The Code of the Anti-Christmas Movement

A system-theoretical analysis

Kai-Uwe Hellmann

Movement and Counter Movement

Within the research field of the sociology of social movements there is a special concern about the relationship of social movements and those movements which are directed against them. If an individual pro-issue-movement gains noticeable force and visibility after some time it frequently provokes a certain anti-"pro-issue-movement"-movement, which, in everything that it undertakes, is almost parasitically based on the very pro-issue-movement and its activities as a cause of its non-contingent emergence so that both the mobilization processes influencing each other could take place almost in a simultaneous, may be even synchronised manner. The respective examples thereof would be for instance the conflict between the North American “pro choice” and “pro life” movements (McCarthy 1987) – or between the German right-wing extremists and autonomists as movement-shaped types of stakeholders respectively acting towards each other in a stringently antagonistic and confrontational manner.

An attempt has now also been made in the sociology of consumption, especially in Cultural Studies and Consumer Research, to revert to the sociology of social movements and to conceive the extremely heterogeneous field of the opponents of consumerism, anti-corporate activists and

---

adherents of culture jamming, to name just a few examples, as a highly fragmented social movement.\textsuperscript{2}

If one starts speaking about the anti-Christmas protests against this background, which could have been observed all over the world for years, one can even speak of an anti-Christmas movement. Because if Christmas is regarded as a standpoint of anti-Christmas protests, we can virtually speak about an annually recurring, temporary, extremely successful mobilization measure, which casts a spell over millions of people worldwide, albeit for only about four weeks, and relates to a comparatively singular occasion. Insofar it is possible to speak about a pro-Christmas movement of a temporary nature, which creates a corresponding anti-Christmas movement as its opposite, which is strongly related to the pro-Christmas movement. At least it can be noted that the anti-Christmas movement acts as if there existed a pro-Christmas movement and it is under this condition that the scope of the anti-Christmas movement is set; it seems convenient to differentiate between pro and anti-Christmas movements.

The following is an attempt to investigate if and to what extent it can be demonstrated that the anti-Christmas movement is structurally dependent on the pro-Christmas movement. Because whereas the pro-Christmas movement has always enjoyed general support and recognition, has been decisively patronized by churches, businesses, media and further renowned institutions but has also been in massive demand with the consumers, especially parents and their children, the struggle of the anti-Christmas movement is primarily resistance to the hypertrophy of the pro-Christmas movement, on which it is entirely based, using various arguments. It could almost be said: if the pro-Christmas movement had not existed, there would not have been any anti-Christmas movement, whereas the pro-Christmas movement seems to be unequally autonomous in contrast and does not have any comparable dependence.

Such structural dependence of the anti-Christmas movement could be demonstrated by the fact that it does not really get beyond an anti-attitude. From the system-theoretical point of view it would mean: within the code that is used by the anti-Christmas movement communicatively its preference value is paradoxically a rejection value because it can keep its connectivity solely through the continuous denial and rejection of all

the positive characteristics of the pro-Christmas movement. Whereas connectivity is otherwise always established through a preference value that consistently votes for certain affirmed options, whilst the reflection value as an equivalent of the preference value merely keeps the perpetual possibility of the reupdating of that negative selection that has been rejected by the preference value in favour of certain alternatives – which keeps the reflection value in a permanent standby modus, so to say – when we talk about the preference value of the anti-Christmas movement we, in fact, talk about a rejection value. In short the preference is rejection. Thus, the anti-Christmas movement acquires a positive profile essentially only through negative judgements, i.e. through the rejection of what constitutes the pro-Christmas movement. Attempts to develop a positive counterdraft, e.g. for a different way of Christmas or a time out for Christmas are certainly made. However, as opposed to utopian dreams that are distinguished by the even balance between rejection and preference the anti-Christmas movement remains predominantly attached to the rejection pattern and can hardly disengage itself from it. If one could prove this case empirically, it would become an indication of the structural dependence of the anti-Christmas movement, in fact, of its heteronomy through the pro-Christmas movement.³

The present survey is merely of an explorative nature. After the first step traces the core problem of the sociology of social movements, it will be briefly explained, what lies at the root of the system-theoretical concept of the communication codes if applied to social movements. The third step refers to the statements that could be found in the respective Internet fora on the topic “anti-Christmas” in order to be able to review on the basis of those examples if and to what extent the thesis of the structural dependence of the anti-Christmas movement is applicable. The work is completed summarily with a brief final observation.

