

Forthcoming in the Current Sociology Monograph Series

“Disappearing Organization? Reshaping the Sociology of Organizations”

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**A partial organization approach to the dynamics of social order in social  
movement organizing**

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## **A partial organization approach to the dynamics of social order in social movement organizing**

### **Abstract**

This paper builds on the theoretical notion that social order in organized settings is both emergent and decided. It examines the dynamics of emergent and decided social order in a timebank, a local community initiative within the alternative currency social movement. We propose that organized settings are in practice associated with a continuously evolving blend of elements of both decided and emergent social order; thus, allowing organizing to evolve over time. Shedding light on the broader puzzle of how social order in organized settings evolves, we empirically show how organizational dynamics change through the interplay of networks, institutions and decisions, as participants adopt and reject various elements of emergent and decided sources of social order. In our analysis, we combine content analysis and social network analysis of archival data to describe and explain dynamic and inherently relational organizing activities that unfold in the community's day-to-day interactions.

### **Keywords**

Organization theory; Partial organization; Social movement; Process; Timebank; Mixed method

## **Introduction**

At the intersection of social movements and organization studies, the question of social order continues to pose a conundrum that sparks sustained debates on organisation in and for mobilization for social change. The question whether organization is beneficial or detrimental to social movements' goal accomplishment (e.g., Gamson and Schmeidler, 1984; Cloward and Piven, 1984; Walker and Martin, 2019; Zald and Ash, 1966) should be subservient to the question *how* organization—and, indeed, organizing—takes place. “What matters is how movement participants interpret and enact the various opportunities to organize that are available to them” (de Bakker et al., 2018: 224).

The question of how the dynamics of social order in social movements engenders through its participants is relevant in two ways. First, there is a tension between eschewing decided social order—defined as decision-making about membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring, and sanctioning (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011)—and nevertheless needing coordination thereby risking a drift toward bureaucracy (e.g., Staggenborg, 1988, 2013). Second, there is a threat of a minority of participants accumulating disproportionate influence and pushing through their own views or interests, that is, oligarchization (Michels, 1911; Leach, 2005; Zald and Ash, 1966; Diefenbach, 2018). Participants in many social movement initiatives are aware of

these tensions and threats, implying that they may be aware of the prevailing social order in their initiative, reflect on it, and intervene according to a range of actions they deem appropriate.

However, the question of how participants in social movement initiatives engage with social order over time remains largely unanswered. We draw on the recent elaboration of partial organization theory (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011) for social movement organizing (de Bakker et al., 2017; den Hond et al., 2015; Simsa and Totter, 2017) to investigate how STAP—Stadin Aikapankki, a timebank in Helsinki, Finland—has enacted elements of organizing over time in its efforts to deal with the tensions and threats in organizing. We analyse the dynamics of social order by exploring how its participants draw on sources of emergent and decided social order. Hence, the main question of our study is: *How have the dynamics of emergent and decided social order evolved over time in the case of STAP?* This question speaks to Ahrne et al.'s (2016: 99) calls to examine “the consequences of adopting organizational elements in creating social order, compared to other modes,” as well as “the interaction between different types of social order” and “factors that lead to an increase or decrease in the amount of organization.” Our study contributes to answering such questions in a threefold manner: firstly, by repositioning the focus on organization in social movement theory from organization to the dynamics of organizing; secondly, by introducing the blending of elements of decided and emergent order in partial organization theory, and thirdly, by

levering these ideas to the debate on the disappearance of organization in organizational sociology.

In what follows, we first discuss partial organization theory, elaborating on the idea of functional equivalence between elements of decided and emergent social order. We then move to our case study. Organizing (in) STAP has coincided through various phases in response to two major issues: the growth and decline in the size of the timebank, and taxation of exchanges between members in the timebank in light of the Finnish law and the Finnish tax authorities. In light of our findings, we conclude by reflecting on organizing social movement initiatives, partial organization theory, and the disappearance of organization from organizational sociology.

### **Theoretical background**

In examining how participants in collective action organize in ways that manifest their ideals, we approach the organizational question in social movement theory (Piven, 2013) in a way that avoids seeing organization as either beneficial or detrimental to movements. Instead, we see movement participants struggle with the question of how to organize, juggling with the (often diametrically opposed) implications of relying on elements of decided versus emergent social order while pursuing their participatory ideals in accomplishing social change. Their aim is not necessarily to eschew structure (cf. Freeman, 1972), but to experiment with the “*kind of structure* [...] that will maximize participation and prevent anyone from dominating the group” (Leach, 2013:

183, original emphasis). Establishing a structure that matches their ideals demands an ongoing effort and remains an object of contention (Lee, 2015; Maeckelbergh, 2009). We turn to partial organization theory in order to exemplify this quest of matching organizing and ideals.

Ahrne and Brunsson (2011) define organization as a decided social order constituted through decision-making regarding membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring, and sanctioning. Ahrne and Brunsson (2011, 2019) lament that much of current organization theory is concerned with *non*-organizational phenomena; in their view, scholars have turned away from studying organization to embrace institutions and social networks—emergent social orders that do not rely on decision-making. Regarding the alleged disappearance of organization from organizational sociology, partial organization points to the possibility of a partial absence of decided social order in organized settings (den Hond et al., 2019). It further suggests that emergent social order should be recognized as having prominence in organized settings.

In this spirit, we propose elements of emergent social order as functional equivalents to the elements of decided social order (cf. Ahrne, 2015). This move enables a more detailed and dynamic conceptualization of social order in organized settings by relating emergent and decided social order, instead of opposing them. It also allows us to explore empirically organizing as the result of enacting and intertwining these elements of social order.

### *Emergent and decided social order*

We conceptualize social order as the relatively enduring and stable but not static conditions for, and the relatively predictable but not determined patterns of, cooperative behaviour (Elster, 1989; see also Fligstein, 2001). Ahrne and Brunsson (2011) distinguish decided from emergent social order.

Emergent social order is relational; it originates in social networks and institutions (see e.g. Haug, 2013). Relationships are ties in a social network that develop from interpersonal likings, animosities and friendships, as well as from sharing similar ideas and interest (e.g., Borgatti et al., 2009; Dunbar and Spoors, 1995). Institutions comprise shared norms, values, beliefs, and cultural and behavioural patterns that emerge from and stabilize in interaction (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). Emergent social order thus results from the doing, acting and interacting of people and the ability to adjust their behaviour by observing and reflecting on what happens around them. Reflexivity and agency allow participants to influence the prevailing social order and use elements of emergent social order as functional equivalents to decided social order (cf. Ahrne, 2015).

