Ecumenical social activism and transnational connections between Brazil and Britain: Practitioner perspectives on networks and power

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Abstract:

Ecumenical forms of social activism arising from Christian practitioners seeking connections beyond formal religious differences have played a significant role within action for social change globally, whilst varying significantly in form between different national and local contexts. Building on theoretical analysis of these ecumenical forms of social activism as established in a previous article, this sequel article explores how activist practitioners within related non-governmental organisations in Brazil and Britain reflect on their engagement in ecumenical networks that are operating within and connecting these contexts. We focus particularly on how these practitioners use ecumenical relationships to support them in achieving their aims. The article draws on thematic analysis of 42 semi-structured interviews with these practitioners (conducted 2015-2018), with supporting online research (2015-2022). Different forms of power arising from these relationships are identified, focusing particularly on convening, mobilising, agenda-setting/influencing, leveraging/resourcing and learning power. The resulting analysis highlights the significance of how practitioners manage similarity and difference throughout their use of these different forms of power, whilst connecting across complex nested layers of networks and different scales of action.

Key words:

Ecumenism, Christianity, networks, social action, power

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Statements and declarations:

In addition to his university position, Andrew Orton is seconded part–time as Director of the William Leech Research Fund, an ecumenical funder of research into Christian social action in the North East of England; he is also a lay member of the Methodist Church in Britain. Joanildo Burity is also a lay member of the Anglican Episcopal Church in Brazil.

Introduction

This article draws on in-person and online semi-structured interviews conducted between 2015 and 2018 with practitioners involved in networks of ecumenical forms of social activism involving Brazil and/or Britain to explore how their relationships within these networks may be understood, used and developed in practice. In particular, we highlight how these relationships across similarity and difference are used reflexively by practitioners to generate different forms of agentic power within their social activism.

The article is the second in a two-part series, building on theoretical foundations from the first part which explored changing forms and contested meanings of ecumenism[1], including their roots in movements of Christians interacting together across different traditions and denominations, and their links with networks of social activism (Brunn 2001; Stamatov 2010; Kraft and Wilkinson 2020; Paredes 2017; Gwiazdowski 2014). In our previous article, we highlighted how the development of such networks and understandings can differ in deeply contextual ways, whilst being inter-related with global dimensions (Loy 2017; Burity 2013; Roudometof 2016). Within such networks, as part of what Castells has influentially conceptualised as a 'network society', "power is multidimensional and is organized around networks programmed in each domain of human activity according to the interest and values of empowered actors" (Castells 2015, 7) whilst actors of social change seek to exert influence through the relations, networks and movements they communicate through and create.

The previous part also provided a theoretical analysis comparing these forms of ecumenical social activism between the Brazilian and British contexts, taking into account their respective historical trajectories, and the types of transnational connections linking them (Bouwman 2018; Burity 2013; Orton 2016; Werner and Ross 2021). In particular, we highlighted the significance of formal institutional forms of ecumenism originating in Christian theological imperatives. We also recognised ecumenical social activism has also moved beyond institutional church configurations in these contexts to operate within a

[1] Recognising these diverse debates over meanings of ecumenism, as detailed further in the first of this two-part article, ecumenism for the purposes of this project was used broadly in the sense of "any faith-based action which involves an awareness of religious diversity and seeks to be guided by a sense of connection beyond formal religious differences."

broader field of relationships and drivers shaping networks, including non-governmental organisational concerns with funding, policy engagement, evidencing impact, etc. Such forms of activism are seen as *glocal*, that is, as involving a complex nexus between global and local. Whilst originally coming from Euro-American sources, ecumenical ideas and practices had to navigate a massively Catholic cultural environment in Latin America, with the resulting activist, politicised drive becoming redefined and sharpened locally - leading to what became liberation theology and its pastoral and political expressions. Liberation theology deeply impacted ecumenism here since the 1970s but had its "economistic" understanding of the poor, in turn, challenged and expanded through questions of culture and identity that became salient globally as of the 1990s. Also, the agenda of transnational and global ecumenical agencies was debated and sometimes challenged by local ecumenical partners in Latin America, including through ecumenical networks. The iterative, negotiated, and sometimes conflictual nature of such exchanges, involving theological, ethical, and organisational issues interacting across multiple levels simultaneously, can be properly captured by the notion of glocalisation and its qualifier "glocal", as applied to the cases of ecumenical social activism discussed here (Roudometof 2016; Homobono Martínez 2019; Burity 2015; Robertson 1997)

This second article builds on the first article's theoretical foundation by drawing on original interview data with practitioners involved in networks of ecumenical social activism; these included respondents based within organisations identifying as Christian and others where Christian ecumenical activists were involved in organisations and/or networks with broader identities. After initially outlining the research's empirical approach, we analyse how these practitioners described, understood, developed and used their relationships within these networks in seeking to achieve their aims, highlighting how these relationships involved using different forms of power to support their social activism. The potential of these practitioners' roles and connections is explored especially by focusing on the different rationales that they deploy regarding who they prioritise in their ecumenical engagement with other actors, and why, as well as how this fits within their wider networks of relationships across similarities, differences and borders, both within and between Brazilian and British contexts. The article concludes by considering the implications of these connections for theory, policy and practice.

The empirical approach of this research

This article's empirical analysis uses data from in-person and online semi-structured interviews conducted (by Burity) with staff from non-governmental/faith-based organisations or ecumenical activists in Brazil and Britain. These were identified and selected based on the following criteria: (a) that they identified as ecumenical or incorporated an ecumenical (and/or inter-religious) understanding in their work - whether working with religious agents and organisations or embodying a faith perspective in their service provision; (b) that they operated transnationally and included the two countries in their regular work - whether by virtue of organic connections, such as an organisation base/office in both countries, or of project-based partnerships; (c) as an alternative to (b), that they operated locally within one of the countries but were part of networks including organisations representing (a) and/or (b). The research project also included Argentina as a further point of comparison, but interviews with participants from that country are not analysed in this article.[2] Interviews were conducted between 2015 and 2018, with 23 conducted in Brazil and 19 with practitioners in the UK (focusing on Britain and excluding practitioners based in Northern Ireland, given the specific history and complexities relating to ecumenism and denominational relations there). Online research on the selected organisations' website was also completed between 2015 and 2022, to access documents (reports, position papers, statements, publications, etc.) and news items (that instantiate connections expressing operating networks - through events, press conferences, meetings, public demonstrations, advocacy actions, etc.). Three global networks in which organisations and national networks from both countries participate were also studied through online research.

A three-tiered set of cases was then selected. The first tier privileged cross-border links between Brazilian and British ecumenical organisations; the other two sought to capture

[2] The choice of cases sought to capture dynamics of networking and glocalisation, taking the ecumenical history of Latin American countries as a basis. Thus, Brazil and Argentina present relevant and interesting cases, for their diversity of ecumenical structures, both ecclesiastical and civic; their mutual connections and with other similar Latin American ones; and their engagement in transnational networks also including UK organisations. The UK, in turn, is the site of international ecumenical bodies that have long operated in Latin America through partnerships with ecumenical organisations. Following how these connections work today, in a two-way direction, not just from a North-South perspective, was a key aspect of the research design.

broader forms of networks, including the former whilst set against more complex scales of intervention, collaboration, and learning. From an initial mapping of British-based organisations with links in Brazil, the first tier included practitioners from: Christian Aid, Cafod (Catholic Agency For Overseas Development), Tearfund, A Rocha, Anglican Alliance. The second tier included practitioners from robust networks in which the UK, Latin America and Brazil were represented. Examples are ACT Alliance, Caritas International (and its national branches in both countries), World Vision International (and its national branches in both countries), the former Jubilee Debt Campaign (which extended well beyond the UK context to form the Jubilee Network - including Jubilee South, with branches in Brazil and other Latin American countries), the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (which included most of the above mentioned cases), the Ecumenical Coalition (developed in the context of the World Social Forum experience) and the interfaith alliance Religions for Rights (created in the context of the Rio+20 UN meeting on environmental issues). In addition, a third tier included organisations that, operating nationally or locally, have experienced the various crisscrossing dynamics of interconnectedness, glocalisation and incorporation of issues that go beyond any local circumscription. In this case, practitioners from British-based organisations Churches Together in England and Wales, Theos, Citizens UK, Church Action on Poverty, Refugee Support Network, Green Christian, and Catholic Association for Racial Justice were included. From Brazil, the following organisations were included: Koinonia, Ecumenical Service Coordination (CESE), ACT Brazil Ecumenical Forum (FE Brasil), Process of Articulation and Dialogue (PAD), Diaconia, Lutheran Diaconic Foundation (FLD), Indigenist Missionary Council (CIMI), and the Ecumenical Youth Network (REJU). These organisations and networks have been characterised in detail in a larger report, including publications associated to the original project, to which we refer (Burity 2023). As for the Protestant/Catholic profile of the sample, both traditions are clearly included in each country, not to mention the interfaith nature of several networks above. In addition, there is a history of UK-Latin America ecumenical relations involving both Catholic and Protestant agencies (for instance, reflected in the choice of Christian Aid, Cafod, PAD, and Caritas - cf. Christian Aid, 2014, 2020; CAFOD, 2021; PAD - Processo de Articulação e Diálogo, 2022).