³ Just beside it should be remarked that the above mentioned opposition between the “Pro Choice“ and the „Pro Life“-movement doesn’t result in a structural loser position because both movements have a clear positive perspective, and similar it might be in the case of the opposition between right-wing extremists and autonomists although this sounds paradoxically even for the last case. Interesting might be to prove this situation for anti-brands-protests see Lüdicke 2006; Lüdicke/Giesler 2007.
Paradigms of Movement Research

Movement research deals with the conditions of the possibility of social movements, their pre-history, emergence, evolvement and further development, their functions, structures and processes, as well as the relationships they maintain with their environment. In this case a social movement can be defined as a behavioural system of mobilized networks of persons and organizations that want to bring about, impede or revoke social change by means of protest, which exists for a certain period of time and is supported by the collective identity.4

Because of the fact that social movements comprise organizations but are none themselves, it is the movement formation that can be regarded as the central issue of social movements, i.e. the inevitable need to be able to mobilize continuous adherents for their concerns in order to exist at least temporarily. In short, for movements to exist means to keep moving perpetually. Joachim Raschke (1985: 187) formulated it in a very concise way: “No social movement without mobilization”. Connectivity in the case of social movements thus means an ability to mobilize, as Heinrich W. Ahlemeyer (1989) points out very clearly – “mobilizability” is understood as an ability to transform persons from the normal condition of passivity, i.e. non-mobilization, to the condition of activity, i.e. being able to be mobilized very quickly for a short period of time, hence it is a temporary process (Etzioni 1975; Melucci 1989).

The solution of the problems of movement formation or the improbability of successful mobilization, as Niklas Luhmann put it, can concentrate on three aspects: (1) adherents, (2) organization and (3) framing.5

(1) Preexistent networks of persons, who already lead their own life as friends, neighbours or acquaintances or members of organizations even before the mobilization starts, are the basis for each movement.6 Such
networks represent the mostly latent recruitment potential that the movements have access to and depending on the fact who is being mobilized the size, composition and flexibility of a movement are different. In addition movements can also be described as “mobilized networks of networks”, as was the suggestion of Friedhelm Neidhardt (1985: 197), because they are networks and not simply organizations themselves. Insofar movements also have no (formal) members, rather they have informal adherents or, to put it differently, the decisive limiting criterium of social movements is not membership but the sense of belonging to its adherents that has to be generated and confirmed perpetually.

(2) Because of the fact that the state of belonging to the adherents of a social movement is passively latent per se, each social movement depends on the support of certain organizations that have an eminently important function for recruitment and mobilization of those adherents due to the possibility to organise them objectively, socially and temporally (McCarthy/Zald 1977; Zald 1992). Insofar one can say: no organization no social movement. “Objective” means here that the organizations have the task to allocate all the resources that are necessary for promising mobilization, such as money, contacts and competences; “social” means that the organizations – and this is also one of the resources – have enough qualified personnel at their disposal in order to complete this task in the best way possible; and “temporal” means that the organizations are free from movement formation and therefore also free from structural instability of social movements. Because organizations have continuity, whereas movements do not. Hence, organizations offer (relative) constancy, on which movements depend essentially because they always fight against their own constant decomposition (entropy).

(3) If one assumes that movements must have a sufficient mobilization ability in order to exist at least temporarily, the question of the composition of this mobilization ability arises: How does a movement manage to mobilize people? How does it happen that the number of the adherents of the movement increases noticeably and expands as quickly as possible (the fact that cannot be ignored any longer by mass media and with it by politics)? The movement research provides an answer to these questions:

---

7 See Snow et al. 1980; Diani 1995; Melucci 1996; Diani/McAdam 2003.
by means of skilful framing, i.e. through a comprehensive communication strategy, which is applied in the long term and is as integrated as possible, which, on the one hand, convinces

- that there is a concrete problem, at which the protest of the respective movement is aimed,
- that there are legitimate and urgent reasons to venture against it,
- who can be made responsible for this problem,
- what can be done to solve this problem promptly,

– and which, on the other hand, makes sure that more people continuously feel prompted to join this movement and take an active part in it.\(^8\)

One can distinguish between consensus and mobilization action mobilization here. Also it is possible to refer back to the approach of Bert Klandermans (1984: 586): „Mobilization attempts by a movement organization have the aim of winning participants, that is, persuading people to support the movement organization by material and nonmaterial means. Mobilization attempts always contain two components. These are called consensus mobilization and action mobilization.” And the more successful the movement is, in both convincing and inducing them to participate in it, the higher the mobilization ability.

