertwined (Wang and Keith 2020). Further future research on their relationship to various types of strategy is necessary. In the following section, I wrap up the thesis by sharing some of my reflections on the future of new left movement parties.

8.5 Reflections on the future of new left movement parties

A whole decade has passed since the initial emergence of new left movement parties in post-Yugoslav space. This thesis dealt primarily with explaining their emergence and their initial

strategic articulations. However, it is one thing to investigate the emergence of an actor and quite another one to investigate how this actor develops over time. This is of importance because most of the cases of new left movement parties continue to be present in contexts across post-Yugoslav space – some of them holding seats in local assemblies, some of them holding seats in national parliaments, and some of them even taking part in local and national governments.

Even if we limit the overview of more contemporary developments only to the two cases analyzed in this thesis, it is evident that much has changed since the initial electoral engagements of IDS in 2014 and NDB in 2018.

8.5.1 A brief overview of IDS and NDB after the initial "electoral turn"

After successfully entering the parliament in 2014, IDS continued to work within the framework of the United Left coalition with TRS, DSD and "The Fourth Group" (see chapter seven). The intra-coalition relationships, however, soon weakened along the ideological and strategic lines, especially between IDS and DSD. IDS also had to deal with internal conflicts and criticism related to the lack of participation and alienation of the parliamentary party.[89] The further ideological and strategic conflict was related to the potential merger between IDS, TRS and DSD into a unique political party (see also Toplišek 2019). The conflict came to a climax in the 2016 IDS congress, which was eventually concluded without a decision about the merger.[90] In June 2017, IDS and TRS merged into a single party under the name the Left (Levica).[91] The third coalition party, DSD decided not to merge with the two other parties and appropriated the previous coalition name but attained only 0.57% of the vote in the 2018 parliamentary election. The newly created party, the Left, on the other hand, managed to

[89] Delo.si (2015, December 3) Spopad pragmatičnega in ideološkega dela IDS https://old.delo.si/novice/politika/spopad-pragmaticnega-in-ideoloskega-dela-ids.html

[90] Mladina.si (2016, April 9). Kongres IDS prekinili, glasovanje o nadaljnem sodelovanju v koaliciji Združena levica prestavljeno. https://www.mladina.si/173605/kongres-ids-prekinili--glasovanje-o-nadaljnem-sodelovanju-v-koaliciji-zdruzena-levica-prestavljeno

[91] Mladina.si (2017, June 25) Levico bo vodil Luka Mesec. https://www.mladina.si/180676/levico-bo-vodil-luka-mesec

increase its electoral result with respect to the 2014 election, achieving 9.33% of the vote and 9 parliamentary mandates in the 90-seat National Assembly.

The 2018 success came as a double-edged sword, as it put pressure on the Left to join the coalition government headed by centrist and center-left parties, headed by prime minister Marjan Šarec. The Left eventually refused to join the government cabinet but offered their parliamentary support.[92] A bit more than a year later, in November 2020, the Left decided to withhold its further support for the government as the governing coalition parties refused to support the reform that was supposed to put an end to co-payments in the public healthcare system.[93] By the beginning of 2020, the centrist government was forced to leave office, and the parliamentary majority voted in the right-wing authoritarian government of Janez Janša, who governed until the 2022 parliamentary election. Given the increasingly autocratizing tendencies over the two years of the Janša government, centrist and center-left political parties (LMŠ, SMC and SD) organized with the Left into the "Constitutional Arch Coalition" (Koalicija ustavnega loka, KUL), a cooperation platform among the anti-authoritarian forces in the parliament. Although the four members of KUL ran in the election independently, they agreed on collaboration in government formation after the 2022 election. In the 2022 parliamentary election, the Left lost a significant amount of votes and barely managed to pass the electoral threshold, achieving 4.46% of the vote. It did, however, enter the government as one of the two junior coalition members alongside SD.