As researchers, when citing particular responses from the interview data in this article, we

are not seeking to endorse or critique the particular position being shared, nor to comment on how accurately the respondents might be portraying the practices of the agencies referenced. Instead, we are using these accounts to illustrate the different rationales and stated limitations of these practitioners' relationships across ecumenical diversity, as portrayed by the practitioners within that interview. In presenting the data, organisations linked to respondents' quotations are sometimes named where respondents gave permission for their perspectives to be linked to their organisational context; wider examples are named where these are already in the public domain (e.g. mentioned in the website data analysed). In quotations from interviews, the views presented are those of the individual and not necessarily the official position of the organisation concerned; taking account of ethical considerations, in presenting the quotations, we have not directly named organisations or informants when presenting quotations on some sensitive topics, giving a contextual description of the type of respondent rather than systematically indexing each contribution in a way that might enable them to more easily be identified. The research was interested in reflexive accounts of how individual practitioners understood and managed their ecumenical connections, within the broader context of wider organisational examples of initiatives that were already often in the public domain. We (and many respondents) recognised there can be differences and tensions within organisations as well as between them, as some quotations below illustrate; previous related organisational case studies (e.g. Loy 2017; Freeman 2020; Gover 2022) have analysed such differences further, albeit without the specific focus on links between the Brazilian and UK context here.

For the purposes of this article, interviews were thematically analysed collaboratively by the authors. The themes conceptualising different forms of power arose from inductive analysis of transcripts and comparative contextual consideration of the narratives of the strategies being used that were being presented in these interviews. They also reflected (to a lesser extent) any supporting documents that respondents referred to, linked to their own organisations and wider networks.[3] We recognise that there may be resonances and

[3] We worked with a qualitative approach to the whole project design, collecting empirical data through interviews (conducted in person or virtually in real time) and web documental research. Given the diverse composition of the team, a broad qualitative thematic analysis approach was taken to the data. For this article, this analysis focused on how the interviewed practitioners discussed and narrated their understandings and rationales for ecumenical engagement with both religious and secular others, including their critical

similarities with wider analyses of narratives and approaches taken by actors in related fields, and indeed that practitioners may be drawing on wider theory in the work they do.[4] We also acknowledge that we are addressing a form of ecumenical identity and practice which, although rooted in mainstream perspectives of the global ecumenical movement, includes repertoires of action and strategies which may also be employed by conservative forms of religious activism. Such alternative movements might be described, in that respect, as conservative ecumenism, also involving work across denominational and even interfaith lines, as well as public engagement and networking which seeks to harness the support of conservative voices across wide spectra of opinion and practice. However, the analysis offered in this article dwells on radical or progressive forms of ecumenical social activism that accord with historically-established ecumenical activist traditions as analysed in the first part article. We will return to considering the relationship and contribution of this analysis to wider literature towards the end of the current article. To begin, we start by empirically considering the different forms of power that we analysed as being presented within the narratives of the interview transcripts, illustrating these with relevant quotations in the process.

Conceiving and working out glocal connections and relationships: what do they provide for ecumenical social action?

Within the interviews, respondents highlighted diverse rationales for the range and forms of relationships they sought to develop in their work, including when seeking to broker relationships and articulate various partnerships involving others, and when seeking change within larger social and political structures. In what follows, we describe as *power* some key strategies and aims that ecumenical social activism derive from or encounter in making and

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reflections on how such engagement might support them in achieving their aims.

[4] For example, whilst there is not space here to do so, an analytical comparison of these inductive categories from the interview data with various theoretical conceptions of social capital including those in Putnam's work (e.g. see Field's 2017 summary), including particularly the bonding, bridging and linking forms suggested by Woolcock (2001, 13-14, apud Field, 2017, p. 25), might offer one potentially fruitful direction that also theoretically integrates aspects of relational similarity and difference involving networks of social relationships with capacity for action. We benefited from three main analytical approaches that address questions of network-building, its power dynamics (both internally, among partners, and externally, relative to adversaries or wider audiences and constituencies), and its repertoires of action: social movement theory, social networks theory, and community development theory (Grugel, 2000; Diani and McAdam, 2003; Biekart, 2005; Armstrong *et al.*, 2011; Gilchrist, 2019; Orton and Barclay, 2020).

maintaining connections, partnerships, relationships and networking. Each of the following notions represents what they do and how, in and through ecumenical network-shaped action. These may be conceptualised through connected notions/processes of *convening* power, *representational* power (representing both specific identity-based groups, and wider collective voices on shared issues beyond these), *movement building*, *influencing* power and *learning* power. Threaded through these logics are complex reflexive ways of handling similarity and difference within their network building and ongoing relationships. As we explore some of the research evidence associated with each of these power concepts, and illustrate this with quotations from the practitioners interviewed, we hope to shed more light on the key argument we have developed thus far, and refer to the previous article for the extended argument involving wider literature.

Convening power

A starting point for considering how these non-governmental/faith-based organisation practitioners saw their role was through using their agency or power to *gather together those with shared concerns* about particular social issues. This convening process typically involved intentionally bringing people together who might not normally work together, across different denominational, social and/or geographic boundaries; as one practitioner in Britain noted: "I think we have a very simple agenda, and that's to say to the churches: 'will you do this together rather than separately?'"

Bringing people together involved an agenda of building practical cooperation, which in turn expressed theological perspectives on being Church together through this convening process. For example, in one interview that unusually involved two respondents from the same agency simultaneously, the second respondent built on the first respondent's contribution to express this relationship:

> [Respondent 1] Where I'm at is… building mutual respect, encouraging folks to work together, being a conduit for good flow of information, so people are resourced, empowering people to be who they are, so they can be good partners for working with others. That's my own agenda.
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> [Respondent 2] Yeah,… written behind all of that is obviously the theological agenda, you know, that people of God are called to be one for the sake of all humanity.… That's the ultimate backdrop. That's the ultimate message. But then it gets translated into the strapline of working together, doing things together.

This connecting role was described by some as a form of convening 'power'. For example:

> Tearfund has… a real power here, because we are global, we're … quite well-respected. We can convene. We can convene very easily.… We can ask people to come together and they often … will respond really positively, because we have a good reputation … so we do a lot of connecting, then, of these groups.

In taking on this convening role, whilst often recognising a wider ecumenical vision, respondents typically reflected on their own positionality, and located their own convening contribution within it; for example, one respondent from an international denominational network stated:

> What we believe is that this work is the work of the Church of Christ and not just [our denomination's] and it's also … multifaith.… Our view is that… good ecumenical work needs strong denominations as well… And so where our primary job is building connecting-capacity of [our own international denominational group], that's going to be most effective if we do it collaboratively.

On the one hand, ecumenical orientations pointed to having no favourites in who was invited into convened forms of cooperation; for example, one respondent from a large evangelical international development organisation indicated that:

> Ecumenicalism [sic] is very, very important to [our agency] because obviously we're an interdenominational organisation… we would see that as the people of God in that local place, not as a particular denomination. So where there are people of God in, in that locality, who can we work with? They are our brothers and sisters in Christ. They are, you know, they are God's body on earth… They are the people we want to work with above anybody else.

On the other hand, this same respondent then qualified this by specifying further: "we would never sort of favour, I think, working with one evangelical denomination over another."

This illustrates how the process of bringing together different groups often started pragmatically with those who were seen as being closer to them in identities, locations and/or theological positionings. For example, Protestant evangelical organisations or Catholic organisations tended to recruit supporters from their own respective networks of churches, starting with those in their own geographical contexts and/or working on similar issues within their own denominations. Despite clear initial commitment to convening across ecumenical differences, this sensitive balancing of similarity and difference within this positionality was then represented in a more qualified way by the same respondent:

> We have had some problems with some particular denominations, as the 'health and wealth' Pentecostals, who are not really interested in working with us, and we have big theological differences with. And we've traditionally not targeted the Catholic Church for co-working, but where there have been natural opportunities, we've done it. But we haven't naturally targeted them because they're not our natural constituency. Our supporters are all evangelical, and also because there are other organisations who are their natural constituency… like Cafod.… but we would certainly happily work with Catholics… But none of our … official partners are Catholic.… Our passion is the local church,… and how we can work with them, and support them to be the transformation that we think God is calling them to be. So in that sense, we are quite passionately ecumenical.

The same respondent, coming from an evangelical background, then went on to indicate that they also do less with the World Council of Churches "just because I guess their theology is a bit more liberal … we are not anti them, we don't try and avoid working with them, but they are not our priorities". There is a double relevance of such a statement, which relies on a long debate on the impact of 19th- and 20th-century theological liberalism (and late 20th-century liberation theology) on the ecumenical movement and the rejection of liberalism by evangelicals. First, the opposition of the respondent to working with the WCC no longer seems to be so uncompromising. Second, ecumenical relations and practices have been developed outside the frame of institutional ecumenism referenced in the World Council of Churches, as it had already been the case with Catholics and the Catholic Church.

A staff member of World Vision UK (also originally evangelical) similarly acknowledged how cultural differences between denominations and theological positions might affect their work, whilst also reflecting on the extent to which this might differ geographically and extend to interfaith work:

> It's a historical thing and then what that [organisational identity] means in a contemporary period differs from office to office.… So, here in the UK, I think we would want to say that we have quite a diverse experience of Christian expression within the organisation. That being said, the bulk of that does tend to be still more evangelical in character… we wouldn't officially call ourselves evangelical in the UK, we would just say Christian, but the reality of the organisation [is that there is an] evangelical base within the organisation.
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> So, on that question of then what does it mean working ecumenically and what does that mean working interfaith, I think that sometimes becomes an interesting one for us. We are very committed to both and [in terms of] the ecumenical bit we probably don't always do as well as we would like to, but it's not a point of contention within the organisation generally. I think there's probably some cultural habits that mean we need to work harder to make sure there are Orthodox and Roman Catholic and other sisters and brothers who feel fully included, but that's at that level of cultural habits rather than anything institutionalised in policy or anything that we would be wanting to continue. The interfaith dimension I think, like many organisations that have some evangelical history or large evangelical population

> within them, that have different views on that. I think some people find that to be an amazingly strong expression of what it is for us to be a Christian organisation – to be able to work across faiths and to work in that way – and for others it raises questions that they are less certain about.