The development and implementation of such a communication strategy belong mainly to the fields of activity of the organization(s) of a movement and can consequently be understood as a form of the mobilization of resources, albeit all the actors certainly cooperate in the social environment of a movement. Insofar the organization of such a strategy represents probably the central resource for the ability to mobilize of a social movement without disesteeming other resources. In other words, the success of mobilization of a social movement depends hugely on the success of its communication strategy.

“Frames” are what is communicated in such communication strategies. Hence, it is the framing approach that is shortlisted here for the alignment of the movement research to the sociology of consumption. This approach will therefore have to be described more precisely.

The beginnings of the framing approach to the movement research go back to David A. Snow et al. in 1986. In their article “Frame Alignment

\(^8\) See Klandermans 1984; Snow et al. 1986; Snow/Benford 1988, 1992; Benford/Snow 2000.
Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation they dealt with the functions and structures of the communication processes that become important during consensus mobilization and action mobilization. They have chosen the term “frame alignment” for this, which can also be described as a structural interlinking of the interpretation pattern of a movement and organization with their adherents and sympathisers. This interlinking of the movement and personal levels through the interpretation pattern takes place in a variety of forms: as “frame bridging”, “frame amplification”, “frame extension” and “frame transformation”.

- “Frame bridging” means that different assumptions, perceptions, interpretations, as long as a reason to protest is involved, are directly connected to each other, they receive a common platform, through which they support and amplify each other.

- “Frame amplification” describes the strategies used to outline the relevance of the protest issue to individual lifestyles. Snow et al. (1986) also distinguish between “value amplification” and “belief amplification”, however, it is difficult to describe the exact distinction because both refer to fundamental assumptions about the world, its order, causation and experience with it.

- “Frame extension” focuses on the enhancement of what is considered relevant with regards to the protest issue; more remote aspects become incorporated in the communication of protest.

- “Frame transformation”, finally, refers to the structural reconstruction of the respective interpretation pattern in order to preserve its mobilization ability in case the circumstances on the periphery of the movement change.

Finally, Snow et al. (1986) have introduced another level difference that referred to the different scope of interpretation patterns by distinguishing between a “master frame”, which organize the overall happenings and represent its own weltanschauung to some extent, and interpretation patterns, whose field of application is much more limited. They have also raised an interesting question of the highly contingent impact of “frame alignment” on individuals, which they cautiously called “frame resonance”, without assuming a clear causality relationship.

A further survey by David A. Snow und Robert D. Benford from 1988 is an attempt to present a more precise differentiation between consensus
mobilization and action mobilization by Klandermans by the diversification of three functions, which should be able to implement promising protest framing. “(1) a diagnosis of some event or aspect of social life as problematic and in need of alteration; (2) a proposed solution to the diagnosed problem that specifies what needs to be done; and (3) a call to arms or rationale for engaging in ameliorative or corrective action.” (Snow/Benford 1988: 199) The first was referred to as “diagnostic framing”, the second as “prognostic framing” and the third as “motivational framing” by Snow/Benford. The function of the “diagnostic framing” is to make the problem reference that forms the basis of the protest feasible; the “prognostic framing” deals with the solution of the problem including addressing the cause of the problem at a certain person or organization; and the “motivational framing” is in charge of the activation of adherents, which it tries to achieve by means of moralisation in the first place. 

The interim conclusion is that framing is of crucial importance for the successful consensus mobilization and action mobilization. There are several forms of framing, which can appear separately as well, but which have the greatest chance of success only if they support and reinforce each other reciprocally. And with regards to social movements and their functions it can be said: „Movements function as carriers and transmitters of mobilizing beliefs and ideas, to be sure; but they are also actively engaged in the production of meaning for participants, antagonists and observers.“ (Snow/Benford 1988: 198) Consequently, movements do not only perform the role of a facilitator but also the one of a producer of meanings; in both cases the aim is to mobilize the adherents.