Decided social order emanates from decision-making on the constitutive elements of organization (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011). Decisions (Brunsson and Brunsson, 2017) are interventions in the prevailing social order; they are attempts—explicit, communicated, archived—at directing the behaviour of organizational

members in the case of organizations, and that of others in the case of ‘organization outside of organization’. Agency resides in making decisions—not in following, obeying and complying with them. Organized settings such as Weber’s (1968) bureaucracies, March and Simon’s (1993) organizations, Meyer et al.’s (2006) formal organizations and Ahrne and Brunsson’s (2011) complete organizations are depicted as decided social orders, because decision-making constitutes them. Nevertheless, all these organized settings exhibit emergent social order, too, recognized as the discrepancy between formal and informal organizational structure (Gulati and Puranam, 2009) and the significance of culture (Meyerson and Martin, 1987; Schein 1985) and social capital in organizations (Lin, 2001; Maurer et al., 2011). Emergent social order can be very powerful in controlling organizational members’ actions (Barker, 1993). Defining organization as decided social order therefore carries the risk of obscuring emergent social order: all instances of organization, all organized settings, exhibit both decided and emergent social orders.

One also finds decided social order in organized settings that typically are not considered organizations, such as small groups, collectives, communities and social movement initiatives. Such settings form when people come together based on familiarity, intuitive affection, shared interest, identity or practice (McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Wilhoit and Kisselburgh, 2015). Their subsequent elaboration may happen without decision-making, when participants distrust and, therefore, reject bureaucracy



and hierarchy (de Bakker et al., 2017; Graeber, 2013; Harrison, 1960). Ideological choices may thus guide their efforts to keep decided social order at bay. Instead, they seek emergent social order to guide collaboration and coordination (Haug, 2013; Wilhoit and Kisselburgh, 2015) through trust and norms of mutuality, reciprocity and accountability.

Nevertheless, even anti-authoritarian initiatives may exercise some authority to coordinate activities, manage scale and sustain action (Harrison, 1960; Van Meter, 2017; Zald and Ash, 1966). They may introduce elements of decided social order or explicate some elements of emergent social order when behavioural expectations stemming from elements of emergent social order are not met. We argue that the blending of decided and emergent social order enables initiatives to evolve over time in their quest of realizing social ideas.

#### *Elements of organizing*

Membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring, and sanctions form Ahrne and Brunsson's (2011) typology of elements of decided social order. We see social order grounded in both emergence and decision-making and propose affiliation, non-hierarchical forms of authority, norms and values, social control, and intrinsic motivation as functional equivalents to Ahrne and Brunsson's elements. We bring the resulting pairs together under shared labels: participation, authority, regulation, control, and motivation.

*Participation.* Participation stands for the closing of social relationships (Weber, 1968) by including participants and excluding non-participants (Ahrne, 2015; Zald and Ash, 1966). The decided order solution to participation is membership whereas the emergent order equivalent is affiliation. In the former, a decision is made about who to accept as a member (and who not). Membership can also be abrogated by decision. While often a list of technical criteria exists to define who would qualify as a member, such criteria are often combined with other criteria such as ‘fit’. Becoming a member entails a commitment to accept the benefits, rights, constraints and obligations associated with membership.

The emergent social order solution to participation is affiliation: having a link to or interaction with a group; being present at particular events; expressing belonging (e.g., through behavioural or consumptive choices, cf. Ahrne, 1994; Lichterman, 1996), and thereby facilitating recognition of belonging by others (Wilhoit and Kisselburgh, 2015). Affiliation often follows from social relationships (e.g. friendship) and shared social-political convictions (Klandermans, 2004; Rothschild-Whitt, 1979). Participation in a movement can be inclusive (Zald and Ash, 1966). For example, people are free to join a demonstration or an initiative when they share interest, identity or solidarity (Reedy et al., 2016). In other instances, participation is more exclusive. For example, in the cases of friendship networks and hobby groups not everybody is welcome, yet exclusion does not need to rely on decision-making—exclusion may rely on other

mechanisms, such as ignoring, not informing, or espousing other negative attitudes toward prospective participants. Leaving may be difficult, too. Even if somebody no longer considers him/herself a participant in a collective, incumbents may still consider that person affiliated and treat him/her as if s/he still is a participant.

*Authority.* Authority refers to the legitimation of domination (Weber, 1968). The decided social order solution relies on rational-legal authority established through decision. The rights to make and enact decisions is vested in hierarchically structured positions and offices (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979). “Hierarchy is an organized form of authority” (Ahrne, 2015: 8). Authority is concentrated at the top of the hierarchy, although some authority may be delegated to lower levels in the hierarchy for functional reasons (e.g. information overload and span of control). Lower-level office holders also make decisions that affect the organization and its members, but their authority is derived from higher levels and the rights and responsibilities associated with their office are circumscribed (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979).

The emergent social order solution relies on non-hierarchical sources of authority, such as quasi charisma (Harrison, 1960) or practical experience or expertise (Van Meter, 2017). These sources of authority are transient; the authority they enable needs to be established through presence and action: for it to endure, it needs ongoing confirmation. Such emergent forms of authority are claimed and accepted in interaction (‘this is how it has always been done’) and through action (e.g. by undertaking action

without being challenged); they can be attributed to others ('you know how to do this'). Differences among participants' social position and individual qualities entail the risk that a minority of participants become dominant in the group, which may transmute to oligarchy, although this trend is not inevitable (Diefenbach, 2018; see also Zald and Ash, 1966).

*Regulation.* Regulation refers to way by which behavioural expectations and prescriptions are expressed. The decided order solution to regulation is to issue rules: "Rules are primarily in written form and always pronounced" (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011: 86; cf. Rothschild-Whitt, 1979). Rules bind behaviour to specific and explicit prescriptions for actions. Members' deviant behaviours, setbacks or unexpected events typically provoke an elaboration of the prevailing set of rules, such that "[t]he proliferation of formal rules has been a salient feature of modern organizations" (Zhou, 1993: 1160).

The emergent order solution relies on shared norms and values. Norms can be conceptualized as the shared and taken for granted understandings that guide participants' behaviour. Norms are grounded in interaction; norms evolve and new norms emerge when people attach value to some novel behaviour, which is then reinforced through positive feedback (cf. Opp, 2015; Horne, 2001; Elster, 1989). New participants become socialized by internalizing the prevailing norms and values of the group. Yet, norms are never stable, and socialization is never complete; participants

may reflect on the prevailing norms and values as they experience them and then seek to change them.