An ability to convene and bring different partners together often arose out of being located in an 'in-between' position: to bring people together involved initially having to explain, translate and represent different groups to each other, whilst finding and creating platforms on which different groups might work together. For example, another respondent in an evangelical INGO described this position as follows:

> We were kind of between these two spectrums and trying to explain our works. We spend the time trying to express the… differences to the world, why working from a religious perspective isn't infringing anyone's freedom of religion and isn't proselytising and forcing conversions and things like that. And then, a lot of time working back to the church about why things like the Red Cross Code of Conduct isn't un-Christian, and things like that.

Within this in-between positionality, related decisions were needed about who to seek to convene and connect with in order to take action together on particular issues. In such choices, the agency of the ecumenical practitioners and organisations can be pragmatically expressed in which agendas they choose to prioritise within each convened space; as one practitioner in a British-based Christian international development agency stated: "sometimes it is necessary to say 'well, you know, as a community of practice on this, let's engage with that, because we can connect'." In addition, the same practitioner argued for the need to engage more broadly with churches, ecumenical agencies and secular bodies, by building further on convened spaces around topics where there are existing relationships, and bringing their voices to each other on wider issues too. They also described a more proactive "playing off" of different interests where they felt it was needed to generate some initial momentum for tackling issues that might otherwise be overlooked.

This convening power (when exercised by established ecumenical actors) often included liaison and coordination roles, gathering other smaller or more fragile ecumenical partners to strengthen their voices and reach. Such gatherings took place at various levels, including through international agencies, such as Christian Aid or CAFOD, and different Brazilian organisations; national-based Brazilian NGOs, such as Koinonia, CESE or the Lutheran Diaconal Foundation; global networks such as ACT Alliance, or Jubilee South.

However, a representative of Koinonia, an important Brazilian ecumenical agency,

highlighted the complex and at times uneasy relationship between European and Brazilian organisations within convened network relationships. For him, there was both a break in time, as the former became global organisations (thus changing the nature of the previous forms of partnership between those groups), and the emergence of asymmetries with regard to the autonomy of Brazilian partners:

> Many international organisations, or rather national ones but from rich countries, became global organisations. Until the 1980s, there were relations of partnership between national organisations and organisations from the countries of Europe and North America. From the 1990s, these Northern organisations became global organisations. Quite particularly, environmental organisations: Greenpeace, WWF… well, all these large organisations, which brought their branches to Brazil. So, there was no longer a partnership - I will use a term here that may seem derogatory, a criticism -, but what used to be partnerships between some organisations turned into conquest or co-option! National organisations or national groups were co-opted by these international organisations. I mean, Koinonia is not one of them. We preserve our national autonomy a lot, but we do have an international connection. Now the ecumenical movement had to rebuild itself in this period. The World Council of Churches, which was the great articulating ecumenical organisation and a great umbrella for both local, national, continental and international initiatives, lost much of its strength, largely due to globalisation, because the agencies that kept, that funded the World Council of Churches, decided to act directly in the various continents. They no longer had the World Council of Churches as a strategic partner - now, it was more of a one-off partner in those thematic fields - and acted directly in countries and continents. And these same ecumenical organisations, some of them, are moving towards a sort of globalisation. This created for us the need for another articulation. So, in terms of global action, we are seeking to combine national actions with global actions, and one of the alternatives we found was the organisation of ACT Alliance.

The creation of ACT Alliance had important inputs from the South, including Brazil. It corresponded to the global side of a local strategy that also involved acknowledging the Brazil Ecumenical Forum (which existed from the early 1990s) as ACT's own national forum in the country. This double belonging, for instance, including Christian Aid alongside Koinonia, Diaconia, the Lutheran Diaconal Foundation, allowed for a levelling ground in which the existing asymmetries could be dealt with. Another initiative was the articulation of the Ecumenical Coalition in the World Social Forum, starting with its second conference. This was a Brazilian initiative, according to a Koinonia informant. Several interviewees mentioned this coalition and how it evolved in a broader, interfaith direction, both in the World Social Forum and in UN conferences held in Brazil, such as Rio+20. From the start, the coalition had a global character, including partners from all continents. Several ecumenical organisations had attended the Social Forum from the beginning in an uncoordinated way. The Ecumenical Coalition helped draw them together, creating visibility for them, and

allowing for dialogues and networking, resulting in an evolving articulation and formulation of what they held in common:

> We detected that in the first edition there were several organisations from around the world that participated in the Social Forum and were ecumenical, but had no articulation with one another. That's how the idea came up... It was difficult for us to articulate it, but we got it and, since then, from the second, [in] all editions of the World Social Forum, we have been able to articulate this "Ecumenical Coalition", around more general activities, the big conferences, within the Forum, the big seminars, workshops, and create articulation spaces. All of them around themes dear to the ecumenical movement, but which are neither in antagonism with, nor differ from the interests and themes of other organisations. You know that the ecumenical movement treads on all the topics that have to do with rights, defence of life! So, in the area of economics, politics, social and environmental issues, we always had this kind of activity, usually with various initiatives occurring simultaneously…. And this coalition expanded even more at Rio+20... Then, we no longer call it "ecumenical coalition". Because the ecumenical coalition has mainly involved Christians. But this time we created "Religions for Rights". It was an extremely broad coalition. Just for you to get an idea, only the local Rio committee, responsible for organising the programme had, I think..., more than 50 religious organisations! Christian and non-Christian ones.... From other continents, too.... We liaised with national organisations, but also with international organisations: Caritas International, ACT Alliance, Religions for Peace, the Parliament of Religions...

As these quotations illustrate, any convened coalition may still have other forms of power (and indeed contestation) ever present, including over: (i) who is included or not at any point; (ii) on what basis they understand themselves as relating to each other; (iii) how they describe and represent their shared interests to others. Within the resulting convened relational-network-space, those with similar identities and concerns could represent their interests to others within the coalition, whilst also seeking to use the collective representational power of the convened coalition when liaising with those external to it, as we'll go on to consider in other forms of power discussed below.

Mobilising power

A second form of power, 'mobilising power', provided a strategy to widen and further develop the support base for responding to issues of common concern, building on the relationships convened. This form of enhanced agency arose from practitioners seeking to draw in others (beyond those already involved) based on these issues of shared concern, often through both: (i) starting with those with whom activists already had closer religious relationships, drawing on their existing committed support; whilst also (ii) drawing on ecumenical relationships across difference to broaden out their appeal to others, whilst actively seeking to attract and engage a widened and increased range of participants and

support. In the process, activists worked to proactively create more of the very actors their organisation already sought to work with, growing their collective momentum, representativeness and potential for impact. This process subsequently connects with what we call leveraging (or resourcing) power, as further discussed below.

This strategy is exemplified by the small A Rocha Brazil in its work on environmental conservationism until 2020 in the country's Northern and Northeastern regions (with main funding coming from Tearfund). In contrast to other A Rochas[5], the Brazilian team decided to prioritise bringing local churches on board, through awareness-raising and educational initiatives, seeking a wider impact than the research, educational and advocacy work done by the organisation internationally:

> [W]e felt that there was this need, regarding the churches, here in Brazil. Therefore, we should also connect the Church with our work..., with the care for creation.... At the time, it was innovative....
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> So, we set up this awareness-raising and mobilisation project for churches, especially evangelical churches, but some Catholic churches also participated.... Unfortunately, the Church, especially the evangelical one, has not done much for the environmental issue in Brazil.... So we started with an environmental education project, instead of a species conservation project, as has happened in other A Rochas around the world.

In doing this, such mobilisation sought to adopt a practical ecumenical orientation, and not be driven by any faith conditionality, despite being led mostly by an evangelical conservationist group:

> [This conservation project carried out in São Paulo] has no bias, like talking about the Bible, raising awareness on biblical grounds. People know, A Rocha never omits that it confesses a faith, that we are Christian. Any country president of A Rocha needs to work on these principles and one of the principles is Christianity. And another principle is cooperation. So we don't just work with Christians, Christian organisations, right? We also work with any other organisation and people who want to work and accept our... our Christian values, which prevail in our work. So, this project is a conservation project, it is not a project directly linked to spirituality, or to a church…

Other respondents actively used Christian concepts to motivate others as part of their

[5] A Rocha is an international Christian conservationist organisation present in over 20 countries, working mainly on species conservation projects. It was founded by British evangelicals who set up a field study centre in Portugal in 1983. It seeks to develop scientific knowledge for conservation and environmental education projects with local communities, not necessarily churches (see www.arocha.org/en/about). A Rocha Brazil stood out in its emphasis on involving churches, compared to many other national branches of A Rocha. After our field research, A Rocha Brasil closed its activities for financial reasons and no longer operates in the country.

mobilisation strategy, particularly when engaging directly with Christian constituencies. However, concepts were typically carefully chosen to be those that might have wider mobilising (rather than divisive) appeal; they included those (like the concept of 'jubilee' used in debt relief campaigns) bringing religious resonances for some whilst not otherwise putting off others from participating.

