A EUROPEAN ANTIPOPULIST MOVEMENT? THE EMERGENCE AND DIFFUSION OF THE ITALIAN SARDINES AND FINNISH HERRINGS*

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This article investigates the emergence and diffusion of antipopulist mobilizations. Resembling the iconic image depicting a school of small fish chasing a big one, the Italian 6000 Sardine *and the Finnish* Silakkaliike *(Herrings) emerged as two movements with antipopulist claims. Although the scholarship on populism is abundant, antipopulism remains mostly neglected, especially its mobilization from below. Drawing on extensive fieldwork including a grounded-theory approach applied to twenty-seven interviews with activists from these two movements, plus the analysis of offline and online organizational documents, this study shows the mechanisms—cognitive, affective and relational—of their national and crossnational diffusion, relating them to the opportunities of the context. Exploring the internal movement dynamics and actors' perceptions and motivations, this study also contributes to the conceptualization of antipopulism from below, defining the main characteristics and the ideological underpinnings of these two antipopulist movements.*

This study focuses on recent "antipopulist movements" in Europe and the dynamics of their emergence and diffusion, mainly defined as the adoption of similar frames and strategies of action across distant places in two different social movements. While populism has received enormous academic and media attention over the past decades (Hunger and Paxton 2021), antipopulism has not, especially from a social movement perspective. Yet, there is an increasing number of actors considered as such: from the anti-Brexit movement, a network of several ideologically diverse groups mobilizing around the goal of avoiding Brexit (Fagan and Van Kessel 2022), to the Italian 6000 Sardines movement, to Indivisible in the U.S.—born to resist the Trump agenda (Greenberg and Levin 2019)—to the almost unknown Finnish *Silakkaliike* (Herrings) movement, self-defined as "a grassroots protest against racism, populism and hate politics" that organizes street protests against the Finns party (Koski 2019), to the recent "Volt movement" in Europe, according to some. In an era when the populist-antipopulist divide seems to be intensifying (Stavrakakis, Katsambekis, Kioupkiolis, Nikisianis and Simos 2018; Ostiguy 2017), research on antipopulist movements "from below" appears all the more relevant to an understanding of the potential for changes in European democracies (della Porta 2021).

In light of these recent developments, this study investigates the emergence and spread of antipopulist mobilizations by comparing the 6000 Sardines movement in Italy and the *Silakkaliike* (Herrings) movement in Finland. Named to reflect the strength of collective action, as represented by the iconic depiction of popular power in the "schools of fish" graphic (see figure 1), these movements are similar but puzzling cases of antipopulist mobilization from below. They mobilize against the same enemy, right-wing populism, but at different scales (local versus national). By investigating these two organizationally independent movements, one of which inspired the other, this article primarily explores the mechanisms of this protest's emergence and national and crossnational diffusion. Also, we aim to conceptualize this mobilization by investigating the question of whether they are antipopulist movements or not. Analyzing the internal movement dynamics (relational, cognitive, and even emotional) and actors' perceptions and motivations,

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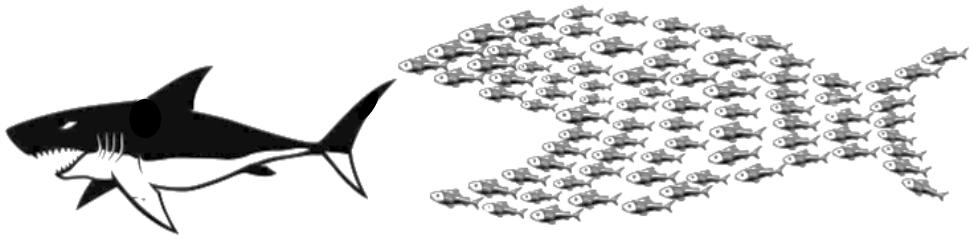
Figure 1. "Sardines," "Herrings" and the Iconic Graphic Representation of Popular Power



with a grounded-theory approach applied to twenty-seven in-depth interviews with activists and representatives of the two movements, and an analysis of their organizational texts (statutes, manifestoes, internal documents), this article also points out the political opportunities (della Porta and Diani 2020) at different levels (national and international) for their scale shift and diffusion. Scale shift is the process of taking contentious action to a higher or a lower level than that at which it was initiated (in our case, from local to national, Tarrow 2005). Upward scale shift has generally received more attention, with models describing a range of recurring mechanisms. Like diffusion, scale shift implies the transfer of some element of a social movement from its origin to other destinations. As such, scale shift can be thought of as vertical diffusion, such as when an issue or tactic or frame emerges at a local level but is then adopted by actors at the national or transnational level (Soule 2013). In this article, we focus on diffusion while also observing scale shift. In doing this, the study also contributes to the conceptualization of antipopulism from below, showing these two movements' main characteristics and ideological underpinnings.

The findings demonstrate that the perceived and actual similarities between the political contexts in Italy and Finland due to the presence of populist actors in politics, the relative success of the 6000 Sardine movement in mobilizing people and challenging populist actors, and the resonance of shared values and principles between the two groups, enabled both organizers and participants of the Silakkaliike to engage in a similar movement in their context. This phenomenon, a form of thin crossnational diffusion, reveals how antipopulism in different contexts emerges and spreads through relational, cognitive, and emotional channels. Besides, the findings also demonstrate that by challenging both populist and polarizing discourse with an inclusive and pluralist conceptualization of the people, these value-oriented movements are distinguished from the previous progressive movements (and from populism) by their focus on politicizing and mobilizing apolitical citizens from below, through socialization in squares, social media platforms and new (entertaining) repertoires of actions with a strong emphasis on positive emotions. Based on these findings, we propose a general framework to explain the mobilization and spread of an "antipopulist movement" in populist contexts.

The article contributes to social movements and populist literature in two ways. First, it sheds light on two recent movements that have not yet been fully studied and documented. If antipopulism, as suggested by the extant literature, is usually elite driven (i.e., the reaction of mainstream parties against populist parties, Hamdaoui 2021: 2), this study offers a different view: antipopulist popular mobilizations from below. Second, it contributes to the recent efforts to better understand the diffusion processes of social movements and their ideas (della Porta and Mattoni 2014), namely by bridging populism and collective action concepts, which still rarely talk to each other.

CASE DESCRIPTION

We selected our two cases because they are among the few positive instances of antipopulist mobilizations from below in Europe. Together, they represent a case of "diffusion of protest" across distant places, namely, the spread of the ideational and behavioral elements of collective

action from a transmitter group, the Italian 6000 Sardine, to an adopter group, the Finnish Silakkaliike. They also represent a puzzling case for the diffusion literature. On the one hand, both are EU member states. On the other hand, considering the local characteristics and motivations of the two movements, the linguistic, cultural, and historical differences between the two countries, and—above all—the absence of organizational affiliation or strong ties between the groups, the reasons behind the adoption of the "Sardines model" in Finland remains a question.