*Control.* Control is evaluating how and how well participants adhere to the behavioural expectations captured in regulation. Decided order control is practiced through systematized monitoring, typically by supervisors or dedicated administrative entities (such as HR departments). Monitoring may comprise quantified data; its output may be reported and archived. Contemporary data management tools enable more extensive monitoring and thereby enhance rule following.

The emergent social order solution is social control through non-systematic evaluative observation among participants. Participants observe the behaviour of their fellows, compare it with the prevailing norms and values, and construct what they observe as acceptable or not. They may share their observations with other participants and jointly reflect upon them. Such assessments may lead to action; exit, voice and loyalty is a rough summary of the various options participants can summon (Hirschman, 1970). Social control may lead to reinforcement of behavioural patterns; for example, when others are held accountable for their behaviour, or when a participant reflects over their own behaviour in light of prevalent norms and values and changes it accordingly (or leaves the community). Yet, social control need not be conservative; reflective engagement with others may also lead to escalating spirals of mutual understanding and

collaboration (or of misunderstanding and outrage), and thereby sow the seeds for change.

*Motivation.* Motivation refers to the reasons why people participate in collective efforts. The decided social order solution motivates members to contribute to the accomplishment of organizational goals by creating explicit and routinely distributed (material) incentives (Zald and Ash, 1966). Incentives can be positive through the granting of rewards or negative through the imposition of sanctions. Both the nature—material, symbolic—and amount of incentives are standardized in relation to the outcome of monitoring and therefore largely speak to extrinsic motivation. This solution to motivation relies on the attribution of goods that are external to the practice (cf. Macintyre, 2007: chapter 14). Administering incentives is decided by incumbents of offices with appropriate decision-making authority.

In comparison, the emergent social order solution to motivation relies on participants' intrinsic motivation to contribute. In Macintyre's (2007) language, contributing to the collective effort is a virtue, such that its rewards are internal to the practice. Intrinsic motivation can be enhanced when others recognize and approve the associated contribution in the context of the group's norms and values. Esteem may follow. Because such rewards are non-competitive, participants are more likely to assist each other. Combined with mutualism (de Bakker et al., 2017), relying on intrinsic motivation reinforces norms of solidarity and altruism. Nevertheless, solidarity is often

a weak incentive and realisation of purpose (e.g. a movement's social change goal) may lead to the demise of collective action (Zald and Ash, 1966). Participants' efforts may vary considerably in amount or nature: some may enjoy similar levels of recognition regardless of input, whereas those whose efforts clearly exceed may be viewed with both admiration and suspicion simultaneously.

In summary, social order is constituted in both decided and emergent elements. It evolves through decision-making to buttress social order; as a reflexive response to the prevailing social order, and autonomously as social networks and institutions evolve. This implies that in organized settings people have the possibility to forgo decision-making when they wish to change the prevailing order and, instead, rely on emergent sources of social order to accomplish coordination and collaboration. In what follows, we will examine the constitution of social order in the alternative currency movement, and more particularly, timebanking as an initiative in this movement.

## **Method**

### *The case*

In timebanks, reciprocal exchanges of time units happen in a peer-to-peer network (Laamanen et al., 2015; North, 2014). The focus is on creating and maintaining an inclusive local economy. Seeking a viable alternative to the current socio-economic hegemony, timebankers share values based on sharing, collaboration and mutuality, and resist hierarchy (Author 3 & 4). Stadin Aikapankki (STAP or Helsinki Timebank) is the

largest timebank in Finland; it has operated in metropolitan Helsinki since 2009. Participation is inclusive; anybody can join by filling in an online membership registration form. Exchanges between members are registered in an electronic ledger; their value is expressed in the community currency of *tovi*—Finnish for ‘a while’; one *tovi* represents one hour of work. By December 2017, STAP’s 3,500 members had completed more than 10,000 exchanges to an accumulated value of slightly over 34,000 *tovi*.

The principles guiding community interactions were made explicit in 2013 with the adoption of the ‘ABC’ of trading rules. Members commit to the ABC upon joining. The community consciously eschews political affiliation and refuses to adopt a recognized organizational form. Administrative work and decision-making in STAP adhere to the ideals of *stigmergy* and *adhocracy* (Author 3), which refer to the self-selective and self-directing distribution of administrative and other support tasks, and to stimulating equality and maximum voice for all members in matters concerning the collective and minimizing personified authority, respectively.

#### *Data collection and analysis*

Our mixed method approach combines various archival data to examine how STAP members drew on elements of decided and emergent social order in organizing STAP. The archival data include 41 documents from membership meeting memos and newsletters used in internal communication between November 2009 and December



2017 (about 27,000 words of text in total). Furthermore, we analyzed the exchanges as recorded in the electronic ledger, from between January 2010 to December 2017, which include member-to-member transactions, internal tax levies, and payments for services to organize and promote the timebank. The data allowed us to trace the evolution of membership, the intensity of trading, and characteristics of the social network of STAP members. STAP membership meeting—the principal decision-making body—gave us explicit approval to access and use the internal documents and the community ledger for research purposes.

The first author, a native speaker of Finnish, translated all documentary data from Finnish to English. The translated documents were coded in Atlas.ti. To increase reliability, two of the authors undertook first and second-order coding and initial analysis. We furthermore calculated word frequencies relating to ‘discussion’ and ‘decision’ to obtain a sense of the relevance of decided social order in the community discourse. Data in the community ledger allowed us to calculate the number and value of exchanges over time and the number of actively trading members (Figures 1-3). We also used these data to construct and analyze social network matrices, using Ucinet (Borgatti et al., 2002). We created an affiliation matrix which shows who traded with whom and calculated the density of this network (Figure 4).

[Insert Figures 1-4]

The mixed method approach allowed us to triangulate between the researchers' interpretations, and between the various data sources. Our interpretation of the data emerged from repeated discussions in regular meetings and evolved over the various versions of the manuscript.

## **Analysis**

### *Three phases in the blending of emergent and decided social order*

We explored, in an abductive manner (Dubois and Gadde, 2002), STAP's dynamics over time by tracing the trading network of STAP members. Participation and exchange activities were highest during the years 2012-2013 (Figures 1-3). Social network theory suggests that networks are more cohesive when there is a larger number of connections among members—when network density is higher—resulting in more cohesion in the network. Network connectedness and cohesion matter for flows of resources and information (Borgatti et al., 2009). A dense network further facilitates the diffusion of social norms (Oh et al., 2004) whereas decreasing density signifies reduced connectedness and the potential weakening of collective norms. We calculated annual network densities by considering trade exchanges as ties in order to map the connectedness of STAP members over time and found that network density was lowest in 2012 (Figure 4). Network cohesion was lowest at the same time when membership and exchange activity peaked.

