# New Participatory Spaces
**Insights from State and Social Movement Practices**

Abstract by: Lisa Villioth, University of Siegen, Germany (lisa.villioth@uni-siegen.de)

**On and Off. How the recursiveness of online and offline engagement practices generates political resonance.** (Working title)

Online-petitions, forwarding newsletters, online-donations, sharing politically / socially interesting content on social media platforms like Facebook or Twitter or mobilizing others for (offline and online) activities via internet – there are many ways to get engaged on the internet -  is all this only "Slacktivism", to quote Morozov (2011)? Are protest practices which are expressed or accomplished online, only by clicking with your mouse, just Clicktivism? Both terms implicate a devaluation of this form of activism and engagement: 5-minutes-activism, armchair-activism… There are even more terms for describing a phenomenon which might be more than just on click - if you take a closer look at it. This is what this paper wants to accomplish: a more differentiated analysis of online engagement practices - which one might call Slacktivism - in combination with other political activities that those respective citizens carry out and therefore need to be considered as well. How do online and offline modes of communication and elements of protest interrelate and under which conditions can these protest practices generate political resonance?

In many cases online and offline protest-activities do not shut out, but complement each other. Online-activism elements often prepare or initialize offline activities (Facebook event for a certain street demonstration), support them during an event (mobilizing participants via Twitter) or can be useful as post-processing (sharing pictures and results). Political protest mostly takes place in "hybrid locations" (Hamm 2006; Fahlenbrach 2009) or "hybrid public spheres" (Kneip 2010) and nowadays hardly any NGO would work without the advantages of online activities. Still, for its credibility, but also trust and its common identity face-to-face meetings and street demonstrations are still indispensable for every organization (Baringhorst et. al. 2010). Earl and Kimport have developed a systematization of how online and offline elements work together in the context of protest. They differentiate between e-mobilization (the internet is used to coordinate an offline protest action easier), e-movements (the organization of protest and the protest itself take place online) and e-tactics (a combination of online- and offline-components at low cost level, for example in the context of petitions) (Earl/Kimport 2011: 12).

This paper intents to illustrate how online and offline elements of protest engagement work together by presenting a case study.[1] Stefanie is 29 years old, studies a Master of management of natural resources and holds a Bachelor degree in economy of media and communication. She wants to live sustainability in a holistic way and tries to apply it to as many parts of her daily life as possible. The prevention of plastic is one of her main interests and therefore she created an online-petition in cooperation with the German Environmental Aid Association (Deutsche Umwelthilfe, DUH) on the online-petitioning platform Change.org demanding for a fee on plastic bags. Besides her studies, Stefanie works as student assistant in the Ecological

---

[1] This case study is based on an interview which was conducted in 2015 and which is one interview out of a sample of 18 interviews that are the empirical material of my dissertation on online- and offline engagement practices in the field of the Environmental Movement in Germany.

Institute Berlin which is a private institute, but does research for different ministries, as for example the Federal Ministry for the Environment. Furthermore, she is engaged in local initiatives in her city, which are partly funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, she organized street workshops and other offline activities. On a personal blog, Stefanie writes about upcycling-practices and sustainability and posts pictures and instructions about how to make use of what other people consider as garbage.

Taking the case study of Stefanie as an example, the paper allows an in-depth look at individual engagement practices that can be located in the area of online activism and online petitions, but also street activism and engagement in organizations. These practices reach from individually organized activities (like writing on her personal blog) to organized activities within the framework of the DUH or even state-financed projects. Stefanie's online petition, which is demanding for a fee on plastic bags, and her street activities around the topic of plastic and especially the avoidance of plastic, can illustrate descriptively how online elements mobilize for offline activities and the other way around. Her upcycling-blog exemplifies how offline activities (the upcycling activity itself) go viral and spread online therewith in the end they can go back offline again and inspire people to imitate Stefanie's upcycling practices. My thesis is that it is the combination and recursiveness of online and offline engagement practices, which make it possible, that one single person can generate political resonance.