For some, mobilisation involved not just finding allies, but also reflexively working through the interests of different networks to generate further momentum for action on the issue of central concern. Such strategies involved practitioners taking advantage of their position at the intersections and overlaps among different networks (sometimes embedding smaller and more specialised ones into broader ones). Many had multiple belongings to a variety of networks, at different levels (*nationally* - as the ACT Alliance Brazil Forum), which includes non-member organisations and movements; *transnationally or globally* - as Christian Aid, Koinonia and the Lutheran Diaconal Foundation as members of ACT Alliance, or CAFOD, Christian Aid, Tearfund, Anglican Alliance, ACT Alliance, CLAI, World Vision both operating in Brazil, belonging to various transnational networks, and being part of the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities. Although all these were not necessarily in themselves movements, they contributed at the root of movements (being glocally articulated networks seeking to sensitise religious and secular audiences or to mobilise people to act on particular issues - such as climate change, poverty, gender equality, peace, etc.). In Brazil, for example, in addition to A Rocha as discussed above, aspects of movement building could be seen in the role played by Conic and CLAI (councils of churches), CESE and Koinonia (ecumenical social activism agencies) in the creation of the Brazilian Ecumenical Forum (1994).

Some of these wider expressions could be found in active participation, when not in a steering role, by ecumenical groups in the World Social Forum experience - including the Ecumenical Coalition (as of the Forum's third meeting, in Porto Alegre) and its outgrown expression Interfaith Coalition - and during the UN Rio +20 conference (both in the main conference and the Peoples' Summit, its parallel gathering); the articulation of the UK-based Jubilee 2000 Campaign as a more permanent initiative, as Debt Justice (formerly Jubilee Debt Campaign UK) and the Jubilee South movement (e.g. through its Brazilian branch); the launching of the Emerging Leaders Multi-Faith Climate Convergence, in 2015; and various

campaigns developed in coordination between UK and Brazilian partners particularly in the area of human rights and environmental advocacy.

Some respondents described this mobilising work as intentionally building social *movements* for change, with networks of relationships that may outlast any particular initiative and that may project church-based or faith-based activism onto wider social and institutional arenas. A number of examples from the data could be mentioned, e.g. a staff member at Tearfund described their intentional philosophy of movement building (also noted in Daehnhardt, 2020), mentioning specific academic theorists in the process, and concluding how this built on the convening power mentioned in the previous section:

> [M]ovements are powerful, but how do you actually do it? And the thought is that you need to do three things: mobilising, organising, and connecting.… So the mobilising is the breadth, it's the sheer numbers of people, but often quite centrally directed [through asking people to engage in relatively easy actions]. Then the second element of movement-building is organizing… where it's the depth… it's building of leadership. It's sort of participatory democracy. It's really engaging in your community in local action. So it's not centrally directed. It's giving away the power to local actors to really go deep and to build other people's leadership and to really get a foothold in communities on this issue. [And the third thing] we're doing [is] connecting... So where we're finding groups of organisers or where networks are mobilised, then we try and bring them together to build this movement, essentially.

Tearfund has launched a global environmental initiative called *Renew Our World* (also present in Brazil and led, as we write, by the former leader of A Rocha Brazil), described as a movement, and on its website the "Resources" tab explicitly offers tools for movement building.[6] This is not strange to other ecumenical actors in this study, who have either been part of social movement networks or sought to initiate their own (e.g. the multiple and overlapping links between Christian Aid, CAFOD, CESE, PAD, and FEACT Brasil with indigenous, black, women's, environmental movements, in Brazil and globally).

These mobilised movements may also exert influence through coalitions such as: (i) ACT Alliance, using its consultative position within the UN to advocate for or give direct voice to Brazilian partners (or some of their direct beneficiaries) around indigenous, environmental, gender and global finance issues; (ii) The support given by Tearfund to the creation of a *Faith and Politics* movement among evangelical churches and the creation of an ecological network among its Brazilian partners (the Renew Our World movement and the agroecology

[6] See https://www.renewourworld.net/resources?filter=movement+building.

Rede Semear [Sowing Network], which includes Diaconia, studied in the project); (iii) The articulation promoted by the Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI), a pastoral service of the Brazilian Conference of Catholic Bishops, with the Brazilian indigenous movements (on occasion including other researched groups, such as Koinonia, ACT Brazil Ecumenical Forum, or the Lutheran Diaconic Foundation). Other examples can be found below.

Finally, mobilisation also takes place between global organisations and local churches seeking to influence global debates, seeking to bring mobilisation to bear on government policy circles, legislative debates, public hearings, or even partnership negotiation, as one practitioner described:

> This applies to both national and local issues… So, there are issues that, in Brazil, for example, at Rio+20, were more national issues. There was a mobilisation from communities, from civil society groups in dialogue with other social movements, but that was a more complex agenda… So, we tried to encourage and organise ourselves to participate in civil society forums, wherever possible, right?... And so we had a mobilisation meeting! And then, we structured participation both in the parallel forum, sponsored by organised civil society, and also an active participation at the Summit itself! Then, more recently, we made an assessment of the importance of continuing this experience... involvement outside the church, defining some lines that we can act on in the scope of national, and perhaps local public policies, but also, within the church too, because it is a subject that the church hardly gets involved in.

Agenda-setting/Influencing power

As these examples also demonstrate, a key aspect of the resulting mobilised capacity for action was the potential for increased *influencing power*, particularly through any related *campaigning and advocacy work*. This included creating public engagement on issues that may galvanise wider social support or be taken up in policymaking, and seeking to change the agenda through turning issues into demands.

This agenda-setting power may relate to local attempts to influence global agendas, and vice versa. Public engagement is refracted through local agendas, those involving national cooperation and wider global issues - such as the environment or poverty and inequality. Here, the convening power of donor agencies can impose elements of their own local agendas, sometimes creating tensions with local priorities of their partners at the receiving end. Former patterns of dependence and even colonial habits from European organisations and governments may linger on under new rhetorics of relationship and partnership, in these cases. Several Brazilian informants expressed uneasiness about such biases, and

mentioned initiatives to make their beneficiaries' and local partners' voices heard when discussing planning and funding with UK or European ecumenical partners. This uneasiness could also be found among both local staff of UK-based organisations and some partnering local organisations.

The global advocacy initiatives of bigger organisations such as Christian Aid, ACT Alliance, Tearfund, World Vision, Cafod, may be interfaces for interacting agendas across different levels in their already existing roles in international or multilateral bodies. As summarised by a PAD official, advocacy-based networking is aimed at

> promoting articulated actions, based on common agendas. And these actions need to be reflected both in Brazil and in the countries where these agencies are headquartered.... Today, PAD's strategy is to co-promote advocacy actions, whether there or here in Brazil, always with the aim of strengthening, of highlighting the importance of relations with the [ecumenical international] cooperation.

This is often done via connections established through local projects, involving disadvantaged groups as well as ecumenical partners, previous encounters or engagements in ecumenical or government initiatives, and international/global events. This is also the case with those Brazilian and UK nationally-focused organisations that had developed their own networking strategies in seeking to broaden their appeal and getting wider, transnational or global audiences for their agendas. On issues relating to environmental, gender, children, poverty, etc., there is an array of strategies to gain more leverage locally through robust trans-local connections and to achieve local aims more effectively through inscribing such demands into the agenda of partners, funders, and multilateral bodies, in addition to their own agendas.

Participation in UN conferences has led to the articulation of local groups and social movements from various countries, like the interfaith "Religions For Rights" space in the Rio+20 People's Summit, convened by Brazilian and ecumenical organisations, such as Koinonia, ACT Brazil Ecumenical Forum, ACT Alliance, Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, PAD, the Catholic International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity (CIDSE), and the Anglican Alliance. Often, such issues are addressed under the rubric of "human rights".[7] As highlighted by a Brazilian interviewee: "All ecumenical agencies invest in this field of

[7] This translates, in Latin America, since the early 1990s, a broad spectrum of economic, social, cultural and environmental rights; see www.plataformadh.org.br.

monitoring human rights... And they encourage us, provoke us, more and more, to carry out this type of advocacy."

The use of mobilisation as a springboard to agenda-setting is also clearly a strategy found in our study. For instance, in July 2022, CESE, CIMI, and the Centre for Biblical Studies (a liberation theology think tank) convened an Ecumenical Caravan in Support of the Guarani and Kaiowá Peoples, visiting a number of settlements. This was organised to draw public and international attention to the plight of indigenous populations facing invasion of their lands, intimidation and violence, and denial of access to basic public services (health, running water, electricity, transport), and put pressure on the Brazilian government on behalf of indigenous peoples. The event attracted participation by the Brazilian Anglican Episcopal Church, the United Presbyterian Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Baptist Alliance of Brazil, the Latin American Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, FEACT Brasil, CONIC, FLD and its twin Lutheran organisations Council of Mission among Indigenous Peoples and Centre for the Support and Promotion of Agroecology, and the National Human Rights Council (a participatory structure with government and civil society representations)[8]. CIMI's role, working across the borders of Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Bolivia, resulted in the creation of a coordinating regional indigenous body as part of a wider Latin American network of indigenous movements.