Next, we analyzed STAP's newsletters, meeting memos and other texts for indications of the community's orientation to decided social order. First, we listed the documents chronologically and counted the number of words per document (Table 1). The total and average word count per document peaked in the years 2013-2014 (Figure 5). We also counted the number of times the words "decision" and "discussion" (including their derivatives) are mentioned (Figure 6). These words appeared considerably more frequent in the years 2013-2014 than in other years, both in absolute and relative terms (Figure 7).

[Insert Table 1]

[Insert Figures 5-7]

This quantitative inspection of documents and log file data from the community ledger suggests that there are three phases in STAP's orientation on elements of decided social order, and in how the STAP community understood and practiced its organizing (see also Author 3). In the first phase (2009-2011), STAP relied on emergent social order in organizing; the second phase (2012-2014) showed a more prominent orientation on decided social order, and the third phase (2015-2017) came with a renewed reliance on emergent social order. The transitions from the first to the second and from the second to the third phases took place in early 2012 and by the end of 2014, respectively.

How may we explain the waxing and waning of reliance on decided social order? We focus on two topics—the community’s size and issues relating to taxation—that were recurrent in the history of STAP and provoked continuing discussion about and activity relating to the community’s organizing. First, timebanks seek to increase their membership—size—in order to sustain activity and increase their potential of making a positive impact (North, 2005). Yet, in STAP, the increase in membership challenged its predominant reliance on emergent social order in phase 1. Several interventions ensued, including attempts to activate smaller groups within the larger structure and drafting the ABC. Phase 2 was thus characterized by increased reliance on decided social order as rules and administrative functions (the coordinator) were introduced. During phase 3, the elements of decided social order introduced during phase 2 lost much of their significance: for instance, rule following proved problematic and organizational discussions were not returned to leaving the question of structure unresolved.

Second, taxation has been central to STAP organizing (Joutsenvirta, 2016; Author 3). Initially, during phase 1, taxation concerned the redistribution of community ‘wealth’ through the internal tax paid to the community to enable community maintenance tasks; a limited amount of decided social order was in place to support organizing through emergent social order. At the end of phase 1, the ‘tovi tax’ was recoinced as a ‘social policy instrument’ that should enable an orchestrated use of

community wealth in order to sustain organizing. During phase 2, in November 2013 the tax authorities ruled to tax professional work in timebanks: this increased the importance of internal taxation as an instrument that creates social goods beyond community organization and premised attempts to develop a decided-order an approach to tovi tax. Consequently, during phase 3, since 2015, taxation mainly dealt with the aftermath of the tax authorities' decision and the ensuing attempts to counteract community decline and legitimize timebanking in collaboration with institutions, such as the municipality.

While both size and taxation challenged the community to take a stance on organizing, the issues also illustrate how STAP members, and particularly those in the active core group, held diverging views on how to address it, thereby influencing the dynamics of organizing and the blending of its elements. In the next two sections, we discuss these two issues in detail.

### *Size*

Late 2009, a handful of individuals established Kumpulan Vaihtopiiri (KVP) in the Kumpula neighborhood of Helsinki. The initiators looked for practical ways to strengthen the economy and increase wellbeing in the neighborhood. In May 2010, the community renamed itself Stadin Aikapankki (STAP) to acknowledge that a considerable number of its members now came from all around Helsinki, well beyond

the boundaries of Kumpula. STAP also affiliated with “the international timebanking movement” (STAP newsletter, 5 May 2010).

In the early years, central focus was on growing the community. STAP attracted considerable publicity in both local and national media, and STAP encouraged its members to take part in recruitment and promotional activities. Until 2012, the community newsletters prominently featured information on the growth of its membership and exchange activities. After rapid growth in 2010-2012, STAP membership shrunk from 2013 onwards (Figures 1-3).

Yet, how did size affect the blending of organizational elements? In the early years, the initiators communicated the operating principles of timebanking in newsletters. They also organized information events during which new and prospective members could learn about STAP and timebanking. Most of these activities were ‘one-directional’ communication from the initiators to the membership; members were expected to contribute through entering exchanges and by ‘spreading the word’.

In May 2010, the first gathering of members established the membership meeting as the community’s supreme decision-making body and with this, changed the community’s one-directional orientation. By vesting authority in the collectivity, the *de facto* leadership—the initiators and active members of the so-called core group—were made subservient to the membership meeting. The balance of emergent and decided social order in the timebank changed more drastically two years later. By February

2012, there were 1,300 registered members. With rapid growth, socialization of new members became increasingly challenging. At the same time, new members' lack of familiarity with the community's ideological rooting in inclusive alternative economy building with its implicitly exercised adhocratic and stigmergic organizing posed a challenge to the community overall. By 2012, the newsletters no longer mentioned numbers of new members or exchanges and instead, greater emphasis was placed on the community's values regarding behavior. This suggests that the focus of the community changed from inclusion to socialization.

Dealing with growth whilst holding true to the community ideals can be illustrated through two interventions. The first intervention, in January 2011, was the proposal to establish neighborhood chapters. This initiative responded to the geographical spread of STAP members but can also be interpreted as a way to decentralize organizing and to stimulate members to increase their involvement in administrative work. These efforts were unsuccessful and the documents suggest there were only two failed attempts to establish local chapters. Consequently, the move from a neighborhood exchange group (KVP) to a timebank that covers the metropolitan region (STAP) reinforced centrality in terms of authority in organizing. Without local stigmergy, the overall tasks of organizing fell onto a few active individuals who in the core group became responsible for dealing with everyday activities, mostly responding to issues emerging in and around the community. Although this seemed a step toward

oligarchization, it is, however, important to note that the core group remained open to participation by any member.

The second intervention came in November 2011, when the membership meeting explicated the community's values and behavioral expectations. This intervention was a reaction to the acceptance of communities and (business) organizations as STAP members, and to the growing practice of valuing exchanges in euros alongside (and sometimes, instead of) tovi. The January 2013 membership meeting was, however, and somewhat ironically, of the opinion that the community's values as outlined in late 2011 had not accomplished their purpose; the meeting debated but did not decide to create a "category police" to systematically monitor members' behaviors. The meeting decided to stipulate the community's norms and values as rules for "good" exchanges; the May 2013 meeting accepted the collectively workshopped ABC.