By the way, this quotation also makes clear that while conveying and producing certain meanings for their adherents, opponents and the public, social movements advance in a highly dynamic environment, which includes not only other like-minded stakeholders, who they can make alliances with, but also hostile stakeholders, who they might have the relations of competition and rivalry with (Rucht 2004). This is what the emergence of countermovements means, anti-movements that emerge every now and then if a certain movement receives too much public attention, creates too much fuss, surpasses a certain amount of quiet tolerability and provokes respective countermeasures, which can even lead to the creation of a complementary countermovement, which, as an anti-

---

movement, is admittedly subject to the same conditions of possibility for successful mobilization as a pro-movement. Consequently both the movement and the countermovement then watch each other with regards to what they are both doing and while doing this they are also watched by the amorphous mass of anonymous observers through mass media if necessary, who, even though they do not belong to any of the movements (yet), (can) very well take a stand for or against it.

**Consumer Movements as Communication Systems**

Before one starts identifying individual anti-consumption activists as adherents of a greater anti-Christmas movement, it is necessary to provide a system-theoretical reconstruction of what has been said about social movements hitherto. The starting point is the assumption that the success of social movements primarily depends on how well its framing knows how to present a certain problem as socially relevant, among other things because the cause of the problem is not subject but system-inherent, what the most concrete solution of the problem that can be reached in a reasonably short period of time would look like and how well it manages to mobilize as many adherents as possible for this reason to protest (Snow/Benford 1988). All of these measures are purely communicative. Here we deal with the development of a preferably promising communication strategy and the planning and implementation of respective communication measures. System-theoretically speaking this fact leads to the possibility to conceive social movements as social systems. This means that social movements are conceived by means of certain structures, which, though already mentioned in this regard, have not yet been integrated in a greater theoretical framework. The systems theory offers such a framework.

Without trying to present a detailed description of the systems theory of social movements it is possible to demonstrate the specific features of

---


11 Concerning those contributions which study anti consumption but not anti-Christmas-protests see Klein 2000; Kozinets/Handelman 2004; Hellmann 2005.

this perspective on the basis of a few aspects that will also be used for the analysis that follows and that have already been used by Kozi- 
nets/Handelman (2004) to some extent.

The first aspect refers to the code of social movements including their programming. If regarded system-theoretically, each social system relies 
on its ability to separate itself from its environment independently. In re- 
spect thereof social systems must have sufficient self-selectivity. Ideall- 
typically there are codes for this purpose. Codes characterise the distinc- 
tions that the two sides comprise. On the one side there is a value that is 
given unequivocal preference, which is why it is also described as a pref- 
erece value. Each communication of the system first refers to this preference 
value, the preference value virtually organises the connectivity of the system. The reflection value is on the other side of this distinction, which, 
as opposed to the preference value that is relatively predefined in what it 
prefers, offers the possibility to bring all the other, not updated, i.e. cast off 
alternatives, up for discussion again, as long as it is necessary.

In the case of social movements the code thus comprises a preference 
value that can be described in the following way: “There are problems that concern us directly, which must be solved instantaneously by those bearing the responsibility”. The reflection value, on the other hand, comprises all those who have been made responsible for these problems and from whom the respective solutions of the problems are expected. Each social movement steers its communication by means of this code inde- 
pendently of its specific programming, i.e. of the concrete problem, for 
whose sake the protest appears. With regards to the anti-Christmas 
movement it means the documentable contributions of the adherents of 
the movement are graded according to the following: What are the prob- 
lems? Who can be made responsible for them? How do they imagine the 
solution of this problem?

The second aspect focuses on the way social movements reach not the 
objective – this happens mostly through the code –, but the social rela- 
relationships between their adherents. Heinrich Ahlemeyer (1995) made an interesting suggestion hereunto that social movements are marked by a 
specific form of communication that is based on the concrete join-in-
mobilization. If one also adds the distinction between the consensus mo- 
bilization and action mobilization by Bert Klandermans, it becomes es- 
pecially important to motivate people to support the movement actively, 
i.e. action mobilization comes into the foreground. What is specific about
it, according to Ahlemeyer, is that the success of mobilization depends to a great extent on how well the mobilising manage to convince the mobilized that they are really concerned with their cause by making them believe their mobilisability. In other words the prerequisite of the successful engagement of others is a credible self-engagement. Furthermore, each mobilization measure has to do with certain sanctions, which are often of moral nature. Consequently mobilization happens through moralisation: Are you one of us or are you against us? Mobilization often operates offensively by the allocation or denial of social recognition, by the promise of inclusion in or the threat of exclusion from certain networks. This strategy is, more often than not, accompanied by the distinction between the adepts and the unsuspecting, between the elite and the mass, between the good and the evil. However, this strategy is set already by the two-side form of the code. With regards to the anti-Christmas movement it means that documentable contributions of the adherents of the movement are graded according to how the protagonists speak about themselves (“we”) as opposed to all the others (“them”), how they make others believe they are serious about it and what respective strategy of moralisation they use for the given situation.