Influencing power has also to do with *lobbying*. Networking allows for numerous strategies including where: (a) some network actors may have direct access to legislators, ministries and other stakeholders in policy-making or legislative activity; (b) small actors may benefit from the visibility and expertise of more established and empowered ones in maximising their impact; (c) local actors can benefit from the weight of a wider network bearing on domestic politics, through statements, joint action or foreign pressure; (d) networks can act as a proxy of powerful single actors in global scenarios. As illustrated by a UK-based interviewee:

> My own role here is I'm a Government Relations Manager, which is both self-explanatory but also means I end up pulled into a whole lot of different things as well. The primary focus

[8] A public statement was issued at the end of the Caravan, which can be found at https://www.cese.org.br/carta-da-caravana-ecumenica-em-defesa-dos-povos-guarani-e-kaiowa. Accessed on 20/01/2024.

> of my role is engagement with the UK government and that is both with the parliament but also with the civil service. So, with DFID, the Foreign Commonwealth Office and other parts of the government.... I participate in a number of our global or European networks around advocacy and policy across the [international organisation's] partnership. I also... do quite a lot of our engagement around faith and with faith communities, particularly in relation to policy, advocacy, those kinds of areas.... So, there's that element to our programme work and that will then feature in some of the conversations that we'll have …with government where we will be specifically talking about the role of faith in development, the role that faith actors and faith leaders can have within that, the importance of faith as a tool for addressing harmful social norms and moving towards more positive social norms in communities.

UK organisations such as Christian Aid, CAFOD and Debt Justice, for instance, may seek to use this approach as they lobby the British government and Parliament on issues of international development, human rights, and debt, sometimes voicing concerns from their overseas (e.g., Brazilian) partners. Globally, World Vision International has general UN consultative status at the UN. ACT Alliance (which includes Christian Aid, CESE, Koinonia, and FLD), CAFOD, Debt Justice (still listed as Jubilee Debt Campaign), and the Brazilian CIMI and INESC all have special UN consultative status. Tearfund has a roster status.[9] PAD has done work at the UN, monitoring the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Universal Periodic Review, as well as doing advocacy at the UN Human Rights Council, and the Organisation of American States' Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. World Vision Brazil has sat for years on the National Council for Children and Adolescents (a participatory structure of the Brazilian federal government, with equal representation of government and civil society, which monitors related legal and policy developments). FEACT Brazil (ACT Alliance's Brazil Forum) has acted on advocacy initiatives, on its own or in collaboration with other networks and international bodies, on global finance, gender, indigenous rights, religious freedom, cultural diversity, etc.

These are not always harmonious and fully-aligned concerted actions. Differences play out in various ways: from perceptions of what is at stake in the coalition or network, what is expected from each partner, to how far and deep the actions must go in order for the network's aims to be achieved (or its partial results endorsed by its components). There are cultural sensitivities at play, sometimes leading to tensions. There are different levels of expertise and commitment invested in the network. But all these may sometimes be

[9] See https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n23/320/16/pdf/n2332016.pdf.

bracketed when concrete initiatives are planned, or taken on to governments or multilateral bodies.

However, local ownership of initiatives is strongly stressed by most interviewees - both as a demand from local actors and a strategic orientation for global and transnational ones, who cannot always fund or act directly locally. For example, ACT Alliance, Anglican Alliance, Christian Aid, Cafod, Tearfund and World Vision all affirm this commitment to take seriously the issues raised by their local partners. As one respondent commented: "For us, the critical thing is to do that within any given context or locality, so that it's owned and sustained within the region and within the location."

This feature reinforces the *glocal* nature of many activities and campaigns in which the studied groups are engaged. It also translates as network *politics*, particularly when North/South differences are at stake, and tensions arise between Northern and Southern priorities (sometimes dictated by restrictions posed by international cooperation funding). All the above organisations have developed regional and national forums or other structures for receiving and processing local demands, in terms of voice and shared advocacy. A member of a British ecumenical organisation comments on some related dynamics:

> If you take more examples of better practice, certainly around... climate or tax justice, which are our two biggest ones, there's an approach that is very definitely to help... relevant regional bodies or whatever, and then work with them to introduce them into the global agenda, so that they become the voice and then actually taking then a back seat and support them.... So, similarly, tax justice, you know, we... have actually really reinforced not just reporting tax justice from our point but focusing and supporting the global alliance that actually works through its own regional basis.... So, there is much more that sort of voice that's coming out of the regions themselves. So, that would always be our approach: to try and foster that.

Nonetheless, as already noted in discussing convening power, because Northern organisations have their own agendas and some demands from their Southern partners involve projecting their voices and demands on a global level, there is always some deliberation and disputes to settle between expectations, possibilities, and priorities. This is also commented on by the same informant:

> [U]ntil now [organisation] has been very clear that we don't do advocacy in the South. You know, we work only through partners and so, it's much more, what [organisation] would want to see is, in that sense, slightly relevant, because it's got to be the national organisations that are actually setting what it is that's the appropriate methodology,

> targeting message, you know, all about… Having said that,... I think that mantra needs more nuance. We're moving now. But it's still very clear that … [organisation] doesn't want to come in and start doing its own thing. We're still trying to be led by the national partners, who obviously have to be in the driving seat there.

Another aspect of these changing relations, commented on by several other Brazilian interviewees, regards continuous negotiations - and sometimes pressure from both sides - around priorities, emerging themes and specific strategies put forward by Northern partners, impinging on the funding possibilities, planning and to some extent the internal operation of Brazilian ones. The asymmetric relationships between UK-based organisations and their partners or offices in Brazil was articulated either in terms of former more egalitarian relations or of a "postcolonial critique" of the North/South divide. Respondents also gave examples of South-South or intra-national connections that help strengthen the impact or reach of local ecumenical groups, and get new issues on the agenda; for example, we explore the example of Koinonia in more detail later in the article.

Leveraging/resourcing power

For Brazilian organisations in particular, these networks may add *leveraging or resourcing power*, as organisations/practitioners seek to leverage additional resources and capacity to act through their network links (and the wider sets of relationships with other organisations they maintain). This may include leveraging, for example, capacity-building funds from the UK. Younger and/or smaller organisations may particularly benefit in reaching wider resonance to their agenda and demands. Younger organisations may need to develop skills in pitching for international funds, or develop staff experience in addressing complex or non-local dimensions of issues. New issues become taken up or more intertwined with previous ones already on each organisation's agenda. So, (ecumenical) networking can provide, for faith-based organisations, a valuable and time-effective alternative to accessing funds, developing skills, and building the necessary thematic bridges across various advocacy areas, thus raising their profile or allowing for more effective engagement. Christian Aid comes as a good example of this dynamics:

> In a lot of our campaigning in the UK, for example, or in Ireland, we know that many of the people that support the campaigns, they're already working ecumenically at the local level, ... How do we support that and how to mobilise their kinds of efforts? Which isn't dissimilar… to the way that we work through partners in the South… and we would always, in a sense, support whatever initiative was, whoever was involved or not.... But at the same time…, for those ecumenical bodies that we think are particularly important to us, we will

> also try making the resourcing available to help support them as institutions… particularly, say, the WCC [World Council of Churches]. I was in the core group of the roundtable for a number of years.... We would certainly want our country programmes to participate in all of the different ACT [Alliance] national forums, as well as riding a lot of support to the official governance bodies and to the informal communities of practice, and things like that.

This was seen as ecumenically bolstering the agency's "legitimacy" as an "outsider" which was neither local nor a branch of a church denomination.

The awareness towards the link between resourcing local groups and them doing their own advocacy directly can be seen in this Tearfund Brazil officer's comment:

> Our role is to bring people together, help to articulate, help to animate the process and people do it! If they don't do it, we won't do it [for them]; it won't help anything! So, there is a whole effort to... really "empower" local groups to do it, there... And it is possible!... We just provide support. We contact specialists, get them there and make the connection, help design the initial strategy, and people get on with it. They really do it! Simple as that.

As a very small group, A Rocha Brazil also showed this awareness of what can be gained by being part of a larger, international organisation:

> A Rocha Portugal, which was the first one, carries a very big weight there... in Portugal, within academia. Universities send their students to A Rocha Portugal to do internships, right? Other A Rochas are not even much known as Christian organisations, but rather for the scientific data they manage to gather, or the mobilisations they make around conservation. So, for us to say that we are part of the great A Rocha family, here in Brazil, carries a lot of weight… It holds a dialogue that is greatly facilitated by the work it has done with governments, with other more recognized organisations.

The respondent gave further examples of making contacts and mediating initial dialogue with different international environmental NGOs via its partnership with A Rocha International, providing "a great gateway to other movements, which have been around longer than us". Similarly, they could access major academic events and enter UN spaces and forums at Rio+20 as an observer via A Rocha International, which "had the right to issue credentials to enter the UN space".

In Brazil, the context of decreasing funding availability for Brazilian NGOs and ecumenical organisations led to the creation of the Process of Articulation and Dialogue, in the mid-1990s, as already mentioned. As a hybrid platform gathering European ecumenical donors and Brazilian partners, PAD was conceived as a bridge between the two kinds of partners but also as a means to position Brazilian organisations more effectively in an adverse

international context, giving them a vantage point for advocacy but also for continuing to tap into available funding from European sources. According to a staff member:

> This was the motivation for setting up this medium called PAD: how can we, agencies, build an environment for reflection and debate on the importance of cooperative relations in Brazil with the ecumenical cooperation, in the sense of ensuring that the [international] cooperation withdrawal [from Brazil] isn't so abrupt, does not cause so many problems, so many consequences for the institutional life of these organisations?
>
> We have been working for a long time, and we have been focusing on the topic of human rights, human rights and democracy... because they are topics that also dialogue and have to do with the political agenda of international cooperation. So, in addition to this big umbrella, we work with more specific themes, even if they have a lot to do with Brazil, but may also facilitate, have repercussions, so to speak, on the interests of the agencies, in the sense of permanently seeking to influence and engage the politics of the cooperation in its relationship with Brazil.