Turning to Serbia, although NDB managed to sustain itself as an initiative in the period after the initial electoral entry, the broader new left environment went through a number of splits and mergers, as well as the emergence of many new actors. In the period after the election, several new left actors, including NDB, started to look for a more sustainable electoral organizing form that would enable a clearer and more stable alliance and a stronger relationship among various new left actors (see also Pudar Draško, Fiket and Vasiljević 2020). Eventually, in September 2020, a part of anti-capitalist activists organized the Party of Radical Left (Partija

[92] RTV Slovenija (2018, August 10). Levica bo podprla manjšinsko vlado Marjana Šarca https://www.rtvslo.si/slovenija/levica-bo-podprla-manjsinsko-vlado-marjana-sarca/462889

[93] RTV Slovenija (2019, November 6). Mesec: Levica je v polni opoziciji; Šarec: Levica zapušča vlado, ne obratno. https://www.rtvslo.si/slovenija/mesec-levica-je-v-polni-opoziciji-sarec-levica-zapusca-vlado-ne-obratno/504165

radikalne levice, PRL), which was established as a legal successor of the inactive Social Democratic Union (see chapters four and seven).[94] This party, however, soon went through a split, bringing to the development of another electoral initiative named Platform Solidarity (Platforma Solidarnost). Notwithstanding the dynamic of splits and mergers, a significant part of the new left actors organized into the green left electoral coalition We Must (Moramo) for the 2022 parliamentary election, which also included several environmentalist groups and movements. The results of the coalition represented a significant success, especially in the Belgrade City Assembly election, where We Must managed to gain 11.04% of votes and 13 out of 110 seats. On the national level, We Must entered the National Assembly with 4.7% of the vote, which gives it 13 out of 250 seats. Although in both cases, We Must remains in the opposition, it now represents one of the most influential oppositional forces in Serbia.

8.5.2 Further prospects and challenges of new left movement parties in post-Yugoslav space

New left movement parties in the post-Yugoslav space were skillful in challenging the predominant notions of politics and political. By standing against the reductionist and negative meaning of politics, inspired by the idea of reclaiming representative politics through participatory party organizing, they opposed the inevitability of neoliberal policies (see Fiket et al. 2019, Matković and Ivković 2018). In a way, the concept of the movement party itself played a role of rhetorical device in overturning, at least for a brief moment, anti-party sentiments. However, an important question remains: How can movement parties be more than a rhetorical device and grow into a sustainable electoral force that at the same time promotes participatory politics and stays true to its political program?

Although they partly reshaped the electoral conflict, in particular on the center-left, much of the conflict remains polarized between two prominent forces: authoritarian right-wing actors, such as SNS in Serbia or SDS in Slovenia, and anti-authoritarian liberal actors. In these circumstances, new left movement parties will have to directly or indirectly cooperate with anti-authoritarian forces on the center and the center-left while at the same time keeping true to anti-neoliberal political positions. Although the two aims are not mutually exclusive, they

[94] rs.n1info.com (2020, September 7). SDU postala Partija radikalne levice, izabran novi sastav predsedništva. https://rs.n1info.com/vesti/a637249-sdu-postala-partija-radikalne-levice-izabran-novi-sastav-predsednistva/

can become hard to navigate simultaneously, especially in the case of governing coalitions led by liberal actors (see Korsika 2017).

Apart from the pressures coming from the environment, new left movement parties will have to continue their organizational innovation, looking for new strategies of broadening their electoral and activist base. In one of the most important recent studies on political organizing, drawing on the experience and investigation of trade union organizing, Jane McAlevey claims that organizing should be distinguished from two other strategies: advocacy and mobilization (McAlevey 2016). Advocacy includes elite-focused strategies created by various types of experts, such as lawyers, pollsters and researchers, but mostly does not even aim to include a broader basis of disengaged people. Mobilization, on the other hand, makes an important step forward and looks at how to utilize the key strength that powerless people have over the elites: large numbers. This approach, however, relies at least in part on campaigns designed and implemented by elites and, in the long term, relies on the base of committed and already engaged activists instead of the disengaged people. The paradigm of organizing makes an additional step with respect to advocacy and mobilization by engaging more directly in the detection of "organic leaders" among the disengaged and prioritizes face-to-face interaction over digitally mediated interaction (McAlevey 2016: 9-16). Using McAlevey's framework, it is possible to say that this thesis traced new left activists' increasing capacity for mobilization. The next step, beyond strategic framing, should be about increasing the capacity for organizing.