The 6000 Sardine movement started in Italy as a reaction to the electoral campaign of the right-wing coalition led by Matteo Salvini and his Lega Party for the upcoming regional election in January 2020. The movement originated locally in the Emilia Romagna region, a historically left-wing "red belt" region (Caruso and Di Blasio 2021) that was about to fall under the control of the right-wing populist League. As the League organized an electoral campaign event in Bologna on 14 November 2019, four young people—Mattia Santori, Roberto Morotti, Giulia Trappoloni, and Andrea Garreffa—simultaneously called for a flash mob in the main square of Bologna (Piazza Maggiore) on the same day. Announced by a Facebook page called "6000 Sardines against Salvini," organizers aimed to mobilize more people than the 5750 seats in the PalaDozza, a sports arena in Bologna where the League's event was scheduled. The result was that 15,000 people attended the demonstration. Within a month of the first flash mob, several similar demonstrations had been organized in other large Italian cities, such as Florence, Turin, Milan, Naples, Roma, and Palermo. They drew the participation of tens of thousands of people. The Sardines movement also captured significant media attention. On 14 December, the movement's leaders released a manifesto stressing the need for a more transparent political atmosphere in Italy without any discriminatory and alienating agendas or discourse. The movement also expanded beyond the Italian borders, as similar flash mobs named "Sardines" were organized in other European countries such as Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands (see the online appendix, which can be accessed at https://osf.io/3y9d7/).[1]

The Silakkaliike movement, on the other hand, was born approximately one month after the Sardines on 25 December 2019 in Helsinki. It was initiated after the public debate following the government's decision to repatriate two Finnish children from al-Hol Refugee Camp in Syria in December 2019. Some right-wing groups and MPs from the main right-wing populist party, True Finns, criticized the government and demanded that the children's identities be revealed during the live-streaming of the repatriation operation. Triggered by these events, Johannes Koski (the movement's founder) and his friends decided to set up a Twitter account to combat populism and hate speech in Finland with a proposal for Finnish activists to "have their own Sardine movement" (Koski 2019). Although the Silakkaliike (which means "herrings" in Finnish) explicitly referred to the 6000 Sardine movement as an inspirational benchmark and adopted similar framings, ideas, and tactics, it was founded as an independent movement with no organizational affiliation to Italy's 6000 Sardine. In the words of Silakkaliike's founder, they took "the example of the Italian Sardine movement," which was then called the "sister movement" of the Silakkaliike. However, they did not consider themselves a proper spin-off movement of the Italian Sardine (Koski 2019).

In one month, the Silakkaliike reached around 30,000 people in its Facebook group and organized a flash mob that drew the participation of thousands of people on 1 February 2020. The emergence of the new COVID-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions hampered the physical gatherings of both movements. However, the Silakkaliike actively used its Facebook group as an active platform for discussion and has continued its online activities since that time (regarding the movement's strategic changes following the onset of Covid, see Caruso and De Blasio 2021).

Despite the absence of geographical, cultural, linguistic, and historical connections between the two countries and these two movements, the 6000 Sardine became an inspiration for the Silakkaliike mobilization, as Finnish activists adopted various frames (Caiani 2023), ideas, and repertoires of action from their Italian counterparts. Our empirical analysis will show why and how this could have happened.

ANTIPOPULISM (AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT), DIFFUSION, AND EMOTIONS

In this study we conceptualize antipopulism as a social movement. If populism is all around us, growing (albeit minor) academic attention has been paid to the populist-antipopulist divide (e.g., Stavrakakis 2014). But what is antipopulism? According to Moffit (2018), the very definition of the concept remains contested, sometimes coupled with elitism, pluralism, or liberalism. He observes that antipopulist fronts are a mix of ideological and strategic bedfellows pulled together in temporary alliances of opposition to populism (2018). Others see antipopulism as a developing antagonistic cleavage that has radically different conceptions of both democracy and the people at its core, with the populists on the side of the "radicals" and the antipopulists on the side of the "liberals" (Galston 2018; Mounk 2018). Antipopulists consider the populist criticism of the elites as antidemocratic.

However, the main focus of existing studies on antipopulism is on traditional political actors, such as political parties, aiming at countering the populist wave—for example, the establishment discourse used to counter populism in the anti-Brexit "Remain" campaign during the EU Referendum (Grainger-Brown, 2021). Some studies have looked at how mainstream parties demonize populist rivals (Stockemer 2017); adopt their programs or rhetorics (Carvalho 2019); or wait until their defeat (Aslanidis and Rovira Kaltwasser 2016). In this sense, antipopulism is understood as an opposition to populism characterized by the legitimization of the status quo (vs. more direct forms of popular sovereignty), as well as the belief that politics is technical and complex (Hamdaoui 2021; Karavasilis 2017).

Those studies more explicitly address the concept of "antipopulism," although mainly from a normative perspective. In this regard, antipopulist movements construct populism as irresponsible behavior and a political disease (Miró 2019). They see populism as a dangerous ideology (Markou 2021), often assuming elitist tones and arrogating (themselves) a moral and political superiority against people-centric discourses and demands (Miró 2019). In sum, according to these approaches, antipopulists would use the "populist" label to discredit a party, movement, or politician that claims to defend the people and the idea of popular sovereignty (Hamdaoui 2021). In Greece, for example, Nikisianis and colleagues (2019) have shown that through this strategy, an emerging antipopulist block has attempted to naturalize a negative, pejorative signification of populism (associated with the Left and social resistances against austerity policies).

However, there are also a few studies focusing on a more movement-centered conceptualization of antipopulism (and populism). They look at "counterpopulism" from below, namely at social movement actors who generally mobilize against a right-wing populism (Roth 2018). Aslanidis (2018) points out the gap between populism in the party system (which is more studied) and populism in the streets (less explored) and asks whether we have ignored (anti) populist social movements for too long? In this sense, populism and—for our study—antipopulism are better seen as a "collective action frames," antiestablishment discourses in the name of the people (Aslanidis 2018). In fact, scholars have noted that populism are embedded in their respective societies (Ruzza 2020). Not only is populism inconceivable without antipopulism (i.e., mutual constitution) but also antipopulism is "the antagonistic language developed around populist representations" (Stavrakakis et al. 2018: 15).

Indeed, the populist-antipopulist divide does not limit itself to the struggles among political parties or in parliaments. Instead, it also pertains to civil societies (Ruzza 2020). Populism is inconceivable without antipopulism (each mutually constituting the other), and the latter can more broadly be considered as the antagonistic language developed around populist representations. It is also seen in terms of political identification or political identity (Panizza 2017), namely, as a practice of political mobilization that brings dynamics of typical social movements into the field of party politics to mobilize the people as a political actors aimed at recovering popular sovereignty as a mean to take back control upon collective destiny. Antipopulist movements would therefore oppose populism on the core aspect of the construction of the people, proposing a different one.

In this study, we will import these concepts and ideas, adapting them to investigate our two cases of antipopulist movements mobilizations in Europe. Because of its frequent use of unconventional action repertoires, its roots in civil society, and the alternative policy vision it espouses, antipopulism is therefore characterized in this study as a social movement (see also Aslanidis 2016). We are now witnessing the emergence and spread of antipopulism in the streets, including its diffusion—another unexplored topic we seek to address.

Crossnational Diffusion and its Mechanisms

We focus on the diffusion of these antipopulist movements. Social movement scholars have long recognized that social movements, their ideas, and their organizational, cultural, and tactical repertoires can spread transnationally. Unlike traditional forms of contention that were limited in scope in terms of issues, grievances, geographical localization, and social groups, modern forms of contention are coordinated and sustained across localities, actors, contexts, and issues (Tarrow 1998). Protester organizers do not have to reinvent the wheel in each conflict because they often can find inspiration elsewhere in the ideas and tactics espoused and practiced by other activists (McAdam and Rucht 1993: 58). This implies a process of diffusion within and between countries which can be defined as the spread of protests and social movements from a transmitter group to an adopter group through relational, nonrelational, or mediated channels (Kolins Givan, Roberts and Soule 2010). In this conceptualization, the object of the diffusion, the innovation to diffuse from transmitters to adopters, can be either a behavioral component consisting of the practices and repertoires of collective action such as "strikes, riots, protests, sit-ins, boycotts, petition drives, and other forms of contentious action" or ideational components involving the interpretive schemata based on identities and collective action frames that "define issues, goals, and targets" (Kolins Givan et al. 2010: 4).