The third and last aspect, which can also be found in the works of Kozinets/Handelman (2004) with reference to the term “historicity” by Alain Touraine, is the tendency of social movements to universalize the problem on the basis of their communication code and to place themselves in direct opposition to society as such as if they did not belong to it. This brings the presumption of totality into play that only appears because of the proposition and staging by the adherents of the respective movement or, to put it differently: this is a thorough framing effect.

The following analysis of the material that has been collected from several Internet fora is an attempt to trace and prove those three aspects according to their frequency and conciseness. The aim of the analysis is first and foremost to make it clear that the anti-Christmas movement mainly persists in a rejection and obstruction attitude and as a consequence its communicative flexibility is strongly limited, even blocked,

which can be assessed as an indication of structural dependence of the anti-Christmas movement on the pro-Christmas movement.

“Kick the Christ out of Christmas”\textsuperscript{14}

If one starts with the self-description of the field, it is beyond debate that many anti-Christmas activists regard themselves as adherents of a “movement”, of an anti-Christmas movement or at least identify the existence of such a movement.\textsuperscript{15} For instance Sara Parks Ricker says: „We are SO THRILLED that this movement is taking off. I never would have guessed it so be possible. Thank you all so much!” And Treasure means: „I want to say thank you for starting this movement.” All the more so as there is an online initiative, which calls itself “The Christmas Resistance Movement” and which has implemented a typical mobilization appeal on its website, “Join the Christmas Resistance Movement!”

If one considers the problems and the motives, which are the reason why such an anti-Christmas movement is embraced or even actively supported, there appear at least three different arguments: (1) The most often mentioned reason is that Christmas time has fallen victim of “consumerism” and “materialism”.\textsuperscript{16} „Christmas is nothing more than guilt induced consumerism”, so Gary, and Pass the Whiskey writes: „Christmas has been perverted into a feast of massive material consumption and it SUCKS!! … Forget the terrorists, we are sabotaging ourselves.”\textsuperscript{17} The problem diagnosis is that commercialisation, consumer stress and materialism are dominant motives for Christmas, whereas the

\textsuperscript{14} This is the title of a contribution of Bob Dog.

\textsuperscript{15} See Jones (1996, 1997) and the contribution of leroy mxswain: „I never buy or ask for christmas gifts because, since becoming an adult, I look for the deeper meaning of Christmas. i never realised that I was part of a movement, though! … anyway, god bless you in your movement (or I should say our movement) and keep up the good work.” And Fern: „I didn’t know that my husband, daughter and I were in so much company.” Or Corinne: „Wow, there are a lot of us on the same page.” At least Neil: „I really can’t think of anything to add. I’m just amazed that there are as many people that despise this time of year.”

\textsuperscript{16} See the contributions of Cline (without year).

\textsuperscript{17} See Restad (2004) who starts his article which is concerned with Christmas critics at the end of the 19th century as follows: „Christmas has become too commercial.“
Christian origin of this holiday is barely shown to advantage. This goes so far as to call it an “anti-Christian celebration”, thus Christian virtues are damaged through Christmas.\(^{18}\) Besides, it was ascertained that Christmas is considered absolutely “meaningless”\(^{19}\), i.e. not having any deep meaning anymore, which is again another accusation of consumerism.\(^{20}\)

(2) In addition the atmosphere in the cities and towns starting from the “black Friday”\(^{21}\), the day after Thanksgiving, the forth Thursday in November, when the Christmas season officially starts in North America, was frequently bemoaned. Because the buying behaviour of the customers becomes disparately rougher, greedier, more hysterical than it is otherwise. Everyone is virtually in buying fever. „i am so sick of the way christmas makes everyone worse, not nicer. do you see the way people act when it comes to buying gifts for the holidays? like freakin’ savages. it's disgusting, the way people get so worked up over crap, most of which is cheap shit made in China anyway. come on, people, get your head out of your asses and stop feeding the capitalist monster!!! amen” (F.L.P.) The streets, roads and department stores are jammed beyond all hope. The same Christmas carols are played over weeks so that a very stressful time of in-

\(^{18}\) See Andriacco (2000) who reports of the christian orientated organization „Simple Living“ which renamed Christmas into Consumas: „The central figure of the Christian Christmas is Jesus Christ. The central figure of Consumas is Santa Claus.”