The question of effective political organizing has been present on the left for a very long time, not least in recent decades. When it comes to recent cases of left-wing movement parties from Latin America and Southern Europe, cautionary tales abound (Gerbaudo 2019, Kioupkiolis and Katsambekis 2018, Ovenden 2015, Webber 2017). The debates about political organizing on the left, however, have rarely been constructive, mostly revolving around a rigid dichotomy between organizational centralization and dispersion (Nunes 2021). Instead of looking for universal "either-or" solutions to the question of new left organizing, the activists need to reorient from the paradigm of creating a single perfect organizational form toward the paradigm of organizing through ecologies that encourage distributed leadership and are open to strategic pluralism (Nunes 2021). In other words, it is important to bear in mind that movement parties do not represent a finite answer to the need for participatory political organizing. They are only one of the possible elements of left-wing political strategy.

New left movement parties in the post-Yugoslav space started with activists' high expectations about the revival of party organizing through participatory methods. It remains to be seen whether they will be able to sustain and advance their electoral relevance and the participation of their members, supporters and voters. This depends on three important capacities that are mentioned by Nunes (2021) and McAlevey (2016). First, their capacity to design decision-making beyond the narrow leadership group, continuously keeping an open outlook that embraces diverse strategies and tactics. Second, their capacity to continuously find ways of regenerating the relationships with other left-wing actors in their environment. Third, their capacity to engage with individuals and groups who remain out of immediate reach. Given that movement parties are highly relational and unstable actors, the work of balancing between the movement dimension and the party dimension, or in Kitschelt's (1989) terms, the logic of constituency representation and the logic of electoral competition – never really stops.

This thesis showed how new left movement parties mobilized around framing within which the very concept of the movement party was an important rhetorical device. Only by keeping their openness and intra-organizational democracy, with continuous innovative strategizing, can movement parties be more than rhetorical devices and grow into genuine vehicles of political change.

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pcFiLtHqRA

Appendix A: List of interviews (in alphabetic order of pseudonyms)

Belgrade

ID	Pseudonym	Date of the interview	Interviewee description
B13	Anđela	20.3.2019	NDB activist
B16	Bogdan	11.7.2019	left-wing activist
B21	Boris	21.1.2019	academic expert
B15	Danijel	22.3.2019	NDB activist
B14	Dragana	18.3.2019	left-wing activist
B18	Dunja	28.9.2021	NDB activist
B05	Dušan	12.3.2019	NDB activist
B06	Gordana	12.3.2019	NDB activist
B20	Ivan	25.1.2019	academic expert
B12	Ivana	29.3.2019	NDB activist
B09	Lazar	27.3.2019	left-wing activist
B02	Luka	17.1.2019	NDB activist
B04	Marija	16.1.2019	left-wing activist
B08	Mihajlo	15.3.2019	left-wing activist
B03	Milica	21.1.2019	NDB activist
B10	Nikola	11.3.2019	left-wing activist
B07	Sara	18.1.2019	left-wing activist
B19	Saša	20.3.2019	left-wing activist
B17	Stefan	4.7.2019	NDB activist
B01	Tijana	16.1.2019	NDB activist
B11	Vuk	9.10.2019	NDB activist

Ljubljana

ID	Pseudonym	Date	Description
S07	Alenka	12.2.2020	left-wing activist
S03	Aleš	10.2.2020	left-wing activist
S04	Eva	7.2.2020	left-wing activist
S01	Igor	27.1.2020	left-wing activist

S08	Lara	10.2.2020	left-wing activist
S09	Janja	11.11.2019	IDS activist
S06	Jure	11.2.2020	IDS activist
S10	Klemen	14.11.2019	IDS activist
S11	Neža	31.1.2020	IDS activist
S05	Peter	31.1.2020	IDS activist
S02	Robert	29.1.2020	left-wing activist
S12	Simon	11.11.2019	IDS activist

Appendix B: Interview guide

Note: This interview guide was adapted to each of the two investigated contexts.