These innovations can diffuse through relational channels, such as "interpersonal contacts, organizational linkages, or associational networks" (Tarrow 2005), nonrelational channels that consist of indirect and communication channels such as mass media, Internet, and social media platforms (Castells 2012; Gerbaudo 2013), or brokerage by a third actor (della Porta and Diani 2020). As social movements and protests have increasingly transnationalized after the 1990s, theories of protest diffusion have become one of the dominant approaches to explore the dynamics of international waves of contention and both the transnational of protests. Several factors and mechanisms have been recognized as enabling and facilitating the spread of contention from one location to another one: transnational activist networks, emulation (Tarrow and McAdam 2005), attribution of similarity (McAdam and Rucht 1993), spatial and cultural proximity among adopters and transmitters, organizational ties and structural similarities (della Porta and Diani 2020), as well as theorization of these (Strang and Meyer 1993). Recently, diffusion has received significant scholarly attention following the interconnected and interactive escalation of various mobilizations around the world, such as anti-austerity movements in Western democracies since the 2008 financial crisis, the Arab uprisings during the 2010s, "Friday for Future" protests in 2018, or the 2019 global protest wave in countries such as Chile, Israel, and Hong Kong. Della Porta and Mattoni have noted, "Information traveled quickly from individual to individual through social networking sites, frequently in combination with portable mobile devices like smartphones" (2014: 286). New forms have been proposed to analyze these changing dynamics, such as "thin diffusion," which is "based on the almost instantaneous exchange of information and content of protest through the individual use of new social media" (della Porta, Lavizzari and Reiter 2022: 3). Although theoretical studies have proposed important explanations for these cases, we still know relatively little about exactly how antipopulist social movements diffuse.[2]

In this project, we will look at the relational ties, cognitive frames, and emotional sentiments (or mechanisms, see Eren 2023) that can account for these two movements and their spread from one level to another one. We argue that analyzing the 6000 Sardine and the Silakkaliike movements from approaches focusing on agentic, cultural, and reciprocal factors—as suggested by the

social movement and diffusion literatures—may contribute to our theoretical explanations and, in particular, help us better understand antipopulism.

Populism and Emotions

Finally, a guiding concept of this study is to pair a theoretical understanding of emotions with antipopulist mobilizations and diffusion. Over the past three decades, social movement scholars have analyzed emotions in wide-ranging areas of protest campaigns, pointing out several functions that emotions can play (Flam and King 2005). Emotions can enable or inhibit mobilization, providing resources for activists' commitment, making networks among people more efficient for political participation (Jasper 2011) and for recruitment (Van Ness and Summers-Effler 2019). Some specific emotions have even been identified as causal mechanisms of collective action, for instance, "pleasurable emotions." While the empirical research on populism's emotional underpinnings and affective components is still in progress (Widman 2021), the emotional dimension is increasingly found to be relevant in populist narratives (Demertzis 2019).[3] In this regard, we not only look at the emotions that these two antipopulist movements invoke but also argue that emotions and antipopulism might be particularly interconnected and central to an antipopulist political identity (Eklundh 2019).

METHOD

This study employs a methodological strategy of triangulation. The three dimensions include: (1) a grounded-theory approach applied to twenty-seven in-depth interviews with the participants and organizers/founders of the 6000 Sardine movement in Italy and the Silakkaliike movement in Finland to investigate the internal movement dynamics and actors' perceptions and motivations of the mobilizations, (2) the analysis of organizational offline and online documents (mission statements, manifestoes, Facebook pages, and official websites) of the two movements and (3) the analysis of secondary sources (newspaper articles) in order to reconstruct the (political and cultural) opportunities of the context, and resources of the actors (della Porta and Diani 2020) (e.g., the birth of the movement, its structure and compositional characteristics, the chronology of events, etc.; for more details see list B in appendix 1). The interviews were conducted online from April 2020 to November 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviewee partners vary in age, gender, job, role in the movements (either organizer/founder or member), and region (for details, see list A in appendix 1). The interviewees were selected through a combination of snowball sampling and theoretical sampling, which we used as a data-collection practice to expand the sampling criteria in a direction determined by the concepts and issues that are revealed in the initial data analysis process (Charmaz 2006). In the Sardine case, some expatriate interviewees were included (in Belgium, Luxemburg and the Netherlands). These participants took part in at least one protest event in Italy and were added to include a more distant perspective on the movement. The interviewees were contacted through a positional approach, starting in each country with the movements' founders, whose contacts were public, and then through the movements' official social media sites. The content of the questionnaire focused on our main theoretical dimensions of our analysis. The interviews, lasting about 90 minutes each, were preceded by and informed consent, recorded and tran-scribed. A grounded-theory approach has been then applied, following the methodological standard guidelines, on the interviews' transcriptions.

Interviews in grounded research are open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet flexible (Mattoni 2014).[4] To unveil the mechanisms of the emergence, mobilization, and diffusion of these antipopulist movements, our questionnaire was focused on several themes: (1) the activists' perception of contextual differences and similarities between the 6000 Sardine and the Silakkaliike; (2) their opinions, ideas, emotions on the "us" and "them" dimensions of their mobilizations; (3) their motivations and relations (and the meaning of them)

within and beyond the campaigns, as well as (4) the reasons of their identifying references (i.e., inspirational and motivational); finally (5), the meaning and consequences of the protest for them (for details, see table D in the appendix 1 available at https://osf.io/3y9d7/).

Grounded theory (Charmaz 2006; Charmaz, Thornberg and Keane 2018) is particularly suited to explore novel topics such as antipopulist mobilizations. It allows "for identification of general concepts, the development of theoretical explanations that reach beyond the known and offers new insights into a variety of experiences and phenomena" (Corbin and Strauss 2015: 28). Moreover, grounded theory enables the researcher to examine social and political phenomena from the inside, giving emphasis to the agency of political actors by investigating their "perceptions, meanings, and emotions" that shape interactions between microscopic agencies and macroscopic conditions (Mattoni 2014). For more details on our methods, see tables E in appendix 1 and F in appendix 2 (available at https://osf.io/3y9d7/).

Considering these aspects of grounded theory, our approach is deemed methodologically suitable for two reasons. First, the cases under investigation introduce a novel movement model that mobilizes specifically against populism in the European context. Both their emergence and crossnational diffusion require a new understandings, which grounded theory may be able to provide. Second, since the major motivations and dynamics of the crossnational diffusion of collective action in these cases remain uncertain and puzzling, we believe that our data analysis through grounded theory may uncover new dimensions of collective action across countries.