\(^{19}\) See the contribution of LesCanadians: „This mindless consumerism is an abomination to God. … Christmas has become a linchpin of our economy. … their mindless consumerism …” Additional one contribution in Rip’s Domain from the 7\(^{th}\) of December 2006: “Yes you read right, I hate Christmas. I think know the holiday has lost all meaning and people are only concerned about receiving gifts. It’s so commercialized now, what good is it.” Or from Trixie: „There is no meaning to it anymore … it’s just an over bloated gorging of materialism. … Thank GOD I’m not the only one who feels this way!”

\(^{20}\) See the contribution of Sharon concerning gift giving: „Why single out one day to be special? Buy people you love presents when you think of them and try to be nicer year round rather than all this fake one day a year shit. Getting me a christmas present doesn't make me think you care about me, it just pisses me off. Why do charities think that hunger or cold goes away on Boxing day? I'm tired of people thinking I'm obligated to get them a gift at christmas.”

\(^{21}\) The name „black Friday“ comes from a metaphor to write red (losses) or black (profits) figures: The day after Thanksgiving is for the retail business the most important, literally a deep “black” day in North America see 1985; Okleshen et al. 2000.
escapability comes, which causes an absolute opposite of what is traditionally associated with Christmas: calm, contemplation and self communion. (3) Finally it was problematised that an attempt to evade this Christmas behaviour, especially the exchange of presents, was very often treated with incomprehension, if not with reprovals ("Scrooge"\textsuperscript{22}) and other sanctions\textsuperscript{23} – up to the interruption of communication, as Donna Stewart reports, when she intended to stop gift giving at all: „I tried this last year, and my sister hasn’t spoken to me since.” In other words Christmas is characterized by a pronounced intolerance towards the opinions and attitudes that differ from the prevailing Christmas habits; nothing is allowed to disturb the staging so that those with a different opinion than the majority of the population feel downright persecuted.

Speaking about the possible reasons that are made responsible for this perversion of the Christmas season one first mentions the companies that use Christmas specifically in order to draw the great part of their annual sales during the Christmas season. Here a clear “anti-corporate” bias becomes conspicuous, as you can see in Ricardos contribution: „Anyway I loath the idea of Santa. His whole image is nothing more than a pitchfork that capitalist fat-cats use to penetrate the wallets of the mindless drowns that take part in this twisted backwater ‘Holiday’.”\textsuperscript{24} Every now and then this condition spreads to the “system” that is behind it. So Jamie Howard writes: „It seems that Christmas and it’s true meaning is lost and taken

\textsuperscript{22} See Henry (1990) and the contribution of Russ: „If a person doesn’t go with the end the rest of the sheep with Xmas (and writes it with an X instead of the full title) they flip out on you, call you names of characters made up to make you feel bad about yourself, like Scrooge, Grinch, etc. … telling me I’m bad if I sin yet on the other hand…”

\textsuperscript{23} See the contribution of AB: „Two years ago I stopped sending out Christmas cards, which cost me some friends. Last year I stopped putting up decorations and a tree, which earned me the label of being a Grinch. And after this year, I’m done with the gift giving, which will probably lead to me being labelled cheap.”

\textsuperscript{24} See also Steve-o: „In my opinion Christmas is nothing more than a grotesque trade fair that has been hijacked by trade, retail and commerce.” Sowie bella: „I don’t hate Christmas but sometimes I despise it because the only reason we have Christmas is to celebrate the birth of jesus and family but now its just a time were stores and corporate use to sell their merchandise and its not right at all. … Christmas is now a materialistic holiday.” Or Thorpe (2006): „Christmas is the credit card industry’s favourite day of the year. … Peace, goodwill towards men, hope, and a new beginning – this is forgotten, this is not really encouraged by Corporate Christmas beyond using it as justification for consumerism.”
over by the machine that is capitalism.”25 Finally, one can also find comments on the pro-Christmas activists, i.e. all the consumers, who argue in favour and advocate such a staging and commercialisation of Christmas, and who are sometimes denounced as “brain-washed”, as Nikola expresses it: „I despised brainwashed people.” On the other hand, it is also admitted, albeit only marginally, that personal problems in the private lifestyle (loneliness, no access to family, poverty, etc.) can also be responsible for the fact that one cannot participate in the pro-Christmas movement.26