Introductory note
Restate to the interviewee the goals of the interview: Let me shortly repeat the goals of our meeting. In this interview, I am mostly interested in grasping an overview of (1) the way activist field behind the electoral initiative/ movement party was formed, (2) the way activist field developed and eventually took the electoral turn, and (3) your perception of key opportunities and problems (threats) related to the electoral turn. I was interested in interviewing you as one of the key persons in the movement, and thereby knowledgeable on its long-term development. Ethics-related reminders: - inform participant about possible levels of anonymity (1 – full disclosure *OR* 2 – short description of activist without name and surname); - ask participant to sign the informed consent, and inform him/her that the consent can be withdrawn or amended at any point during or after the interview; - restate the need for recording of the interview, and offer not to record it.

Interview structure	
Issues	Question script
Main issue:	Focusing introduction: When social movement scholars try to define a movement, it can be too crude to define it based on one

1.) Formation and initial state of the activist field	single organization. Instead, we often use notions of field, milieu or arena in defining it. In the first part of the interview, the aim is to gain a good description of the field behind the electoral initiative. Thus, I will ask you to focus on the beginnings of the filed, and share your memories as best as you can.
Sub-issues:	Questions:
1.1) Timing of the establishment of the field	What are your first memories of activist engagement with the group of people which today lead the electoral initiative/ movement party? When would you say this activist field was established?
1.2) Organizations involved in the field	What would you say, which organizations, both formal and nonformal, played the most important role in the field at that time?
1.3) Type of activists	How would you describe activists at that time? What was their age? What was their previous experience of activism? What was their social and economic background?
1.4) Activities	What was the initial activism of these activists focused on? What types of activity did you undertake?
1.5) Ideology 1.6) Initial attitudes toward partisanship	How would you describe political values which these activists shared at that period? What was their ideological positioning at that time?

	How would you describe the attitude toward party politics in that period? What were the opinions at that time toward partisan or electoral engagement?
Main issue: 2.) Development of the field	Focusing introduction: Each movement has some collective memory which includes landmark events. I will now ask you to shortly recount these events, and tell me more about how transformation from the initial state to what we see today took place.
Sub-issues: 2.1) Memory of key events	What would you say are the key events that have marked the field? What were the biggest successes and biggest failures in your opinion?
2.2) Changes in the group	How has the group changed throughout this period? Were new individuals and groups joining or were some leaving?
2.3) Changes in networking and alliances	On your way, with changes in activities, you have also built alliances? Which alliances do you see as crucial?

	Which other alliances would you mention? How would you describe these forms of cooperation?
Main issue: 3.) Electoral turn	Focusing introduction: In this last part of the interview I am interested in understanding the period around decision to engage in electoral competition, and some challenges and opportunities you recount from that period.
Sub-issue: 3.1) Idea of electoral engagement – origins of the idea: exogenous/endogenous	I have already asked you a bit about the idea of electoral engagement in the beginning of your activism. When would you say that this has started to change? When did you first come up with the idea of engaging in elections? • IF the answer mentions following similar left-wing examples from Croatia, Slovenia or Southern Europe – ask the following: What made you follow the example of what happened in other countries? Were there any discussions for this possibility before you encountered similar moves of activists from other countries? o IF the answer is no, ask the following: Why were there no such discussions before encountering other cases, in your opinion?

3.2) Decision for electoral engagement – strategic assessment of opportunities	• OR IF the answer doesn't mention any examples from Southern Europe, ask for more elaboration, such as: What was the reasoning behind this initial idea? Why take electoral turn at that point in time?
3.3) Decision for electoral engagement – strategic assessment of threats	What was at the time articulated as the key opportunity brought by the electoral turn? What was the key strength you saw in it?
3.4) Current attitudes toward partisanship	Did you encounter any problems/challenges/threats from the outside at the time? How did you manage the resources necessary for elections? What was the initial reaction of other activists and other groups you cooperated with when you informed them about decision to engage in elections? I already asked you about attitudes toward party politics in the initial phase of activism. When you compare it to now, did you encounter some change in attitudes toward partisanship and electoral engagement within the group? How did you cope with the criticism toward your electoral engagement that was raised in some of the left-wing circles and the media? Why people are more motivated for electoral engagement than before?

Concluding note

After you have stopped recording, ask the participant to say if there is anything to add.

Ask the participant for some people he would recommend for the interview.
Tell the participant that you could potentially contact him during the following phases of research process for another interview or for his feedback on your analysis.