A different leveraging/resourcing strategy involves supporting very local organisations in relation to their own beneficiaries, by helping them reach a wider audience, being heard and seen on national, international, or global levels. That can be done even via individual organisations, as in the case of the Indigenist Missionary Council (CIMI):

> We have made a special effort in recent years to invest in international advocacy, as well. And then it involves some other organisations like FIAN International[10] ... even organisations that support CIMI, from a financial point of view, right?, because CIMI, in short, receives donations and also contributes to this perspective of international articulation and advocacy, whether within the scope of the Organization of American States, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, that we have... followed, participated at several moments, and also in the more global scope of the United Nations. Because we have also participated in the UN Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples, the UN Human Rights Council, and so on. Also, within the scope of the European Parliament... Mainly through presence on the occasions of events, right?, helping with articulation, enabling the participation of representatives of indigenous peoples in these spaces… Last year we got approval of CIMI's consultative status with the UN, so this also favours the presentation of written complaints.

A former official of Christian Aid Brazil highlighted a variation of this resourcing or leveraging dimension of networks, which resulted from being both within and without the national context, and between UK headquarters and Brazil offices or partnering organisations. Christian Aid had an office in Brazil until 2020. As an INGO, it could not legally operate directly, only through partnerships and project funding. However, as a member of ACT Alliance (both internationally and in Brazil) and PAD (as one of its donor agencies),

[10] A global human rights organisation focused on food security (see www.fian.org).

Christian Aid was also a "local" actor, and had staff mutually supporting these alliances at different levels. When FEACT Brasil launched a local campaign or petitioned the Brazilian government, Christian Aid would immediately feature as a signatory. When PAD launched a debate on an emerging theme (such as criminalisation of social movements, in the late 2010s), then through their multi-level involvement, Christian Aid could be both a mediating (leveraging) actor and a participant. The former official described how this multi-level involvement had supported “an entire advocacy campaign with the Brazilian government, with the embassies of the agencies' countries in Brasília, a visit to Geneva, to Norway, to Germany's Parliament; so it's this type of networking that I think is important for us.”

Learning power

The bringing together (within these relational-network-spaces) of a broader spectrum of those wishing to take action on shared issues also offered the potential for increased *learning power* from the diversity of experience, contexts and identities of those involved. Public engagement, leading to joining or forming networks of social activism, by itself is insufficient. It is not only a matter of having the people to get things done; it is also about knowing *how* to do it. Action may be taken at various scales, involving different dimensions (e.g., community organising, advocacy, participation in policy networks, social movement building, campaigning, media exposure, negotiating organisational aims and survival, promoting their views on Christian values in a pluricultural and postsecular environment). The complexity of undertaking concerted or coordinated action required a learning curve for most actors - whether those positioned on the donor or the receiving side of transnational connections. The former may be challenged because of the cultural and institutional intricacies of local contexts; the latter, because of the challenges of profile-raising in a secular environment, in the context of global religious pluralisation and local changes, and moving across boundaries and different scales. In both cases, learning became a pressing need for reasons of effectiveness but also for responding to unintended and uncontrolled conditions posed by the interconnected links between civil societies, states, multilateral bodies, and markets, as globalisation spread locally. Few felt fully ready for these challenges. How could they help others? How could easier access to cross-cultural and glocal experiences of collective action empower faith-based organisations seeking to make a difference? Networks and joint actions became opportunities for learning those skills,

alongside the actual outcomes sought for. Through forming relationships and opportunities for sharing ideas across borders between activists within movements, learning and models that have worked successfully in one context can be spread to other contexts.

However, the extent to which this learning power could be realised *depended on how able these networks were to engage with differences within them.* Common areas for differences, tensions and controversies included how Christian identities were operationalised within organisational practices; how denominational/ecumenical, Christian/secular and interfaith engagements were managed in practice; how minoritised groups were treated, and the extent to which they had a voice and say in shaping the resulting shared work. A Brazilian official of a British agency reflected on these challenges of working on global issues at local levels and connecting the two levels:

> We have been trying to make this connection. I can illustrate with some examples. For instance, the issue of transparency in the mining sector. There is a whole effort in the United Kingdom and the European Union on this. So, we tried to find out what was done. What is the strategy? How to approach Parliament? Which groups are connected, including in Brazil? We sought to identify them and this dialogue continues to this day. We are expanding this dialogue all the time.... So, what did we do? We went to London, gathered some NGOs there and went to pressure the Brazilian [foreign] minister there! We went to pressure him there in another circumstance, on the indigenous issue; we also asked [our British office] to pressure the Brazilian Embassy, stuff like that. So, there is this link. It doesn't always work!

How does the learning take place, including when encountering difficulties? There is a *pedagogy of participation* - which is activated through meetings, interpersonal sharing and communication, training sessions, observation of more experienced actors at work on concrete occasions. There are also *tools and resources* made available by more structured partners, or the network itself. These have become an asset that big organisations and networks have increasingly put together and made available to less experienced or resourced partners, especially where international organisations' direct funding has decreased.

But learning is also offered by local organisations and networks, whether or not based on resources produced by international partners. The "resources" or "publications" tabs on such groups' websites have become omnipresent. Through them briefings, toolkits, reports, policy papers, books, stories, training opportunities are provided or advertised for partners and beneficiaries, aimed at narrowing gaps in skills or awareness of critical issues. At an

international level, learning hubs have been put together by organisations - such as Tearfund (Tearfund Learn[11]), Christian Aid (Campaigns and Activism Resources[12]), ACT Alliance (ACTLearn[13]) - or networks - such as the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities[14] - covering a series of organisational, technical, and knowledge skills. Brazilian organisations have invested a lot on "formation"[15], which translates as in-person sessions or web resources to pass on skills, including theological and ethical ones to support a more robust positioning *vis-à-vis* secular partners and religious competitors or adversaries. This is something learned from the broader environment of NGO activism and international cooperation, beyond Christian organisations themselves.

Why talk of learning *power* to describe such initiatives? Because they are driven by understanding the need for informed action if effective advocacy, policy implementation or cultural change are to happen, involving constant reflexive adaptation and innovation in particular contexts to realise their aims. They are also, in the case of ecumenical or Christian organisations, sometimes driven by a desire to be informed by the theological outlooks and character of their own tradition as interpreted within the contemporary context (e.g. also see Loy's 2017 case study of Christian Aid and Freeman's 2020 case study of Tearfund respectively). This sometimes takes the form of a perceived need to draw certain lines of distinctiveness around faith identities or an aspired faith-based approach to social activism, in the context of secular state action and wider civil society or social movement-based activisms; however, the nature of this distinctiveness, as well as whether this contributes to inclusion or division, remains highly contested in extensive wider literature on particular contexts; e.g. see Johnsen 2014; Pathak and McGhee, 2015; Wilkinson, 2020).

Transnational ecumenical engagements are particularly interesting to study in this regard, being often at the interface of action informed by a broad Christian worldview whilst interacting with diverse contextual Christian interpretations (and often other faiths and secular actors) across scales of action. Most of these organisations have long abandoned a

[11] See https://learn.tearfund.org. Accessed on 20 Dec 2023.
[12] See https://www.christianaid.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/campaigns-resources-hub. Accessed on 20 Dec 2023.
[13] See https://fabo.org/act. Accessed on 20 Dec 2023.
[14] See https://jliflc.com/about-jli-learning-hubs. Accessed on 20 Dec 2023.
[15] See, for instance, CESE (https://www.cese.org.br/estrategias-de-acao/formacao), INESC (https://inesc.org.br/acoes/formacoes), and CIMI (https://cimi.org.br/cfvc).

voluntaristic approach to collective or public action, moved by motivation and values alone. They acknowledge the power-knowledge dynamics of contemporary societies and have, even if grudgingly or costly, taken steps to combine beliefs, demands, and attending to formal and technical requirements to be part of the strategic 'games' they need to play to survive and impact change. The resultant learning connects tightly with leveraging and resourcing power, as learning through networked engagement may lead to greater empowerment in the struggle for visibility, recognition, and capacity to influence relevant structures and stakeholders, at different levels (e.g. as also recognised in Orton and Barclay, 2020).

Learning is also a strategy for negotiating differences: learning about those one relates to may give better access to them; learning about what really makes them different and sometimes reactive to one's line of action (whether themes, identity, or methodologies) can help fine-tune approaches and expectations, hopefully rendering more feasible the tasks at hand. This assumes that some roots of conflicts and misunderstandings lie in misconceptions and lack of insight on other peoples' forms of life or other organisations' cultures.

So, learning power (or power through learning) also has limits. Some conflicts may have deeper roots and will not be addressed through such practices, as reflected on by one British ecumenical worker whose organisation operated across multiple countries:

> I think there's conflict. I think for some there is a sense of, you know, 'we all know what a good outcome would be'. That sense of balance of gender, the push-pull works in a way that there's a win-win for everybody. That's what we seem to get to. And together we move forward with the strengths of the church, the prophetic voice of the church, the support of the movement behind it, to see change for the poorest people. That's the ambition. Now, on the way, you know, there are going to be snags, there are going to be tensions, there's going to be a place where you just have a different understanding, a different position, and there are some really thorny issues.