The question about the solution of the above-described problems results in several options for obvious reasons. Firstly, it was proclaimed many times that finding the respective websites and the exchange with the like-minded is an enormous relief, as Sue writes: „I am so glad to find this on the screen! … Now I find maybe it’s not all my fault and perhaps there is something important behind it.” Because not being the only one with a problem that Christmas rush represents to many people is regarded as a partial solution.27 A kind of basal motivation and moralisation effect is closely connected with it in the sense that those concerned feel encouraged, accredited and assured in their anti-Christmas attitude and describe the knowledge about such an anti-Christmas movement as inspiring, as it

25 See moreover Val: „We live in a society that sets up such completely unrealistic expectations of how we are supposed to live, unrealistic expectations of what we are supposed to have or do to be happy.” And gallego: „The commercial culture turns gift-buying into a presupposition – you are expected to buy something from the get-go, and all the ads are competing for the money that you are supposed to spend.”

26 See the contribution of Denise: „I am a fellow Christmas hater. For me, it means feeling left out home. I have no close family connections.” And wikkd: „I probably would not hate it so much if I were not so poor … it’s just too depressing to think about celebrating…”

27 See the contribution of Sandra: „I was so glad to find out that I am not alone in my despair.” And Lorraine Udell: „Thanks for your web site and the ‘action’ you are taking to confront this issue. … Your web-site has made me feel I can do something more constructive, and cut back without spoiling things or being seen to be mean!” Or Sue Pettitt: „Suddenly I’m not alone here in old England (Birmingham)! Thank God there are people like you starting this message. Will tell my kids about it (I’m a teacher). I wish you all great peace.”
is the case with Susan Mazzara: „Thank you for the encouragement and inspiration your web site provides. Marry Christmas!”

If one turns to more activist reactions, there appears a tendency to participate and change. The scope of reaction possibilities becomes wider as expected. For some the chance of participation, i.e. the possibility to leave the (self-) chosen isolation and immerse into a bigger behavioural connectivity is attractive and represents a physic and social benefit, as Aiden Schlichting Enns expresses it: „As I participate in a Buy Nothing Christmas, I’m seeking to re-assert my political power, which, when combined with the actions of others, is quite empowering, and even offers a hint of hope.” The concrete actions here are denial and resistance, thus keeping the chosen anti-Christmas course right up to a boycott (“Buy Nothing Christmas”). Moreover, one sometimes thinks about the change of the circumstances, giving Christmas its original purpose back, chastening of consumption and gift mania, as it’s the case with Brendan Shaughnessy: „I was horrified knowing the extent of commercialism and lack religion found in most families Christmas including ours. Your site supports my beliefs and gives me strength to refuse to give or receive physical gifts this season.”

Hereto belongs also the thanks which Robert Gillespie feels: „Thank for providing education to the masses.” On the whole, however, the field is characterized by the evasion and denial attitude. Positive counterdrafts are rare, the feeling of belonging to a minority that wants the right thing but whose effectiveness is limited is dominant to a large extent.

Finally, with regards to the last aspect of mobilization there is little evidence for the existence of the mobilization of others through self-mobilization, i.e. the invitation to participate by doing it themselves first. The evidence is relatively good for the rhetoric of both the initiatives “Buy Nothing Christmas” and “The Christmas Resistance Movement“.

---

28 See also the contribution of Aiden Schlichting Enns: „It’s empowering for me to shed this self-concept and take an anti-consumerist stance.”

29 See also Alisa Stucky: „Your website has given us the motivation to do something.”

30 See also Jen Winnipeg: „I hope it provokes some alternative thinking on gift giving, using barter and trade where the actual creation of a gift is not possible (or desirable!).” And Homie: „I’m a Christian and I agree with your sentiment. But banning it wouldn’t be right, it has to be a change in the attitudes of people.”
In the postings, however, this connection hardly ever appears or at least cannot be documented unambiguously.\textsuperscript{31}

The situation with statements of concrete mobilization success looks quite different. Repeated messages allow us to conclude that the contact to other persons concerned and activists of the anti-Christmas movement has triggered off a real impulse to mobilization of further persons, as Joel Butler writes: „This Christmas season I put up ‘Buy Nothing Day’ posters around the city in an attempt to introduce the idea of freedom from consumerism. I also convinced my family that instead of our usual practice of each person giving other person a Christmas gift, this year we would each draw a name and give a gift to only that person.” Or in the case of Mike Kaethler: „You can expect me to be campaigning my campus this Christmas.” Ditto Claire Cummings: „I have forwarded it to everyone I know.”\textsuperscript{32} Insofar the mobilization appeal apparently does work. Finally, there is evidence that such mobilization initiatives avail themselves of moralisation in order to bring about the respective changes of behaviour in the persons close to one, i.e. mobilization in a private network\textsuperscript{33} – whether with\textit{strong or weak ties} it is still to be seen.