These interventions illustrate both an involuntary emergence of authority but also a conscious decision on codified principles. With this, an orientation towards decided social order was laid. In practice, for example, prospective members need to accept the ABC upon registration by confirming "I have reviewed STAP's operating principles [...] and agree to abide by them while using the timebank," whereas organizations wishing to participate need to explicate in their application how their activity will align with STAP's espoused values.



These two interventions foreshadow discussions during 2013-2014. The process of workshopping of the ABC had uncovered community tensions and while values and rules regulated members' exchange behaviors, the centralization of power and hidden hierarchies was questioned by some STAP members. Although the membership meeting is the main decision-making body, everyday organizing and administrative work fell onto the core group. In the membership meetings, this situation was heavily debated:

*As the number of members grows and the number of active actors has increased, the need to better organize the activities connected to running STAP has increased. STAP has very active members [performing administrative tasks] [...] Since STAP is not a registered association [...] there has been no need for a formal board or similar body [...] [as the] idea has also been to promote horizontal and direct democracy, where responsibility is shared together. It was argued that the principle of activities is independence and solidarity. In practice, it is challenging [...] It was noted that in the future task sharing, information flow and decision-making need to be communicated better than currently and that more organization is needed. (STAP membership meeting memo, 2/2013).*

To decentralize authority, special working groups were created alongside the core group. For instance, a conciliation group was created to mediate disagreements between exchange partners. The three parties would discuss whether the ABC had been respected during the disputed exchange—an *ex post facto* observation rather than a systematic monitoring of membership. Likewise, in 2013, a working group prepared a response to the inquiry by the Finnish tax authorities about taxable work in the community (see next section).

From 2015 onwards, the meeting memos have become short and approximate. This change in style is important *per se*—irrespective of the possible reasons for the change in style, such as a change in authorship—because the community *accepted* the curtailing of information provided to the membership. STAP focused on finding ways to remain relevant: building local neighborhood economy and rekindling the dwindling community. The most interesting feature is the re-emergence, in 2017, of the discussions about regulating exchanges. Repeating discussions from 2012-2013, the meeting memos refer to norms and rules for exchanging, such as the need to use one’s own name in the system and the types of charges related to the exchanges. They indicate how exchange issues were brought up and how they were dealt with by repeating existing policies and further specifying existing rules.

### *Taxation*

Since its early days, KVP/STAP has considered the potential ramifications of its activities vis-à-vis taxation. The initiators considered their initiative as a way to foster “neighborhood help”:

*[KVP] is a timebank, i.e. services are exchanged in relation to time, not to euros [...] [it does] not have the purpose of creating local money but aims to reinforce social relationships [...] This choice is essential from the point of view of the tax officials. [...] the general principle [of exchange networks in Finland] is that the exchange is equated with neighborhood help, not [with income from] wages or sales. (KVP newsletter, 12/2009)*

This statement presents timebanking as in line with the Finnish legislation on community work that grants tax exemptions for everyman’s work (i.e. work that

requires no particular qualification) and community volunteering. KVP/STAP shunned the use of the fiat currency in exchanges and a conversion rate between tovi and euro was not determined. These decisions expose the assumption that participation should be motivated by solidarity incentives, rather than material gain.

Valuation and personal gain would nevertheless be the very issues that led the tax authorities to review whether community work and individual participation in timebanks should be considered everyman's work or taxable labor. Elsewhere in Europe (e.g. in the UK and the Netherlands) it is common practice for timebanks to register as legal entities in order to guarantee tax exemption to communal and individual activities. STAP had previously not sought to find out how the tax authorities would interpret its activities nor had it registered as an association. Yet, STAP's prominent media exposure initiated a public discussion (e.g. in the Finnish parliament) on the impact of new economic models on society. Consequently, the tax authorities started an investigation of timebanking in 2013. As the largest timebank in the country, STAP was central in the investigation. The August 2013 membership meeting created a tax working group to try influence the tax authorities' looming decision by formulating a written response to the findings of the initial inquiry. This was to no avail: the tax authorities ruled to tax professional work in timebanks in November 2013. This outcome, combined with the problematic process of creating a response in the first place, generated frustrations in the community. This frustration was another reason, alongside the issue of size (see

previous section), why discussions started on how STAP makes decisions and organizes, and whether a more traditional mode of organizing would be appropriate.

The main community-borne intervention in relation to the topic of taxation was the collection of a ‘tovi-tax’: an internal levy on the value of exchanges, held on the STAP Community Account. It was introduced when STAP was established. Over time, the justification for the tovi-tax evolved. Initially, it was justified and used as a means to compensate those members who participate in administrative work and to support members with permanent deficits on their accounts. The September 2012 membership meeting changed the tovi-tax narrative from it being an internal ‘community tool’ to a more encompassing ‘social policy instrument’. Interestingly, and perhaps in anticipation of the adverse tax decision, the August 2013 membership meeting discussed how internal taxation could be used for the common good in collaboration with the City of Helsinki.

Thus, the tax authorities’ interest in timebanking premised two interventions in organizing the timebank. The first intervention, in 2011, was to start exploring collaboration with other organizations and a reframing of the purpose of the tovi-tax. A discussion document outlined options for the community; it could choose to work with the state/municipality or funnel the proceeds to support activities of its member organizations. Effectively the latter option became dominant. With the tax authorities’ ruling, the urgency to collaborate with external organizations (and particularly those

with political influence) increased as collaboration is seen to bring legitimacy to timebanking and protect it from decline.

The second intervention was therefore to find ways of co-operating with the municipality. STAP was mentioned in the 2012 city of Helsinki's Global Responsibility Strategy, but the promises of support did not translate into much dedicated action on the part of the city. In 2015 and 2016, STAP organized public meetings and discussions with city politicians and civil servants to garner their support. Membership was informed of these events in November 2014 and April 2015. The membership meeting memos, however, do not mention discussions or decisions relating to these events.

The idea behind seeking collaboration with the city was to mobilize support and legitimize timebanking. STAP proposed that the contested economic 'gains' in the community could be channeled to the greater public good through investing proceeds of the tovi-tax to generate social services in the city's neighborhoods. This solution would respect the community's alternative views on valuing work. In 2017, members of the STAP core group made a proposal seeking explicit participation and support for the tovi-tax from the City of Helsinki as a reaction to the city's general call for social actors' proposals on the renewal of its strategy. This was communicated to the membership in March 2017.

Whereas the reframing of the justification for internal taxation can be thought of as being more or less in line with STAP's mission to reinforce local neighborhoods, the

reaching out to the City of Helsinki is a departure from the initial conviction that STAP should remain autonomous. Yet, as collaborations were sought, this point was never brought up as a topic for discussion and, perhaps consequently, there was no push-back from the community.

