

Logistics of Resistance— Investigating Supply Chain Practices in Social Movements

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Abstract

This article explores the concept of logistics of resistance by analyzing how social movements, faced with limited resources and a surveillance-heavy environment, manage to optimize their collective actions through advanced digital tools and innovative logistical strategies. Drawing on concrete examples such as the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street protests of 2011 and the Standing Rock resistance of 2016–2017, the goal is to illustrate how secure communication applications and social networks enable the logistical coordination of participants. The contribution also highlights key principles such as flexibility, frugal innovation, and community mobilization, which, although emerging in an activist context, offer key lessons for businesses. By examining the logistics of resistance, the author identifies potential ways to strengthen organizational resilience while promoting more ethical, inclusive, and sustainable corporate engagement within global supply chains, particularly in navigating unforeseen challenges and ensuring long-term sustainability in a rapidly evolving, interconnected global economy.

Keywords: Activism, Community mobilization, Digital tools, Frugal innovation, Information systems, Logistics of resistance, Resilience, Social movements.

1. Introduction

In 2011, during the Occupy Wall Street movement, managing the flow of food, medicine, and equipment became critical to sustaining the protest over time. Images of tents, communal meals, and the distribution of essential supplies were regularly featured in the media, emphasizing the vital role of logistical organization in social movements. However, despite its importance to the movement's survival, logistics largely operated in the background, overshadowed by the political activism that defined Occupy Wall Street (Calhoun, 2013). This example highlights a frequently overlooked but crucial aspect of social movements: the logistics of resistance. While the effective management of human and material resources is integral to the success of social movements, it remains paradoxically underexplored in the academic literature on activism. This article seeks to address this gap by demonstrating how the logistics of resistance serve as a strategic lever for the success of collective action. While most research on social movements emphasizes ideological, organizational, or media-related aspects of mobilizations (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016), logistics—though fundamental—has not received the attention it truly deserves, despite being a cornerstone of successful activism.

Social movements, whether peaceful or violent, often unfold in environments characterized by significant uncertainty regarding the sustainability, scale, and intensity of mobilization over time, all while operating with limited resources. In response to these challenges, activists develop remarkably agile logistical strategies grounded in adaptability, participatory management of human resources, and the creative use of available tools. The organizational model relies heavily on principles of collaboration, innovation, and responsiveness, particularly when confronted with the unpredictable actions of political authorities. Paradoxically, the logistics of resistance offers valuable insights for companies facing similar challenges, as, like social movements, they must demonstrate agility and resilience in an era of increasing economic and operational uncertainty. The originality of my contribution lies in highlighting the unexpected interconnection between these seemingly distinct domains: social activism and commercial supply chains. The central hypothesis proposed is that the logistics of resistance represents a managerial approach worth studying, not only for its unique characteristics but also for the transferable lessons it provides across sectors, particularly in terms of resource optimization, flow management, and organizational resilience.

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This exploratory paper is organized as follows: Section 2 examines how social movements leverage logistics to sustain their collective actions, focusing on resource planning, management processes, and the establishment of logistical hubs that centralize and efficiently deliver the goods and services essential for mobilization. The analysis underscores the critical role of a flexible and adaptive logistics of resistance in overcoming unforeseen challenges. Section 3 delves into the role of digital tools in formalizing the logistics of resistance, including messaging platforms and social networks, which enhance coordination and responsiveness. Finally, Section 4 explores how the principles of logistics of resistance—flexibility, community mobilization, and frugal innovation—can inform corporate practices, offering valuable insights for improving the resilience and efficiency of commercial supply chains. In short, my contribution seeks to illuminate a relatively underexamined field of research, one that holds significant relevance in development studies. By investigating the interplay between social movement dynamics and main logistical principles, it provides a deeper understanding of how these frameworks influence both economic and organizational practices.