They subsequently discussed the importance of tackling climate change as a "man-made catastrophe", whilst encountering resistance in some churches' attitudes and theologies:

> There are some elements of the church who say: 'this is just the outworking of [the book of] Revelation. This is how it's supposed to be, you know. It is a sign of the times.' So, our response is: 'so, what are we going to do? We can play an end in: can we reverse it? Can we slow it? Can we stop it?' That for us is a living dialogue. For some elements of the church, that's not a living dialogue. It is a sign of 'can you get yourself ready? Christ is coming.' That's

> the end of the story. There's a tension there. So, how do you keep people in dialogue to say: 'do you start with: "well, let's be hopeful, you know, let's be hopeful that, you know, we can still do something". You know, we can throw our hands in the air, and do nothing. Or we can do something. So, what is it we should do?' That's where our energies are.

But there may be times when learning about the other only leads to the conclusion that one cannot bring them on board. Differences can be more decisive and divisive than the desire to create bridges and articulations. In such cases, ways may be parted. One may be before an adversary that one decides must be confronted or neutralised, not brought near. There may be differences emerging during joint actions, as new dimensions emerge that highlight clashing views or strategic preferences. Again, these situations may not be smoothed over by learning in a converging and alliance-forming way. Learning can, then, provide entry points for the more conflictual aspects of activism, where lines are drawn and disputes abound.

For example, one respondent from an international evangelical organisation described having "an interesting conversation with a partner in Brazil and I was saying, 'look, there, the Pentecostals, they're massive in numbers and they're so rich here in Brazil, you know, and if our theory of change is that we need to get momentum in the church behind, you know, bringing social transformation, surely we need the Pentecostals on board'." However, this was not able to be realised:

> So if we think about prosperity gospel... within Nigeria and also within Brazil and in quite a few countries that we work in, there a very large proportion of the church would be sort of neo-pentecostal, you know, with a strong element of prosperity gospel. And [our organisation] just does not work with them. There have been attempts, but I think that [our organisation] has come to the point where there are just not enough aligned values. Their theology is just too different to make it work. We certainly work with, you know, sort of old style Pentecostals, like Pentecostal Assemblies of God would be, like, a partner. But when you come to the prosperity gospel and the neo-pentecostals, we don't really work with them. They are not open to it. And even when we've sort of made some approaches and started conversations, it just seems to be so apparent that we're coming from a completely different standpoint.

Attempts to find a 'cross-over person' within these neo-pentecostal congregations in that context who might 'give us traction' and 'understand our issues' were explored, but to no avail, resulting in the conclusion that:

> It wasn't going to happen and I needed to stop. Stop talking about it... That is, you know, they're the kind of people who we just cannot work with, right? There's just no common ground. So, it's interesting and it's a conversation we have a lot internally, but I think at the

> moment what we're thinking is, when it comes to the prosperity gospel, it is extraordinarily hard to work with them in programmes or in advocacy. We just don't share the same theology.

However, this remained a live conversation in the organisation, with some asking:

> 'Is there somewhere where we can, you know, where we go backwards a couple of steps and say, "okay, at the moment we can't work with them where they are, but where can we start to talk about theology with them, when, you know, and where they're forming their theology? Where can we get in, and start to question some of this prosperity gospel?"' And so we have a theologian networks team and I think they are thinking more along those lines.

Others reflected on different issues which were divisive, deciding sometimes to recognise differences and not to take a position on certain issues; e.g. the respondent from Green Christian recognised conflicts within the green movement over issues like nuclear power, genetically-modified crops, bio-mass power stations, where members were in different camps, concluding that "not everybody is gonna agree with everything". Others acknowledged different approaches, understandings and positions on the very issues that prompt coordinated action. Religious, ideological, gender, sexuality and cultural differences generated debates, variously requiring deliberation and negotiation, the drawing of lines among potential and actual partners, and/or sometimes simply avoidance or impasses. As a Brazilian secular NGO leader commented:

> We cannot [literally translated, have not been able to] properly dialogue with these agendas. So the ethnic issue cannot properly dialogue with the racial issue, with the gender issue, with the LGBT issue, with the youth issue, with the class dimension. You can't reach a better understanding of this process. So, in the end everything is very fragmented. It seems like everyone stands in their own ghetto, asserting their agenda and don't realise that this is all part of the same political process, you know?

For some Brazilian organisations, their ecumenical identity and learning was central to their experiences of seeking to tackle religious intolerance (and promote religious freedom for minorities) as well as sexual politics with both Brazilian and wider Latin American partners:

> In terms of the struggle (...) on the symbolic, cultural-symbolic level, I think there has been [an impact on Latin American partners]. For example, all the mobilisation around issues of religious intolerance - religious freedom and religious intolerance -, the issue of homophobia, I think we have had some impact. Because, for example, in the case of Brazil, Koinonia was the first ecumenical organisation to position itself very clearly on the issue of [sexual] relationships, overcoming stigmas, discrimination, in relation to AIDS, religion and AIDS. And also the issue of religious intolerance… We took a lot of beatings from… sectors of the church, but we thought this was important. It's been, more or less, 15 years since we've started. There was practically no talk about religious intolerance in Brazil. It was said that, in Brazil, there was no religious intolerance. We managed to show that there is! And, in the

> case of other Latin American countries, the same applies. We found ecumenical organisations that had similar concerns, but they hadn't yet gone out into the field. To encourage them, we worked together in this direction. So, I think that this issue of religious intolerance is emerging as an important topic... The topic already existed! But it is becoming visible through the action of several ecumenical organisations. The issue of sexual and reproductive rights, too! in this case it is an attempt... [to] almost counter-information as regards the advance of the religious right, in defence of a non-theocratic State.

As these quotations illustrate, for ecumenical organisations, the question of how to engage with differences (both between those who identify as Christian and in relation to wider actors) becomes central to the different strategies they adopt, and to the relationships and networks they choose to form, maintain or change.

Combining forms of power across diversity: Connecting nested layers of networks within and across scales of ecumenical action

Combining and summarising the empirical and theoretical analysis across the two articles within this series, we now draw together the significance of how these different forms of power interact within nested relational networks across scales and differences. While one of our dimensions of analysis is each country's ecumenical environment and dynamics, another is *how ecumenical perceptions and activities articulate glocal and local scales* to promote broader impact. We began in the first article by highlighting contrasting pictures of ecumenism in a context of crisis or at least strong realignment of Christianity in the UK, and in a context of marginal groups, denominationally dispersed but connected through ecumenical umbrellas that strongly rely on transnational links, in Brazil. In this context, we have explored how strategies of connection within and between these contexts both reproduce known forms of network-building and seek to develop and sustain local- and global-oriented action. Moreover, such dynamics create multiple overlaps among many of the studied organisations, and beyond. To exemplify, while Christian Aid, the Anglican Alliance, Tearfund, World Vision, CLAI and ACT Alliance are members of the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities, they also relate "downwards" to more specific networks, or even lead some of those. Christian Aid is a member of ACT Alliance and was until recently also a member of FEACT and PAD, in Brazil. Brazilian organisations such as CESE, Koinonia, and the Lutheran Diaconal Foundation are linked "upwards" to ACT Alliance, and "horizontally" participate in FEACT and PAD. Secular NGOs partnering with European agencies, such as INESC, also participate in PAD. In the UK, Christian Aid, CAFOD, Tearfund, World Vision UK, and A Rocha UK are members of Churches Together in England.

Thus, to operate effectively across these scales, many respondents had responded by creating or nesting networks so that local, smaller-scale activities and groups may become part of complex forms of transnational action without losing their particular references. The rapidly-changing context transforming the spaces and relations within this work have led to a deeper investment in network-building or joining networks, whilst changing the organisations themselves in the process.

One important aspect of this involves *internal relationships between branches of international organisations*, particularly within shifting global and funding dynamics. Concerns expressed included those over where the balance of power lies in determining agendas, approaches and actions, and who is learning from whom where differences arise. Some respondents clearly reflected on how local issues and demands could get picked up and honoured by the wider organisation, including within strategic planning and global advocacy work (e.g. A Rocha, PAD, Christian Aid). The shortage of funding from international cooperation (whether governmental or non-governmental) towards the South, including reductions arising from redirection of funding and focus elsewhere from Latin America, seriously impacted Latin American NGOs. As Northern NGOs and funding bodies felt the impact in their own countries, several of them adopted more incisive forms of advocacy and fund-raising rationales. These included opening up to local partners in Brazil to highlight neglected needs and strategic priorities outside Northern agendas. Several interviewees stressed these developments, as rebalancing or creating more room for negotiations to broaden the scope and autonomy of Brazilian partners in their links with UK donors. These changes also deepened their connections around key local issues, enriching advocacy with authentic voices from the South. The whole process required significant negotiation, persuasion, and pressure from both sides. PAD and the Brazilian ACT Alliance Forum are telling cases of such dynamics, whilst they were also found among secular organisations receiving ecumenical funds for their projects (or administrative structures - something multilateral or governmental cooperation would no longer grant). For example, INESC as an important Brazilian human rights and public budget advocacy NGO benefited from ecumenical support (receiving funding from Christian Aid until 2019 and continuing to

receive funding from Swiss and German ecumenical donors)[16]. A member of its board commented:

> Most [agencies] began to be challenged in their own countries, too, about what they were doing. And they also began to be challenged in order to become political subjects, in their countries, in their spaces, too, taking stands, building pressure, and so on. Then, we also abandoned that agency model of raising funds in different ways and passing them on, for third world countries to carry out "little projects".... And the agencies, too, in order to justify their existence, their legitimacy in their own societies, had to begin to have a political role in their countries....
>
> Ecumenicals, they have a more humanised understanding of the relationship, you know? They are not so stressed about deadlines, timelines, let me put it that way.... In other words, they are agencies that understand more about the process as a whole. While others, like it or not, some of them are getting into this sort of business-oriented profile, you know? Defining the product, deadlines, outcomes... something sort of almost mechanical, right?, which disregards the whole question of process, that a large part of our contribution is about process, which is what lasts, right?… These are very different conceptions...