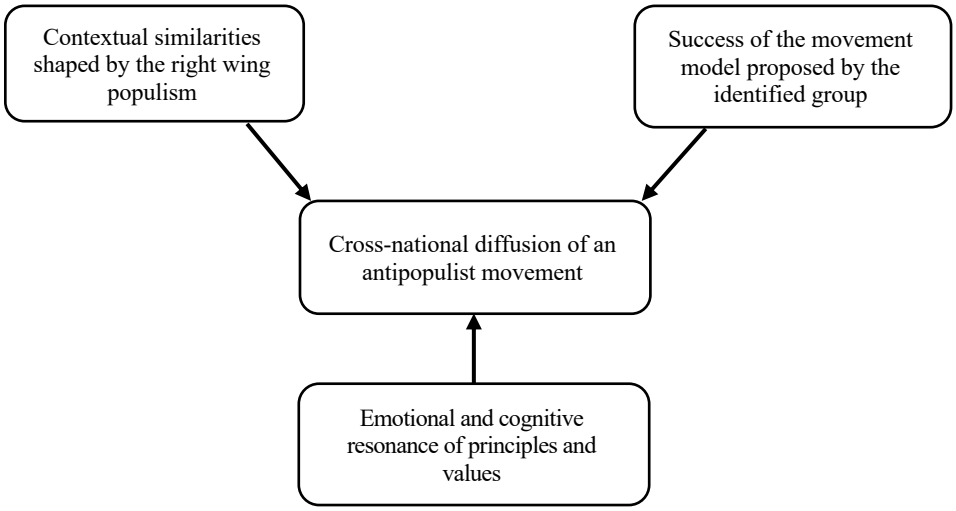
We analyze interviews through a three-stage sentence-by-sentence coding using a constant comparative method (Corbin and Strauss 2015) Grounded theory is a deductive method that transforms movement texts—speeches, interviews, and documents—into mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories. In particular, on the transcriptions of all our interviews, we conducted an open, axial, and selective coding of every sentence and analyzed their relations with each other constantly and comparatively. Consistent with grounded theory, we then developed higher level abstractions—emergent core categories—to inform our theoretical analysis of the phenomena under investigation.

In the initial open coding of our data, we identified more than 1500 codes. We then conducted an open-coding classification of them in which we summarized and categorized the initial codes into 200 code groups based on their conceptual and explanatory similarities. Next, we performed higher-level axial coding, where we used ongoing comparisons of these groups and analyzed their relations with each other. This resulted in a full list of explanatory categories for different dimensions of our cases (see table A and B in appendix 1 where the bolded items represent the important characteristics of the movements under analysis). In a final step, we compared the axial coding (table C) to construct new categories at a higher levels of abstraction. In this stage, we selectively coded two different analytical dimensions: (1) the reasons for the diffusion of collective action from the Italian 6000 Sardine to the Finish Silakkaliike movement; and (2) to comparatively construct a framework of classification of the movements (see table 1).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: ITALIAN SARDINES AND FINNISH HERRINGS

Despite the absence of organizational affiliation, the Silakkaliike crossnationally adopted various components of collective action from the 6000 Sardine through inspiration. In the following, investigating both activists' motivations and contextual conditions in both countries (see tables A-C in the appendix), as well as the sensitizing concepts in the relevant literatures, we propose three major factors to explain this: (1) the contextual similarities shaped by right-wing populist discourses and practices in politics, (2) the emotional and cognitive resonance of the shared values and principles, and (3) the success of the movement model proposed by the Italian group. These factors enabled the organizers/founders and participants of the Silakkaliike movement to emotionally and cognitively identify with their counterparts in the 6000 Sardine movement, thereby facilitating the spread of collective action from Italy to Finland through inspiration. The framings among the two movements were partially different and can be

Figure 2. Theoretical Model of the Crossnational Diffusion of an Antipopulist Movement.



potentially related to different political opportunity structures of the two contexts, especially the enemies against which they define themselves and the ideological underpinning of the two movements.

Contextual Similarities Shaped by Right-Wing Populism

The research on protest diffusion emphasizes that the attribution of similarity is required for diffusion as "adopters must identify at some minimal level with transmitters if diffusion is to occur" (McAdam and Rucht 1993). Eren (2023) argues that contextual and motivational similarities provide a cognitive ground for protesters to identify with other protesters in different countries. A comparable sense of similarity also exists in our case. Our findings demonstrate that both actual and perceived similarities of political context related to the activities and agendas of right-wing populist actors created a cognitive ground for both the founders/organizers and participants of Silakkaliike to identify with the 6000 Sardine movement.

Although Italy and Finland are different countries in distinct parts of Europe, both movements emerged in a similar context in which radical-right populism was gaining significance.[5] The two cases shared similar contextual political opportunities related to populism. In Italy, the Lega party was part of a government coalition with the Five Star Movement from 2018 to 2019.[6] In Finland, where the 2019 national election saw the right-wing party of the Finns Party attain 17.5% of votes versus 17.7% of the Social Democratic Party. The Finns Party became the second-largest party in parliament and one of the junior partners in a coalition cabinet with the Centre Party and the National Coalition Party (Borg 2019).

In Finland, it was not until the late 2000s that the Finns Party (Perussuomalaiset, or PS) made a breakthrough in the Finnish political landscape. The party was formed in 1995 (known earlier as the True Finns). Its mix of rural and agrarian populism, an emphasis on social policies and the welfare state, and xenophobic and ethnonationalist views came from the Finish Rural Party of 1960s, and continues to characterize the core ideology of the Finns Party. It became prominent in the 2009 European elections (9.2%), and then the third party in the 2011 general elections, achieving 19% of the votes. Despite negotiations to join the government in 2011, they ultimately refused and only came to participate in 2015. As for the contextual political opportunities, it also worth noting—although never mentioned and probably unknown by our interviewees—that an institutional alliance between the Italian League and the Finns Party was

announced after the 2019 Finnish national elections. Matteo Salvini exulted the success of "populist friends," although his European Alliance of Peoples and Nations (EAPN) remained later dead letter in future elections.

In our interviews with Silakkaliike's founders/organizers and participants, these contextual similarities (and their impacts on activists' perceptions) appeared as key motivational factors. Indeed, the more central and recurring codes among the interviewees were as follows: "similarly of the countries," the "need or responsibility for change or vision," "a new country," "urgency" "crisis of representation," "lack of opposition" to right-wing populism" (and, in Italy, "disappointment" with the Five Star movement), "aggressive, alienating, and discriminatory language" in politics, "the need to react," and a "toxic Internet culture," "fed by right-wing trolls and populist discourses," "manipulative threats" of right-wing populism, "bullying," and "public hesitation for criticizing right-wing forces." These findings revealed that right-wing populism in Finland was considered a serious and urgent threat, especially with the rise of the populist Finns Party and antiimmigrant discourse. As one of Silakkaliike's founders explained, "The populist attitude is what we all find dangerous . . . towards our society and globally" (interview 1F). Silakkaliike participants describe themselves as actors "against all kinds of discrimination" (interview 1F). One participant in the movement stated,

> [I am] really angry about this right-wing populist party. They are gaining popularity because they are bullying people if you criticize them. . . . It is not just the Finnish populist party, it is everywhere, in the Western countries. . . . They are violent, extremist right wingers, racist groups (interview 10F).