Based on the above presentation of the issues of size and taxation, we turn to highlighting the dynamics of emergent and decided organizing within STAP.

### *Organizing*

Connected to the issues of community growth and the threat from the tax authorities, tensions among the (core) members intensified about the question how to organize STAP throughout the three phases. Especially during phase 2, some members were of the opinion that the ideal of stigmergic organizing was privileging action promoted by a few core group members whose activities were not transparent to other members. Consequently, they demanded clearer procedures for administrative work and more transparency regarding how power was wielded. Whereas bureaucratization was rejected time and again, lack of transparency was perceived as a sign of oligarchization. These tensions culminated in heated discussion during two membership meetings, in February and May 2014, that addressed the question of organization. The February 2014 meeting sketched two potential ways to de-oligarchize authority: “hierarchy” and “adhocracy”. The former option would imply registration as an association, setting up a board, annual documentation and other mechanisms to comply with legislative

requirements. The latter option would not imply any substantial change in the community's reliance on stigmergy and adhococracy. The discussion did not culminate in a clear choice; instead, it was decided that more members should be involved in the discussion. Therefore, an extensive summary of the two options was sent to all members and uploaded to the community website, and members were sent email invitations to express their views on how STAP should proceed. There was only one comment on the website:

*As an outsider new timebanker, I feel that the most important thing is to get the information going. What the form of organization is does not seem so essential to a new member. At this time, it is difficult to find out who are really behind the timebank, how the timebank bookkeeping is done, etc. Such things seem to me more important than the organization's structure. The structure of the organization should be chosen according to the form of activity, so that the structure supports the activity.*  
(<https://stadinaikapankki.wordpress.com/tietoja/miten-stadin-aikapankki-toimii/keskustelua-stapin-rakenteesta/>)

While membership meetings are open to everybody, in practice only a few members attended, and even fewer attended regularly. Figure 8 shows the attendance of the three meetings—March and August 2013, and February 2014—that ignited and addressed the form and function of organizing in STAP (the first two were meetings to respond to the tax decision and the final was a meeting discussed above addressing organizational form). The network map in Figure 8 shows that only a small group of people attended the meetings.

[Insert Figure 8]

Moreover, and related to the pressing question of authority, core group members received relatively more tovi-tax than other members did. Through their participation in the core group and member meetings, they were entitled to receiving community account tovi as compensation for their time and effort. In Figure 8, core group members receiving tovi-tax are identified by black dots. The connection between these data illustrate the tendency to oligarchization: as the membership meetings renounced the option of increasing decided social order, the few persons who regularly attended meetings and were most active in the community found themselves vulnerable to the accusation of establishing an oligarchy, simply because of being present and active.

Given the lack of membership engagement with the topic of transparency and the need to address the tensions, the May 2014 membership meeting discussed, again extensively, the option of either developing a more structured organization or maintaining an organically evolving initiative. The lack of agreement led to the compromise decision—or rather, a truce—to appoint a coordinator whose role it was to deal with day-to-day administrative tasks, but not to make decisions:

*It was generally considered important not to limit the tasks too much, but that the job description develops more with experience and over time. In addition, an emphasis on close cooperation with the core group and the membership, especially in larger decisions, was highlighted. (STAP membership meeting memo, 5/2014)*

Consequently, the organizational question was left unresolved, but new functions and roles were introduced. Yet, what seemed like an oligarchy by 2014, dissolved later and



suggests a kind of de-oligarchization whereby the distribution of administrative work returned to its stigmergic roots. Indeed, without regular communication to and meetings with membership, various initiatives were taken forward without much decision or discussion.

### **Discussion**

STAP was initiated on the premise of an ideology that emphasized inclusive participation and decision-making and sought to rely on elements of emergent social order in its organizing. Early on, it experienced a rapid increase in membership and exchanges. Nevertheless, network density decreased steadily until 2012 (Figure 4), paralleling a shift in organizing in which elements of decided social order became more prominent. The increasing number of members put a strain on the efficacy of relying on emergent social order, as it became increasingly difficult to practice stigmergic work and adhocratic decision-making. However, the social network data suggest that the difficulty of upholding emergent social order is associated with a growing discrepancy in the increase of membership and exchange activity. Also the introduction of membership by organizations further introduced difficulties, as organizational members were not very active and unfamiliar with the timebank and its practices and norms (for a discussion of the consequences of organizational membership, see Ahrne and Brunsson, 2008). Consequently, the community made its norms and values explicit and transformed them into rules. We suggest that this trend is a response to the difficulty of

relying on elements of emergent social order, because a lack of interaction between members curtailed the socialization and maintenance of norms. Vice versa, one may expect that resorting to elements of decided social order when network density is increasing is less needed in the timebank. Yet, the introduction of elements of decided social order was reluctantly accepted. Many members resented and opposed the introduction of elements of decided social order. Time and again, issues were thoroughly discussed in the membership meeting but not decided. We can thus see that the organization of STAP is an eclectic mix of elements, blending between decided and emergent order (Figure 9).

[Insert Figure 9]

Organizing in STAP demanded a continuous investment of energy, especially by the core group members. It was during phase 2 that internal tensions about how to organize were most apparent. This is clearly visible in the documentation relating to organizing efforts in 2014. The need for clarity in terms of organization was called for: “How are common tasks allocated and how are activities coordinated? Is a hierarchical operating culture needed? Or is a flexible ‘adhocracy’ with no established structures supported?” (STAP membership notification, 3/2014). With conflict on STAP’s organizing practices mounting, the transition from the second to the third phase is most notably visible in administration. In STAP, the tension around oligarchization translated to how, even after several attempts to involve more people, central positions remained

occupied by long-standing members of the community, including some of the initiators of the timebank.

Compromise decisions, such as the coordinator role, moved visible authority to a state of invisibility and disappeared from all communication. In this way, the community organically returned to its stigmergic practices. Meetings were organized, projects moved forward, and statements were made. Yet, there is no documentation of decision-making; we are unable to assert whether no decisions were made or whether decisions were made in closed groups (similar to the situation before 2010). Overall, the tax authorities' stance on timebanking was a large blow to the community; it was a major reason for the decline in membership and the number of exchanges. Timebanking also disappeared from public discourse. When the number of exchanges decreased, STAP turned away from decided social order, which is most apparent in its rejection of an explicit organizational structure.