These more dialogical relationships between ecumenical actors were seen as being part of a process of transforming the power dynamics of traditional funding processes by enabling intricate communication and action across multi-level platforms. Such dialogue involved creating processes and spaces for involving others, as a Brazilian official at Christian Aid's former national office illustrated:

> [A] big moment of negotiation has been the issue of the Ecumenical Coalitions during World Social Forums.... For example, our experience with the Ecumenical Coalition at Rio+20 was a bit like this process and in my opinion it was quite successful. Because there was the Thematic [World] Social Forum, in January last year. Then, articulations between the ACT Brazil Forum, agencies, then, for the first time, Geneva[17]…. So, there are several levels, right? Sometimes, for example, Brazil and London, we are also together negotiating with Geneva.... I think it was the first time that the Anglican Alliance also effectively participated in this process. It was quite interesting. And we had a super broad coalition: you had the traditional agencies - Christian Aid, Bread for the World, the Norwegians, the Swedes, the Danes, the Swiss, the traditional people of the Protestant world, the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance- EAA, the World Council of Churches, ACT Secretariat, the Lutheran World Federation and, for the first time, also CIDSE, the Catholics, who also participated in monthly Skype meetings to organise things, to share spaces... And I think it was a learning experience on how to build something. Of course, with a lot of commitment from Koinonia, because they were in Rio de Janeiro. So, without them things wouldn't work. We were also responsible for helping with logistics. So, I think these are negotiations that take time. I think

[16] INESC stands for Institute for Socio-Economic Studies, and is based in Brasilia. Though it has always been a secular organisation, INESC has been closely linked to many of the ecumenical networks and initiatives studied here, from both a Brazilian and transnational perspective, such as Christian Aid, PAD, ACT Alliance Brazil Forum, Koinonia, Cese, the National Council of Churches (Conic), Cafod, and Caritas Brazil. For more on it, see www.inesc.org.br.

[17] This may be referring to the World Council of Churches and ACT Alliance, based in Geneva.

that, sometimes, we don't have the time needed for these articulations.

The issue of limited time to create wider connections particularly affected respondents from smaller organisations (e.g. A Rocha, Refugee Support Network or Green Christian), where spending this time could draw them away from local engagement and development. Participation by smaller or more confessional groups in wider (national and transnational) networks may also lead to enhanced contact with people from other minority groups and their movements. Such contacts across differences may raise mutual awareness but also potentially create challenges for such religious organisations around questions and forms of identity that are beyond the reach of their activities and focus, particularly in the context of limited time and resources. This occurred within what respondents typically saw as a changing attitude towards religious organisations from secular ones, being more open to engagement. For example, one World Vision UK officer described a process over the last ten or fifteen years of perceptions moving from religion being something to be "wary" and "suspicious" of, and "to be feared", through a more instrumental engagement to a more holistic engagement with their wider social role.

This complex picture overall highlights how ecumenism contributes insights into how *identity and difference are relationally bound and mutually challenging*. These insights may be found both in ecumenism's attempts to bring about church unity where dispersion, suspicion and/or self-protection abound, and in ecumenism's attempts to promote from a Christian perspective social change that is open to religious, social, cultural and political differences. In practice, ecumenical social action initiatives may include joint membership, mutual assistance, pooling resources to achieve mutual aims, sharing experiences, and fighting common challenges or adversaries. Within our first article, we highlighted previous literature debates over how wide the definition of 'ecumenism' may usefully stretch in practice, particularly in relation to actors from other faith or secular perspectives. Within the research outlined in the current article, the scope of such relationships reached both across internal Christian divisions and often more broadly across secular/religious and interreligious divides. Rather than a uniformity of wider engagement, we have shown empirically how practitioners reflexively navigated the complex resulting connections and deployed different forms of relational power precisely through nuanced connections across

different identities and scales. In some instances, respondents found it easier to bridge secular/religious boundaries than to bridge divisions between those nominally sharing a Christian identity who differed over theological interpretations or positions on socio-political issues. In terms of limitations, we recognise this research does not provide evidence about how wider actors understood these relationships of forms of action, or whether those with whom our ecumenical respondents engaged would necessarily identify with the concept and label of being involved in ecumenical social action in the same way that our respondents did. Similarly, other groups and networks may identify themselves as speaking from a Christian perspective whilst strongly disagreeing with the ecumenical activists' views in this study on particular issues and seeking to recruit Christians and churches to their position across denominations. We are aware that voices such as these were not necessarily engaged in this study, and would require further research to reach, whilst having chosen the respondents we did in line with their identification with the broader ecumenical movement as outlined in our methodological rationale earlier.

Conclusion

No analysis of contemporary forms of civil society activism over the last two hundred years would be complete that ignores the currents and undercurrents of local and translocal mobilisation, articulation, and public engagement originating in religious identification. Within this, a bustling world of social and political connections are constantly being made and remade among religious actors and between them and secular ones, of which those studied in this article are only part. Across this two-part article series, we have illustrated how connections in ecumenical social activism originating from Christian ecumenical movements can play a significant and influential role within wider developing glocal relationships and movements for change. At the same time, such forms of activism are caught up in wider developments including technological, political and institutional trends that allowed for communication, travel, mobilisation, and advocacy to disseminate across borders and to impact global, national and local organisations. By focusing innovatively on the perspectives of those involved in ecumenical social activism across the Brazilian and/or British contexts, this research explored their perceptions of the complexities when creating and shaping connections between local and global, secular and religious, citizen-based mobilisations and institutional politics, etc.

The research found that building, expanding, and sustaining networks has become a crucial and widespread strategy for respondents involved in Christian ecumenical social activism to promote change at various levels, seeking to bypass constraints of size, outreach, and public profile through connecting different types and levels of action across different groups and contexts. Our analysis of these connections showed practitioners deploying narratives of convening, mobilising, leveraging/resourcing, agenda-setting/influencing and learning forms of power within these networks, through reflexively managing similarities and differences within and across scales in support of their aims. These findings resonate with broader influential theoretical analyses of how activists for social change use power in different dimensions (including Gaventa's 2006 'power cube' analysis and broader different understandings of power within Lukes, 2021) to develop recent literature debates over how religion and social movements interact (e.g. Snow and Beyerlein, 2019). They provide innovative contextual insights to compare with emerging wider literature on how related networks and organisations mobilise different actors (e.g. Daehnhardt, 2020), and connect them together across different local, national and global levels (e.g. Kraft and Wilkinson, 2020). Furthermore, they evidence related challenges, tensions and opportunities experienced, including within and between organisations engaged in ecumenical diakonia internationally (Ampony et al, 2021; World Council of Churches/ACT Alliance, 2022).

Instrumentally, engaging in ecumenical relationships and networks across scales and differences enabled respondents to seek to: (a) more effectively create and convene spaces for their key issues of concern to be seen, heard and talked over; and (b) gather support for their local actions and struggles and raise their own profile by "going global" whilst addressing the glocal nature of issues together through collective mobilisation and co-ordinated action across scales. Such responses were particularly important for respondents in responding to changes in global structures and funding priorities, including increasingly scarce international funding in Brazil, and also local challenges including changing religious demographics such as declining Christian affiliation in Britain.

However, practitioners' rationales often extended beyond instrumental reasons: their narratives highlighted how ecumenical identities intrinsically valued building connections. Their motif of unity (whilst recognising diversity and the disconcerting experience of difference) drives them to seek ways in which things can be done collaboratively to further

aims such as peace, justice, care of nature and enjoyment of human dignity and diversity. So, investment in - and the ordeals of - relationships are at the heart of how these practitioners and organisations see their own place in the world. Pragmatically, reflexive choices continued to be made about who to prioritise relationships with, and how to conduct them. Interview narratives demonstrated how relationships, when associated with strategic aims, can both empower and reflect wider tensions, asymmetries and sometimes conflicts with others. Whilst questions remained about how to address challenges of navigating differences within their own fold, and where to draw a line of separation with others beyond who might oppose their aims, network spaces provided key points of interaction where different configurations could sometimes be worked out and points of shared interests explored across local and wider levels. Even respondents in organisations that didn't operate beyond local or national borders recognised indirect benefits from the existence of wider networks and the overlaps or nesting between different network relationships.

Reflexively managing complex interactions between similarity and difference within these relational-network-spaces proved to be central to respondents' narratives of how they sought to generate power for change through engaging in key processes of convening, representation, mobilisation, influencing, leveraging and learning. Given the differences and tensions experienced within these processes, finding ways to support enhanced learning across different perspectives and contexts within these relational-network-spaces became increasingly important. The analysis in this article suggests that such learning is further enhanced when taking into account minoritized and less powerful voices, whilst acknowledging and engaging with different religious and secular perspectives and identities. Indeed, building relationships and learning across such differences can be seen as central to them achieving their ecumenical aims.

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