The interviews demonstrated that the founders and organizers, in particular, acknowledged the similarities between the Italian and Finnish contexts regarding the rise of the right wing. They stated that they "took inspiration from the Italian Sardines, which opposes right-wing populist Matteo Salvini's La Lega." It provided a movement model for "saying no to aggressive populism" (interview 2F). They decided to "copy" (interview 1F) and "imitate" (interview 14F) the Sardines model, which they considered a "counterforce against right-wing populism" (Koski 2019). Despite their limited knowledge of the Italian political context, most of the Silakkaliike participants identified the Italian 6000 Sardine group as an "antifascist and antipopulist movement" (interview 11F) that was "able to make a difference" (interview 5F). As one participant emphasized, it was the "right-wing populist political change" in both countries that motivated people to gather to "show strength in the masses and in the groups, and finding some support from there as well" (interview 7F).

This sense of similarity can be considered as an "attribution of similarity" (McAdam and Rucht 1993) that enabled Finnish activists' identification with the Italian Sardines and created the cognitive basis to adopt a similar model. Here, rather than actual similarities between the two countries and their political contexts, the parallels perceived by activists revolve mostly around the hostile presence of the populist actors in politics and its consequences for social and political life, such as increased hate speech, racism, and aggressive language.

Emotional and Cognitive Resonance of Values and Principles

Our grounded-theory analysis also revealed an additional factor facilitating the diffusion of the 6000 Sardine protest abroad: its values and principles, which emotionally and cognitively resonated with the participants of the Silakkaliike movement. Emotional resonance, which refers to the "emotional alignment between a movement's ideology and the emotional lives of a potential recruit," is already emphasized as a significant factor for the recruitment of new members in framing studies (Troost, van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2013: 202), yet it has not received widespread scholarly attention regarding its role in the crossnational diffusion of recent movements. The harmony between participants' emotional schemas and the frames, values

or principles of the movement facilitate an emotional release from negative emotions such as fear, alienation and powerlessness, increasing the motivation for collective action.

In our research, we observed that the explicit antipopulist stance of the Italian movement, calling for a defense of democratic and human-rights values, was easily embraced and internalized by Finnish activists. In particular, the 6000 Sardine's "agreeable, basic, and popular" *values*, used in their discourse as a vague but central concept describing their moral principles and political objectives, resonated strongly with the Silakkaliike audience. Based on the analysis of the interviews, the main codes that emerged stressed both similarities and differences among the two movements (see again tables A-C). For the Italian case, They were characterized in the following ways: as a "funny game," providing a "peaceful and secure collective action," "bodies in the street," a space for "politicization through socialization," as well as "collective enthusiasm." For the Finnish movement, it was a "softer" movement compared to Sardines, an "agreeable, basic, and popular-values movement," an "active community of solidarity," but also an "online struggle," "a movement against post-truth politics," and a "relief" and "shelter in which to freely express yourself as a member of a group" without "feelings of threats or exclusion." While the Sardines define themselves insisting on the power of numbers and mobilization in the streets, the Herrings emphasize more online mobilization, but with a similar focus on values such as solidarity and democracy, and with a creative repertoire of actions.

Our findings show that the discursive and instrumental use of the concept of values, and related content manifested by the Sardines, were adopted by the Silakkaliike and played a major role during the group's early mobilization. As one of the founders stressed, "What was inspiring was obviously the values." He continued, "We felt . . . an immediate common ground of . . . similar values against racism, fascism, and all kinds of hate speech and terror that affects specific groups of people" (interview 1F). Similarly, another Finnish participant identified both the mobilizations as "humans taking action to defend very good values. We adopted the same method, focused on the power of the people" (interview 9F). Another activist emphasizes, "The people became really excited about the Silakkaliike and the values" (interview 2F).

Moreover, the 6000 Sardine's strong emphasis in both their discourses and actions on creatively promoting positive emotions such as hope and joy, as Jasper (1998) categorized, was a crucial component of their inspirational impact on the Silakkaliike movement. The Italian movement's characteristic protest technique of countering the aggressive, alienating, and discriminating populist political discourses (and related negative emotions such as fear and hate) with joyful and peaceful demonstrations and slogans such as "We are all here, in the square, close as Sardines") triggered a growing sympathy among the Silakkaliike audience. As Koski (2019) emphasizes, "Like the Italian movement, we are concerned about how ugly the political language has become," along with the "proliferation of such aggressive, hate speech and racist political messages." The Sardines' creative use of action repertoires to challenge this political situation and create a more positive environment was also followed by the Silakkaliike, which focused on "activating people to feel that they are in a group" and getting "people engaged in creating all kinds of herring-related handicrafts" as the Sardines did (interview 1F). "It was a really powerful message to us that you have this huge demonstration in a square where people are singing the anthem and songs," the organizer adds, so they tried to "mirror" similar environment in their demonstrations (interview 1F).

As our interviews show, the emotional impact that the Sardines had on their Italian audience influenced the Silakkaliike activists, who were also seeking a "political environment without negative emotions" (interview 6F). One Silakkaliike participant stressed that when she saw "protests with thousands of people singing 'Bella Ciao,' I was hoping that it would be like that in Finland as well" (interview 2F). Such an impact also provided motivation for some activists to copy actions and apply them to the Finnish context. For example, interviewee 10F composed a similar song to be sung in the demonstrations. The insistence on creative action repertoires involving images and music, as well as positive emotions juxtaposed against the

negative emotions stoked by the populists activated and nurtured what della Porta refers (2017) to as "eventful mobilizations."

Success of the Movement Model Proposed by the Identified Group

While perceived contextual similarities and the resonance of the shared values and principles facilitated the identification of the Silakkaliike audience with the 6000 Sardine movement, the latter's success significantly accelerated the adoption of its repertoires, tactics, and frames crossnationally. Indeed, as the main codes from interviews reveal (tables A-C), we find the adoption and adaptation of many features of the Sardine movement model: the Herring activists self-define themselves, as "a movement aiming at bringing back people in politics," believing in "politicization and mobilization through education and mutual learning," of "ordinary people," but also "with a demography dominated by women."

The social movement literature shows that other movements' successes and failures and the previous experiences of adoptersare significant determinants for the diffusion of tactics, repertoires, and so on (della Porta and Tarrow, 2012). Our findings further demonstrate how different perceptions of success have facilitated this diffusion process. From the perspective of the Silakkaliike founders, the 6000 Sardine movement was a benchmark of organizational success that managed to mobilize thousands of people, even among populations without activist ex-perience or interest in politics, in peaceful and nonviolent demonstrations within a relatively short period. They "started with a flash mob, which surprisingly reached 15,000 people." Thus, Finland "would have its own Sardines movement" (interview 1F).

Second, in the words of the Finnish activists, the Italian movement demonstrated that such mobilizations of ordinary people could "defeat" populism—not only in the short term (as did, in fact, happen in Italy in the regional election), but also by proposing a different model of politics from below, by engaging "ordinary citizens" in collective action using creative and peaceful tactics. Referring to 6000 Sardine, interviewee 12F stated, "The way they work . . . is so strong." Another Finnish activist emphasized that in the Sardines movement, everybody's efforts are welcomed, and there is "nothing as small as a sardine!" (interview 14F).

As the interviews demonstrate, socialization in the streets and squares was a significant part of these movements' action repertoires, particularly the Sardines (interview 2 IT—see next section), but the Italian movement was later hampered in this respect by the COVID-19 emergency, as our interviewees in both countries often recognized. In addition to their offline activities, another goal of the Sardine movement was to promote positive and nonaggressive language on social media. As one interviewee (5IT) characterized it: "'Occupying' online surveys [to defend] against the far-right trolls, organizing online workshops to educate members on various topics, collective fact-checking activities in social media platforms. . . ."