Based on our case study, we seek to contribute to the literature in the following three ways. We speak to the literature of social movement organizing by exploring how a social movement initiative engaged with social order over time, thus advancing our understanding of the dynamics of organizing social movement initiatives (see also Author 3). First, we extend the ongoing debate on the inescapability of bureaucratization or oligarchization of social movement organisations (Walker and Martin, 2019) by considering organizing as a liminal process (much akin the pioneering

work of Zald and Ash, 1966). In this process, active participants of social movement initiatives draw on various, at times contradictory, opportunities to organize and by this render their 'organization' more or less bureaucratic, more or less dependent on specific individuals, to ensure continuation of their ideas of social change (see Kinna, 2016). Our case study illustrates a turn away from decided social order. At the same time, the perceived trend to oligarchization was followed by attempts at de-oligarchization, whereas bureaucratization, too, was rejected time and again. Thus, neither oligarchization nor bureaucratization were ever comprehensive as the community remained characterized by indecision and a loss of practical relevance of previous decisions. This indecision, in which "closure appears elusive" (Denis et al., 2011: 225), enabled the community to procrastinate decision-making, postponing some decisions until they were no longer needed.

Our analysis of how the STAP community sought to keep its organizing aligned with its ideals through collective reflection on the prevailing social order, provides important insights and direction for future research. For example, future studies could investigate in more detail the reflective ability of participants in other settings. Our account provides details on how the dynamics of partial organizations unfold, identifying the importance of non-decision in between emergent and decided social order.

Second, and relatedly, we theoretically argue and empirically show that a dual perspective of both emergent and decided social order affords a fine-grained picture of a community immersed in organizing. Contributing to the literature on partial organisation, we propose elements of emergent social order as functional equivalents to previously described elements of decided social order (cf. Ahrne, 2015). The dual perspective of emergent and decided social order further helps to elaborate the nature of organizing as a fragile and ever-changing process that cannot be reduced to purposeful, teleological interventions of decision-making. With this, we add to an ongoing debate between organizational scholars (Ahrne et al., 2016, 2017; Apelt et al., 2017). The concepts of decision and decision-making as typically used in the partial organization literature have not yet been much developed beyond the understanding of them as deliberate and purposeful interventions. Yet, others have shown that decisions may just happen (Cohen et al., 1972; March, 2011) or need not be followed by corresponding action (Brunsson and Brunsson, 2017), and that people can be trapped in cycles of indecision (Denis et al., 2011). People may decide not to decide for various reasons (Bachrach and Baratz, 1963); Vakkayil (2018), for example, documented how “decided non-decision”, the conscious abstaining from decision-making, was used by a social movement initiative to maintain its openness to participation by whoever wishes to participate. Our study shows how decisions, non-decisions and indecisions may all

emerge from the dynamics of decided and emergent social order. Future research may further problematize decisions and the process of negotiating them in social orders.

The discussion around the supposed disappearance of ‘organization’ from organizational sociology (Ahrne et al., 2016, 2017; Apelt et al., 2017) reflects a broader puzzle of how social order in organized settings evolves over time in the interplay of networks, institutions, and decisions. Our study documents a case in which the blending of elements of organizing enabled the participants in the social movement initiative to engage continuously with their ideas of social change. Finally, our approach is one way through which organizationality as “the study of social phenomena as organization, rather than ... the study of organizations as social phenomena” (Schoeneborn et al., 2018: 31) can be made operational and thereby illustrative of the ongoing relevance of organization in the sociological literature. How STAP members blended elements of emergent and decided social order testifies to the relevance of viewing organizing as a process. Focusing on decided and emergent elements of social order, we appreciate organization as an effort that is never fully accomplished. We agree with those who regret that organization is disappearing from organization theory (du Gay, 2000; du Gay and Vikkelsø, 2016) and that organizing is a significant and distinctive field of research (e.g. Ahrne et al., 2016). Yet, we suggest that elements of decided and emergent social order should be given equal treatment in understanding dynamics in organized settings, a route that is opened up through the notion of partial organization. Instead of focusing

on the disappearance of organization, we suggest that future research may further probe into the interplay between emergent and decided social order to navigate the precarious waters of partial organization.

### **Concluding thoughts**

In this paper, we analysed the dynamics of organizing in STAP over a period of 9 years. The point of departure of this study was our understanding of organization as temporary and liminal. Organization evolves over time as participants experiment with the kind of blend of emergent and decided sources of social order that matches their ideals and it allows participants to collaborate and accomplish some common purpose while relying on certain ideological practices. As such, our study is illustrative of the ongoing relevance of organizing in the sociological literature. To us, organization has not disappeared from either social movement studies or organizational sociology; its study has transformed, however, to a study of the ways in which it is practiced in the everyday of organizing.

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## TABLES

TABLE 1: Overview of meeting memos

Year	Number of documents	Sort of documents	Number of words	Average number of words per document
2009	2	Newsletter	821	410
2010	8	Newsletter	3,909	489
2011	4	Newsletter	2,833	708
2012	2	Newsletter	1,358	679
2013	5	Memo, notification	7,923	1,584
2014	10	Memo, notification	5,573	557
2015	3	Memo	1,131	377
2016	5	Memo, notification	2,333	466
2017	2	Memo	1,110	555
Total	41		26,991	647