If we now come back to the thesis of structural dependence of the anti-Christmas movement, it becomes clear that the thesis can be regarded as confirmed. If one paraphrases this preference value – “There are problems with the way Christmas is celebrated these days, which affect me/us directly, and those, who are directly responsible for them,

\textsuperscript{31} See one exception by Jenny Truax from the Chatholic Action Network: „I’m writing from St. Louis. We’re planning on doing a ‘sweat-free Christmas’ campaign, using many of the resources on your site. Hopefully we will get people in Catholic parishes to sign a pledge to buy nothing produced in sweatshops, and provide alternatives.”

\textsuperscript{32} See also Adam Friedman: „I perused your website and sent your ‘Why Buy Nothing?’ essay on a few friends.” And Lillie-Kate: „My youth group is soon to be involved, and I am so excited! Many of my teachers are now full supporters. … Thank you for having the courage and imagination to start this amazing project you have my support 100%.”

\textsuperscript{33} See the contribution of Kathcart: „It is obscene to keep hogging global resources.”
must solve them immediately” –, enough messages for the first part of this self-description can be found. The statements appropriate for the identification of those responsible can be provided, even though those do not catch our eye so easily. With regards to the suggestions as far as the solution of the problem is concerned the scope becomes narrower, apart from personal “incentives” and fragmented evasion manoeuvres\textsuperscript{34}, there remain rejection and obstruction attitudes that almost remind us of an act of defiance. Even though we cannot ignore the ideas expressed in order to bring people to their senses and lead them back to the right path, all those proposals to change the direction and behaviour are marked by certain diffidence and helplessness. There is no strong positive vision of what should emerge instead of the prevalent code of practice of the pro-Christmas movement. Insofar the anti-Christmas movement, if one agrees there is such a construct, still remains in the grip of negative expectations. It merely reacts but hardly acts. Such attitudes as denial, self-entrenchment and readiness to boycott are predominant but no forced, sovereign attempts to change the circumstances are made, the superiority and support of the pro-Christmas movement are simply too big here, virtually immovable.\textsuperscript{35} Insofar it can be said that the anti-Christmas movement, as far as the data set shows, seems to actually structurally depend on the pro-Christmas movement, against which it tries to hold its ground, but from which it can hardly be separated in order to declare not just negative but also positive selection and preference. The “crossing” of this distinction fails; the data speak for themselves.

\textit{Final Remark}

On the basis of the data stock this text is rather similar to an essay, at least this work has an explorative character at best. Further research should contribute to the improvement of the data set both quantitatively and semi-quantitatively.

\textsuperscript{34} See the proposals from Dan Andriacco (2000): Six Ways Take Commercialism Out of Christmas. Source: www.americancatholic.org/Messenger/Dec2000/feature3.asp. Moreover the are of course some happenings like the „Anti-Consumption Xmas Party!” (http://bristol.indymedia.org/article/24403).

\textsuperscript{35} And of course it should not be concealed that the political opportunity structures for the anti-Christmas movement could not be worst compared with the pro-Christmas movement. Concerning this approach see Diani 1996; Meyer/Staggenborg 1996.
and qualitatively so that the thesis of the structural dependence of the anti-Christmas movement could be proved better. So far nothing but meagre circumstantial evidence that the existence chance of such an anti-Christmas movement is based on a parasitic foundation has been brought up. Of course if one becomes familiar with further works dealing with anti-consumption actions, such as the ones by Kozinets (2002) or Heath/Potter (2004), it becomes clear soon enough that such forms of protest are in a very precarious situation in every respect as far as their autonomy is concerned. Rather there appears a justifiable doubt to what extent such actions can actually exist independently similar to the question of Kozinets (2002): “Can consumers escape the market?”

Literatur


Stewart, Charles/Smith, Craig Allen/Denton, Robert E., Jr. (Hg.) 1994: Persuasion and Social Movements. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press,