Although in the Herrings case there is a similar recognition of "populism as an international problem," they frame themselves as "a domestic movement without a transnational network or aim." The model itself was a consequence of populism, as it was designed to propose an antipopulist understanding of politics through achieving inclusive mobilization beyond party politics or other conventional political actors. In the words of the Silakkaliike founder, this was an alternative way to deal with the "disappointment with current politics" (Koski 2019). As another organizer stresses, the inspirational success of the Sardines model relied on "finding just regular people with regular goals with just decent values and bringing them out to the streets to say, 'This is enough!'" (interview 14F). Inspired by this novel, creative, and successful form of mobilization, the Silakkaliike "took the model of the Italian sardines movement" and recontextualized it to suit the Finnish political context (*Silakkaliike Manifesto* 2019), confirming what the diffusion literature that crossnational diffusion is not *s*imply "the spontaneous adoption by receivers of a protest idea or tactic transmitted form one protest site to another." Instead, it involves "the active and often creative cultural translation of practices from one political context to another" (Flesher Fominaya and Jimenez 2014: 19). Although in the

Herrings case there is a similar recognition of "populism as an international problem," the Finns frame themselves as "a domestic movement without a transnational network or aim."

Our findings consequently demonstrate that regarding the diffusion of protests and social movements, this case can be conceptually categorized as thin crossnational diffusion through nonrelational channels (such as social media platforms and news) and weak or absent organizational ties. As one of the organizers emphasized, despite having some contacts with some members of the Sardines in Finland, Silakkaliike emerged as an independent movement and the interaction between two movements was strictly limited (interviewee 2F). While this model of diffusion has been studied in the social movement literature (della Porta and Mattoni 2014), our analysis unveils how the emotional and cognitive processes and the concept of inspiration empirically function based on abovementioned three factors in the creation and spread of a new type of movement. The success of the 6000 Sardine model also explains the rapid scaling of the Italian protests from the local to the national level. A still more interesting aspect of our findings, however, is the originality of the particular model adopted by both movements to challenge the rise of right-wing populism in their contexts. As previously argued, the ideational and organizational structure of this model was originally designed not only as a reaction to populism but also as an alternative to the existing political culture and actors. By analyzing our interviews with participants in both movements in combination with the sensitizing concepts in the relevant literature on populism and social movements through grounded theory, we develop and introduce a conceptual framework for antipopulism from below, which will be discussed in the next section.

IS IT AN "ANTIPOPULIST" MOVEMENT?

Categorizing the 6000 Sardine mobilization as a social movement has already been definitively proven by Caruso and De Blasio (2021). However, whether it can truly be defined as an "antipopulist movement" remains an open question. Our analysis of the emergence and diffusion of both cases suggests that, in terms of ideology, style of communication and rhetoric, organization, as well as political strategy, they can be categorized antipopulist movements—although with some caveats.

Populism can be defined in many ways. Following Müller (2016), we can identify several general theoretical characteristics:

- Political rhetoric that is marked by the "unscrupulous use and instrumentalization of diffuse public sentiments of anxiety and disenchantment" (Betz 1994: 4) and appeals to "the power of the common people in order to challenge the legitimacy of the current political establishment" (Abt and Rummens 2007: 407)

- A "thin" or "weak" ideology, that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups: "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite." Moreover, this ideology argues that politics should be an expression of the people's *volonté générale* (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2018). Elements of this "thin-centered ideology" concerning the structure of power in society refer to antagonistic relations between the people and the elite, the idea of restoring popular sovereignty, and a conception of the people as a homogeneous body.

- A type of movement organization characterized by the presence of new and charismatic leadership

- A special style of communication (Jagers and Walgrave 2007) without intermediaries. Populists are successful because they are "taboo breakers and fighters against political correctness" (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2018). They usually appeal to emotions

of fear and enthusiasm by employing highly emotional, slogan-based, tabloid-style language, adopting a demagogic style, referring to resentment, and offering easy solutions for complex problems.

- Recent sociocultural approaches to populism emphasize a political style or "a way of doing things" characterized by specific forms of affective and personalistic political relations (Ostiguy 2017).

- Finally, to these typical characterizations of populism, we add that it also includes attitudes regarding disintermediation, authoritarianism and—regarding varieties of left-wing and right-wing populism—different definitions of "the people."

Drawing on these insights, we can argue that—with some adjustments—they can be reversed to characterize forms of antipopulism (see table 1 on the next page, and table F in the appendix). Indeed, our analysis of interviews with participants and founders/organizers of 6000 Sardines and Silakkaliike suggest the following characteristics:

- An alternative collective identity based on a pluralist and inclusive conception of "the people"

- With a different style and rhetoric

- With a creative repertoire of action where positive emotions have a prominent role in activating and nurturing eventful mobilizations

- Through a horizontal organizational structure despite the presence of charismatic leaders from below

Regarding the top row in table 1, not only did our two cases emerge as countermovements (Roth 2018) to populism, but also they proposed an alternative collective identity from below based on a pluralist and inclusive conception of "the people." This identity was different from the homogeneous logic of populism and, especially, its ethnonationalist right-wing forms. The "people" on which their identity was based also emerged from below. It was active and participative, as well as universal and transnational. The Sardines defined themselves not only as a transnational movement but also as a network of members of a cosmopolitan community. Alternatively, it is a transnational movement with a national focus (see table 1, "the people").

As movements opposing the discriminatory practices and discourses of right-wing populist actors, both the 6000 Sardine and the Silakkaliike strongly emphasize the importance of diversity as a fundamental value. The Silakkaliike manifesto (2019) states it is open to "anyone who embraces their values such as antiracism, antifascism, empathy, fact checking, etc." An interviewee observes, "A herring is a herring, regardless of political alignment. . . . Our goal is to show that the rising ethos of hatred and misinformation is not the voice of the entire nation" (interview 6F). Another activist states that they are "open for everybody who has some kind of a sense of justice," and he continues, the movement is made of "a variety of different kinds of people, not just a small group, like a small bubble" (interview 7F). Both movements are mostly described by the activists as comprised of "regular people" and "ordinary citizens." These characterizations are intentionally used to reflect the movements' inclusionary principles, with the emphasis on certain progressive and democratic values, as often stressed by the founders. The "people" are often emphasized as "an active citizenship," distinct from the passive followers of populism, who are often identified as in a symbiotic relationship with the leader (see Caiani and della Porta 2011). This relationship is also characterized as "a political practice," according to interviewee 1IT. She continues, "Sardines believe that 'the people' are the real protagonists of the social and democratic life of the country . . . an antidote to indifference."