## FIGURES

FIGURE 1: Number of exchanges

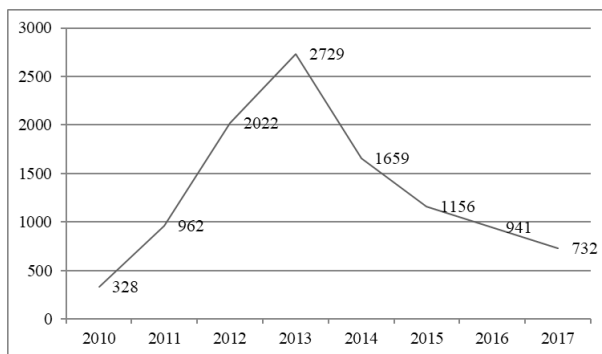


FIGURE 2: Value of exchanges, in tovi

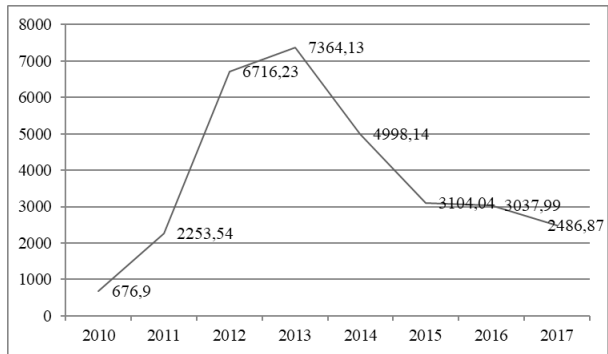


FIGURE 3: Number of active members

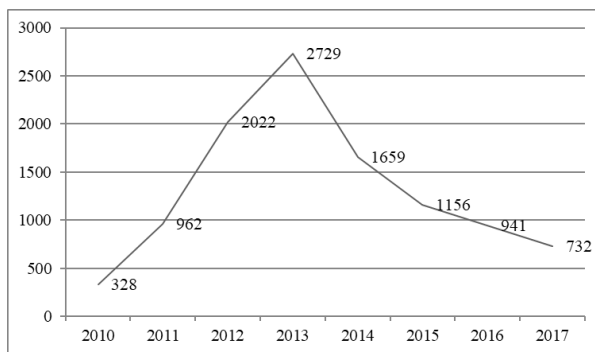


FIGURE 4: Density of trading network

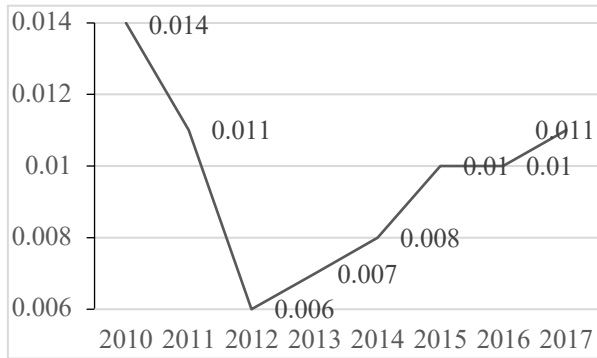


FIGURE 5: Total and average numbers of words in meeting memos

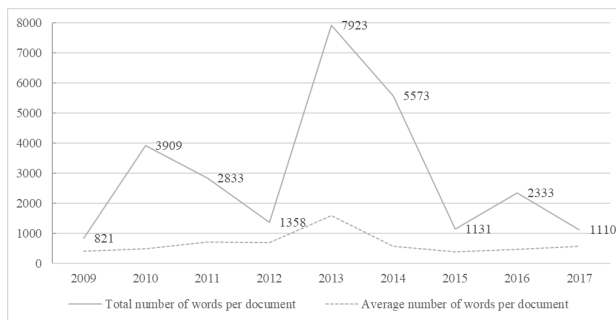


FIGURE 6: Total and average number of words (“decision”, “discussion” and derivatives)

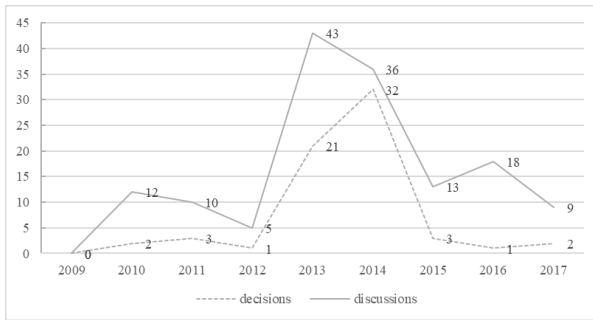


FIGURE 7: Relative prevalence of decision and discussion words in meeting memos

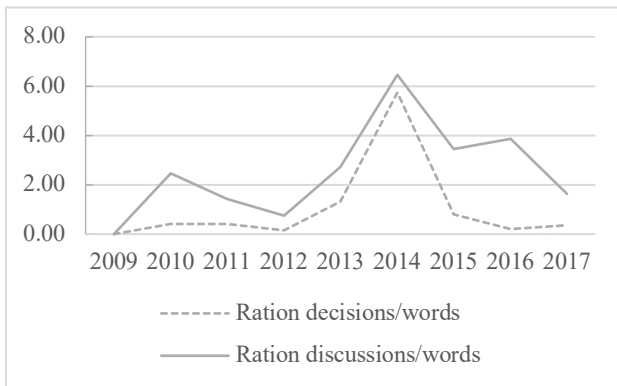


FIGURE 8: Attendance of membership meetings (two-mode network: squares represent meetings, black dots represent members of the core group, white circles represent other attendants)

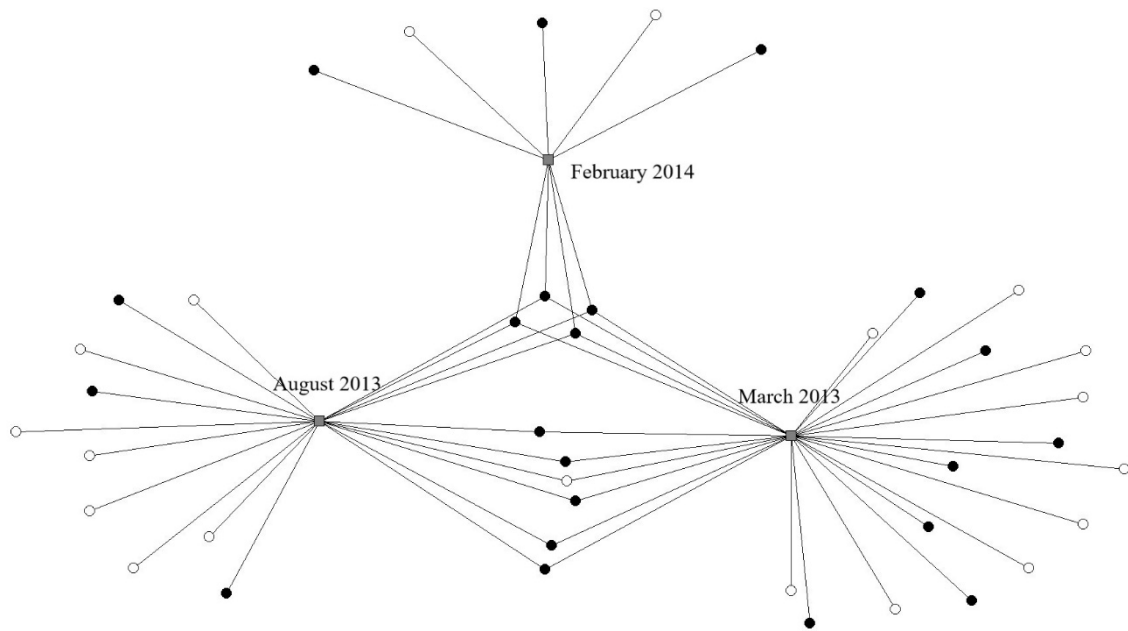


FIGURE 9: Blending of social order in organizing STAP

