

Learning activity

Movement Timelines

TIME: 4hrs (+ preparatory research)

LEARNING AIMS:

- Understanding social movements within a historical context
- Building an understanding of ourselves as historical subjects
- Developing awareness of the complex processes of continuity and discontinuity in movement life
- Encouraging deep reflection on key concepts such as ‘movement power’ or ‘movement progress’
- Beginning to recognise patterns in the lives of social movements.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: From individuals to large groups

PREPARATION AND MATERIALS: Flip chart paper, pens, pre-prepared movement timeline, diagrams/documents to support framing discussion. This activity, particularly part one, requires a fair bit of focus, concentration and clarity. You may want to consider the make-up of the small groups to support them in this, as well as considering where you place the activity in the shape of the day or the overall training (ie. don't put sessions like this in moments when the group are likely to be feeling ‘full’ or fatigued).

This activity works well combined with the Movement Mapping activity as well as with sessions exploring strategic interventions that are suggested by the insights gained.

FRAMING:

This activity should be preceded by a period of time for participants to carry out some research into a social movement they feel some connection with. This can happen in the days or weeks before. Simply set this up as a preparatory activity by explaining that they will be asked to develop historical timelines of a chosen movement, so they should do some research about key events. The timeline could start with historical precedents stretching back centuries or it could be started in recent times - but as a minimum participants should be looking back at least a couple of decades. Ask them to bring their notes with them to the session and be prepared to allow them access to the internet during the activity, in case they need to do some additional research.

It can be helpful to take some time to explore with participants what they understand a social movement is. We will often share a few quotes and support participants to engage critically with them. Examples include:

“Following an old law of social evolution, resistance confronts domination, empowerment reacts against powerlessness, and alternative projects challenge the logic embedded in the... existing order.” Manuel Castells, 2003

“*Purposive collective actions whose outcome, in victory as in defeat, transforms the values and institutions of society.*” Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity*, 2003

“*A network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity.*” Mario Diari, 1992

We emphasise that we are not looking for the ‘right’ definition, but using these suggestions by social scientists to help us reflect critically on our experience and understanding.

We also draw attention to the complexity of social change and social movement roles within it. We often use this quote from William Morris to give a sense of the discontinuity and intergenerational nature of many struggles:

“*I pondered all these things, and how people fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other people have to fight for what they meant under another name.*” William Morris , 1886

We take some time to discuss the value of having a sense of the long struggles our movements are part of and the multiplicity of contributions that have been made over time.

Related material to support framing:

- The Ecology of Social Movements part 1
- [Ecology of Social Movements Mindmap](#)

FACILITATION:

Step 1. Setting up the activity

Frame the activity explaining its relevance to the context in which you are applying it, then take 20 minutes to explore with participants what they understand by the concept of a ‘social movement’ (see suggestions above). Emphasise that:

Most struggles which achieve deep structural transformation are intergenerational and involve many years of education, preparation, trial and error

Having a sense of our connection to larger, long term struggles can support an expanded sense of the context of our work. It can help us feel and recognise the solidarity we share with others through time and across our movements.

Show participants an example of a movement timeline (below) and then give the first set of instructions for Step One:

Draw a simple timescale, marking dates - often the scaling will increase as the timeline reaches the present (e.g. a historical line might only have short 10cm gaps between centuries in the early part, but 30-40cm gaps between years during the most recent period, with more detail to include)

Map the events onto the timeline. Events can include things that happened within the movement or organisations involved, events affecting other stakeholders or adversaries, and contextual events (such as elections, conflicts, etc), among other things

Use at least one full A1 sheet - you may need to stick a couple of sheets together

You'll have 50 minutes in small groups to develop one of these for yourselves

Aim to form groups around movements you feel some connection to.

Step 2. Facilitating the activity

Keep an eye on the groups and offer any support that might be needed. Once they have their basic timelines draw out, introduce instructions for **Step Two**:

- Now we will add some graph lines to our timelines.
- Turn the paper horizontally (so that time is running from left to right) and put a plus sign in the top left hand corner and a minus sign in the bottom left hand corner (see diagram below)
- Now you can plot the rise and fall of certain factors along the timeline. We're asking you to plot your graph the following factors:

1) **Power:** The power of the movement, perhaps in terms of momentum, energy, numbers of people or decision makers in support...

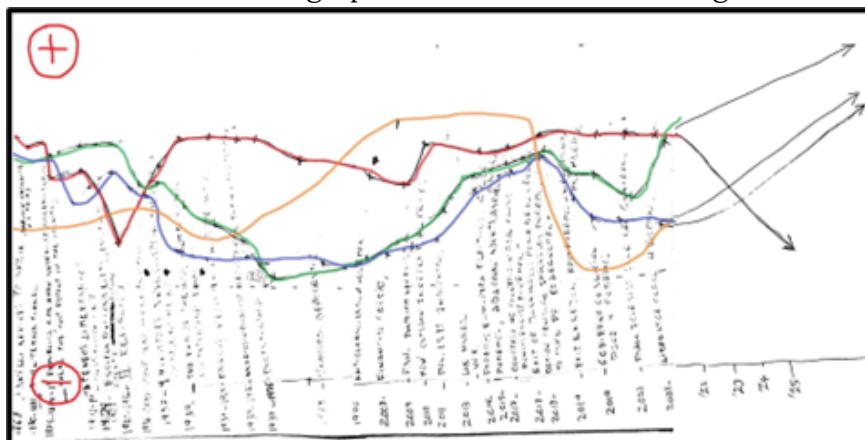
2) **Cohesion:** The internal cohesion of the movement, impacts of internal conflict, clarity of direction...

3) **Progress on the issue**

4) **Opposition:** Impacts of push-back, resistance to the changes the movement wants, and repression.

Choose a different colour for each factor and plot the rise and fall of each of them across the timeline. You'll have 50 minutes.

The final timeline and graph lines will look something like this:



Keep an eye on the groups, give them half way and ten minute warnings, then transition into the first stage of debriefing.

Step 3. Debriefing

In their small work groups, give them around 30 minutes to reflect on the following questions:

- What has contributed to the progress or lack of it?
- How are you measuring power?
- What forms did opposition take?
- Can you find any patterns emerging?
- Does anything surprise you or make you curious?
- Does looking back like this, tell you anything useful about the situation your movement finds itself in today?

Then ask two or more small groups to join together to share their work with one another and especially any new learning that has emerged from the process. Allow 20 minutes.

Bring the whole group back together for some last comments - you may want to ask the groups for one or two key learnings/reflections, or else just tie the session up yourself.

Step 3. Identifying key actors

Groups should now bring the learning they have derived from Module One on mapping the ecology of a movement to discuss the range of actors involved in key moments.

- Who played a key role at different stages?
- What kind of relationships were their between key actors - or lack of relationship?
- What tensions emerged or alliances were formed? How were these addressed or established?
- How does this relate to the answers to the previous set of questions above?

Conclusion and take aways

There will likely have been a lot of valuable discussion and plenty of material generated by the activity. You may want to point to the ongoing nature of this kind of learning - it is never done! - and reiterate some of the points from the framing section about the importance of these kinds of analytical and broad-scope perspectives in effective resilience praxis. Emphasise the way that these kinds of perspectives can feed into and significantly enhance our ongoing planning and acting, in all fields of our social change work.

SOURCE: Ulex Project