Table 1. The Main Characteristics of the Two Antipopulist Mobilizations from Below

Analytical Dimensions		*Codes from Axial Coding*
People	Proposing an alternative collective identity based on a pluralist and inclusive conception of the "people" **(not homogeneous)**	- A movement "from below" with the participation of ordinary people - Diverse and inclusive, demonstrating the strength of masses - Atypical political movement with a low bar for participation - Principle of nonaffiliation to any party - Aiming to activate citizens to engage in politics - Made up of "active," curious people - A "numerical challenge" - Intergenerational, with diverse demography - Against right-wing populism, but also distancing from other militant movements - Cosmopolitan, transnational movement
Rhetoric	With a new rhetoric based on the emphasis on novelty/originality and simplicity **(not simplification or demagoguery)**	- Simplicity and clarity of the message - Based on universal values of democracy and participation - Against aggressive, alienating and discriminatory language in politics - Against post-truth politics (also online) - Agreeable, basic and popular values - Urgent need for change and vision of a new country - Novelty/originality in terms of identity, practices and organization
Political Style	Using creative repertoires of action that aims at triggering positive emotions to activate and nurture eventful mobilizations (**not polarizing or negative emotions**) with affective **but not personalistic** political relations (instead solidaristic, universal, collective)	- Collective enthusiasm as a mobilizing factor ("inspiring impact of songs") - Hope, joy, relief, happiness - A "Do-It-Yourself" movement, supporting creativity in repertoires (e.g., hand-made fishes from paper and cardboards) - Protesting as a "funny game" (providing a peaceful and secure collective action space for everyone) - Countering the feelings of loneliness, insecurity, and powerlessness - Performative power of creative repertoire of action; eventful protest
Organization	Through a horizontal organizational structure despite the presence of charismatic leaders from below **(not hierarchical structure)**	- Spontaneous mobilization without a structured organization or ideological manifestation - Politicization through socialization (and 'mutual learning') - "Genuineness" and "trust" in not being exploited by leaders as motivating factors - Autonomous spread of the movement ("advising rather than leading") - A horizontal and fluid model - Emphasis on the kindness of founders as a positive trait

Note: Table 1 contains the findings (i.e., codes from the axial coding) of our analysis of the interviews with both leaders of activists that we have categorized based on the four dimensions of our antipopulism from below movement model. Instead of using one preferred definition of populism, in the table we look empirically at antipopulism from below using the main definitional characteristics of the main important and consolidated definitions of the concept of populism found in the literature.

Indeed, other interviews affirmed that this conception of "the people" motivated the participation and re-activation of citizens into politics. As one Italian activist explains,

> When I heard about the movement, I said to myself, "It's a good opportunity to return to participate in some way. . . . I heard of the guys who had a proposal that came from below . . . because all the other movements were born more "from above" in Italy, as also the Five Star Movement. . . . (interview 6IT)

Similarly, an interviewee from the Silakkaliike movement stresses that this inclusive approach helped to "lower the bar" for political participation, *"*so it unites people, like there's a lot of common ground" (interview 4F).

Furthermore, although the principle of "nonaffiliation to any party or groups" (interview 1IT) is an important component of the construction of "the people." They are not antielitist (they are pro-European), but instead they are against the political elite of their country, namely, the right-wing populist one that alienated citizens and made them apolitical (interview 3F). Moreover, our data indicate that these transnational frames and identities seem to work as "collective action frames" within which the diffusion of protest is accomplished.

Therefore, like populism, these movements are "people centric," but they propose a different identity and definition of "the people," one that promotes political identification (see next section, also Panizza 2017) through their movements' unique political practices (as column 3 of table 1 shows). Leaders and participants see themselves as having a fully substantive political identity—not just a reactive one. According to various Silakkaliike interviews, they say they are an "antipopulist countermovement against the rise of right-wing extremism."

In terms of movement rhetoric (row 2 in table 1), both cases mobilize with a communication style and rhetoric different from the fear, anxiety, and negativism of populists (Bertz 1994; Cossarini and Vallespin 2019). They do not delegitimize institutions and the mainstream actors, and based on positive rather than polarizing emotions, they emphasize simplicity, although not simplification of political issues (see the axial codes in table 1). Both the movements identify themselves "beyond party politics" and "new ways of doing politics." The principle of nonaffiliation is another aspect of the inclusivity and openness that they pursue (interview 1IT). The Sardines have been also defined as a " progressive movement in support of the Italian social-democratic Partito Democratico" (Hamdaoui 2021).

The emergence and spread of both the 6000 Sardine and the Silakkaliike movements heavily relied on the demand for a new movement in politics, in some ways similar to the legitimation of new political actors typical of populists. But also—as emerged from our interviews—their development rode on their ability to provide this novelty in various ways: *new movements* beyond existing political context, using *new and creative* repertoires of action and *new, genuine and fresh* discourse, with a *new* conception of "the people."

The emphasis on novelty refers not only to being different from the populists, but also to providing an alternative to the existing progressive and left-wing organizations in each country. Also, simple and understandable values—not complex ideological platforms—are central to this understanding of novelty. Contrary to deploying the "enemy-thinking rhetoric of the populists,"[7] the simplicity and clarity of messages are accentuated. This is highlighted by activists and founders, who, by emphasizing "universal values," summon democracy and participation. In their words, this is the "reclamation of these basic values through genuine, simple and understandable rhetoric" (interviews 4IT and 2IT, and 14F and 11F). Indeed, although a "crisis of political representation" motivated them to initiate the movements, it was also associated with the failure of conventional political actors and groups to defend the fundamental democratic and progressive values that "populist actors are also challenging," according to "a broader sense of representation" (interviews 1IT and 3IT). Their protests represented "not just a problem of political representation, but also of values that politics should pursue (interview 5IT). As discussed, the prominence of values such as "democratic participation," "freedom," "equality," "antiracism and antifascism," "antipopulism," "empathy" and "education" played an important role in the rhetoric of these two movements.

In terms of political style and communication (row 3 in table 1), both the movements use creative action strategies and political socialization in squares and streets aimed to nurture positive emotions, such as enthusiasm, joy, hope, and even relief from the "darkness" and "oppression" of the populist times. Thus, we encounter communication styles that transcend the common "will-of-the-people megaphones" that populist leaders stress. Emphasizing the solidarity and social connectedness, "Close as Sardines" was the slogan of the protests of the Italian movement. This socialization dimension is also strengthened by the promotion of proactive stance in terms of creatively engaging in the formation of the movement's culture. "Creativity," beyond nonviolence, is one of the main recurring words in their speeches and documents (see column 3 of the axial codes in table 1). Participants are encouraged to innovate in preparing their materials for protest, such as fish-shaped cardboard signs, placards, pins, clothes, flags, and even to devise their own slogans, marches, and songs to sing together.

This "way of doing" politics, based on affective, solidaristic, and universal—but not personalistic—relations also brings about, as our data seem to suggest, "eventful protests" of mobilization from below where processes of political-identity formation and the creation of ties are at play. As della Porta (2018: 6) argues, such eventful mobilizations are "capable of transforming relations within social movements and between movements and their contexts" and they "reproduce, rather than just consuming, resources of solidarity and collective identification, fueling positive emotions of empowerment." In our cases we observed a similar impact. By transforming political mobilization into entertaining activities "like in a game," a participatory conception of democracy from below is advocated. Also, as stressed by some representatives, the "transformative effects of protest [change] the participants' political actions and positions" (interview 4IT). This emphasis on creativity also aligns with their conception of people, as it primarily aims at creating a movement where elders, children or families can join in the mobilization (interview 2IT). As explained by one activist, "After the demonstration, you go home with more awareness and knowing that precisely participating and being a more active citizen are the keys to overcoming the situation" (interview 8IT). Positive emotions and positivity became not only part of the struggle against populism but also foundational to the collective-identity frames and practices (action choices) of these antipopulist movements. According to one participant from 6000 Sardine,

> We started whistling the song. "Come è profondo il mare" [How deep the sea is] by Lucia Dalla loudly together and finished it with a beautiful whistle. And tears flowed there because people recognized themselves also in a song of beauty in opposition to violence . . . and this positive emotion then broke the city's borders and reached everyone. (interview 5IT).

We argue that all this allows for a collective-identity formation process (Flesher Fominaya, 2010) that acts as a dynamic of mobilization and empowerment, as shown by our data. It also facilitates political identification from below, emphasizing the need for widespread positive identification among disaffected citizens—both aspects underexplored in the scholarship of populism (Melendez and Rovira Kaltwasser 2019).

Finally, concerning the organization dimension (the bottom row in table 1, rather than creating hierarchical and personalized structures, as is the case of both right-wing and left-wing populism (Caiani, Padoan, and Marino 2022), both the 6000 Sardine and Silakkaliike avoided identifying their leaders—at least at the beginning—and preferred to emphasize a "network of networks" structure. As explained by the Finnish activists, "We never came out with people's names. Because we wanted the movement to not have a face in a way. Many people gave TV and radio interviews, but always as 'one of the group.'" (interviews 14F and 11F).

They spread autonomously by adopting the model proposed by the founders without an emphasis on any specific "names" or "faces" but on the group itself (interview 1IT). As explained by the 6000 Sardine founders, "there was no need to convince anyone, the main square (i.e., the first flash mob in Bologna) was enough to trigger the snowball. In order to share 'the lessons we learned' . . . we drafted a vademecum [handbook], and we circulated it, as a guide not to stick to rigidly, but to be 'inspired by' freely" (interview 1IT).

Our findings demonstrate that the charisma of these movements' leaders was based on considering them as "genuine leaders" to trust rather than strong leaders to follow. As one activist states, "Genuine, pure, convincing; I must say they [the leaders] fascinated me a lot (interview 10IT). The interviews with activists and movements founders in both countries showed alignment on this dimension, which sheds light on the horizontal organizational structure and internal dynamics of collective identity formation.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have adopted an innovative and comparative use of grounded theory to trace the mobilization and diffusion of antipopulism. Our findings emphasize the role of microlevel actors, such as individuals without affiliation to a political group, party, or organization, in mobilization processes, including the diffusion of protest and social movements (della Porta, 2017). We applied theories of diffusion from social media studies to populism to "to broaden our understanding of what happens when practices and ideas travel from one context to another" and "expand and redefine traditional conceptual frameworks about diffusion" (della Porta and Mattoni 2014: 278). The emotions, values, and perceptions of these microlevel actors mattered significantly in the diffusion of antipopulist protests across distant contexts—even in the absence of previous organizational or biographical linkages between the two movements. As our findings and the framework of the antipopulist-protest diffusion demonstrated, together with the consideration of contextual political opportunities, namely, similarities shaped by the presence of right-wing populist actors, the perceived success of the 6000 Sardine movement and the strong resonance of emotional reactions and shared values, were key explanatory factors in its diffusion to Finland. This represents a more agentic and processual approach that focuses on the experiences and perceptions of microlevel actors. Although grounded theory does not aim to generate generalizable principles, we are confident that the proposed theoretical framework could also be applied to facilitate the understanding of different cases of antipopulist protests in other countries. Future research might pay particular attention to the online dimension as a nonrelational channel of diffusion (Gerbaudo 2013).

Our research specifically aimed at understanding the relational, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of a diffusion process, and we firmly believe that the findings contribute to the existing theories about thin diffusion and how it could be further improved by also exploring the emotional and cognitive dimensions of the collective action. Furthermore, the differences found in the two empirical cases partially can be explained through a political opportunity lens—namely with reference to the populist forces against which they define themselves. In this regard, we could also argue that the division between the emotional and rational in politics serves to insert exclusionary practices against newcomers and challengers of the status quo (Eklundh 2019).

Our findings can also help us refine the notion of antipopulism. Other concepts have appeared in the literature to capture important characteristics (and ideological underpinnings) of such movements: "counter populism" (Kavada and Poell 2021), "reactive" populism (Vullers and Hellmeier 2022), "alter populism" (Pennucci 2021) or "quasipopulist antipopulism." These particular versions of antipopulism all incorporate some sort of popular-mobilization element. They are "antipopulist movements with populist traits," as some of the activists recognized. Regarding their movement characteristics, their strategy (online and offline) and their relationship with the traditional Left, these movements might alternatively be labeled as "counterpopulists," since they are both against a specific family of populism (right-wing exclusionary) and at the same time mobilize with populist elements, problematizing the relationship between populism and democracy (Urbinati, 2017; see also Pennucci, 2021 for the online characterization of these movements). Moreover, we are not properly dealing with antipopulism, but with an alternative type of populism. As "progressive movement-parties," against populism and beyond digitalism (della Porta 2022), as our findings have shown, they are characterized by an appeal to broaden participation through the inclusion of new population

groups within representative institutions. This is related to the nature of the extreme right in Italy and Finland, which involve an instrumental utilization of populist rhetoric in the service of authoritarian and nationalist ideas (De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017). This is the "enemy" and main trigger of the mobilization of these two antipopulist movements from below. Our findings have shown that this version of antipopulism is both "collective" and "connective," but different than purely digital populist movements (Deseriis 2020). In this sense, our findings may also contribute to breaking some new ground, especially with regard to these types of anti-counter populism movements from below.

More comparative studies across time and space of different types of antipopulist cam-paigns are needed to take into account the endogenous and crossdirectional complexity arising from multiple sources of information and inspiration (Oikonomakis and Roos 2016). Such comparisons hold the potential to increase our knowledge about different possible conceptualizations of antipopulism. Finally, although our cases were limited in time and space and thwarted by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is notable that similar movements and campaigns continue to spread in various parts of the world, for example, the "Grab Your Wallet" campaign in the U.S. and other countries (see Sombatpoonsiri 2018). Right-wing populism is still spreading, which can reflect its current trajectory in its protest cycle. Related to antipopulism, a key question is the sustainability and impact of these movements. To be sure they were rather short-lived, thwarted by Covid-19, and it is worth asking what type of legacy therefore do they have, if any? Are they more fleeting and less impactful as compared to other types of social movements? Future studies on similar cases adding comparison will help to answer these questions.

NOTES

[1] Appendix 1 includes lists A and B, and tables A, B, C, D, and E. Appendix 2 contains table F, which contains extracts from the interviews. Available at https://osf.io/3y9d7/.

[2] There are however some studies focusing on how populist discourses and practices spread in the European context (Gozalishvili, 2022).

[3] In particular, populism has been linked to emotions such as anger, resentment, and hope (Salmela and Von Scheve, 2018). Specific types of emotions, such as fear (insecurity), nostalgia, and anger, are considered important drivers of RW populism (Cossarini and Vallespín, 2019).

[4] According to the main GT tenets, aiming at interpreting the processes behind a certain phenomenon and generating a theory from the data, our broader key questions leading the interviews were: What's happening here? What are the basic social processes? What are the basic social psychological processes?

[5] Italy has been considered a laboratory of populist success and a showcase for populist parties. Not only is the country characterized by a long history of populism, but also by the success of varieties of populism.

[6] In the 2018 national elections, the 5SM—after its astonishing electoral debut in 2013 (with 27% of votes)—reached 32% of votes, and the right-wing League, renewed in its core-ideology and leadership, achieved an unprecedented 17% (and 34% in the 2019 European elections).

[7] We are grateful to the referees for this suggestion.

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