2. Activism in Action—The Hidden Logistics Powering Social Movements

Organizing a protest or direct action demands meticulous management of human, material, and informational resources. These logistical elements, though often invisible to external observers (Paché, 2023), form the critical backbone of a social movement's effectiveness, sustainability, and resilience. Like commercial logistics management, social activists must plan and coordinate complex flows to achieve their political objectives. Additionally, social movements are adept at disrupting critical supply chains to amplify the impact of their actions, whether through blockades or occupations of public and private spaces (Sowers *et al.*, 2017). For instance, in France during the fall of 2018, the Yellow Vest movement targeted key locations such as traffic circles, distribution warehouses, and oil depots to disrupt economic activity (see Box 1). Their efforts ultimately forced President Emmanuel Macron to abandon his proposed fuel tax increase (Driscoll, 2023). Sustaining these blockades required careful coordination across three key dimensions: participant rotation, the provision of materials and food, and effective communication between activist groups. These elements, to varying degrees, underpin the logistical strategies of numerous social movements across Western nations.

Box 1. France in the throes of the Yellow Vest movement at the end of 2018

The Yellow Vest movement was a protest that emerged in France in late 2018 and ended in early 2019, primarily in response to rising fuel taxes. Initially made up of citizens from rural and suburban areas, the movement quickly expanded to include broader demands for tax justice, purchasing power, and social equality. A defining feature of the Yellow Vest was its decentralized structure, with no single leader, which made their actions highly fluid and difficult to counter. Their strategy involved disrupting supply flows, relying on a logistics of resistance that the activists themselves were largely unaware of. Coordinating primarily through social networks, the Yellow Vest movement adapted in real time to unfolding events, making it challenging for political authorities and police forces to respond in a coordinated manner. This form of spontaneous resistance remains deeply embedded in France's collective consciousness, even six years after the movement's conclusion.

Source: Adapted from *Le Monde*, November 19, 2018, and *La Dépêche*, November 26, 2018.

2.1 Coordinating Transport and Resource Planning

One of the primary logistical challenges faced by social activists is coordinating the transport of participants. For large-scale events, such as global climate marches, organizing attendees from various regions of a country—or even across continents—requires careful planning to prevent logistical bottlenecks. This involves arranging carpooling systems, chartering buses or trains, and sometimes coordinating large-scale convoys, such as those seen in migrant caravans or trade union processions. Logistical considerations extend beyond people to include the materials needed for actions, such as banners, megaphones, or specialized equipment. Simultaneously, managing supplies poses a similarly critical challenge, as mobilizations risk faltering prematurely without adequate provisions. During extended protests like Occupy Wall Street, the endurance of urban camps across several U.S. cities relied heavily on well-orchestrated logistics to meet daily needs (Hammond, 2015), such as drinking water and blankets. For instance, the camp in Zuccotti Park, New York City, operated from mid-September to mid-November 2011, until the NYPD cleared the park during an overnight eviction on November 14–15.

2.2 Establishing Logistical Hubs

Logistical hubs are essential for the organization and efficient operation of both social movements and global value chains (Amador & Cabral, 2016). These hubs centralize resources from diverse origins and coordinate their delivery to target destinations with precision. A notable example of their significance is evident in the Standing Rock protests of 2016–2017, which opposed the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline by Energy Transfer Partners. Supported by figures such as Bernie Sanders and Neil Young, the protests were anchored by indigenous

activists and their allies at camps like Oceti Sakowin and Sacred Stone. These camps functioned as robust logistical centers, receiving supplies from across the United States and Canada (see Illustration 1). They facilitated accommodation in weather-resistant tents and stocked essential winter clothing, food, and medical supplies to sustain participants in extreme conditions (Estes, 2019/2024). Through well-organized redistribution processes, these hubs ensured the effective management of resources, enabling the mobilization to persist for several months. Although the Dakota Access Pipeline was eventually commissioned and now transports crude oil, the logistical infrastructure at Standing Rock remains a powerful testament to the strategic role of logistics in social resistance.

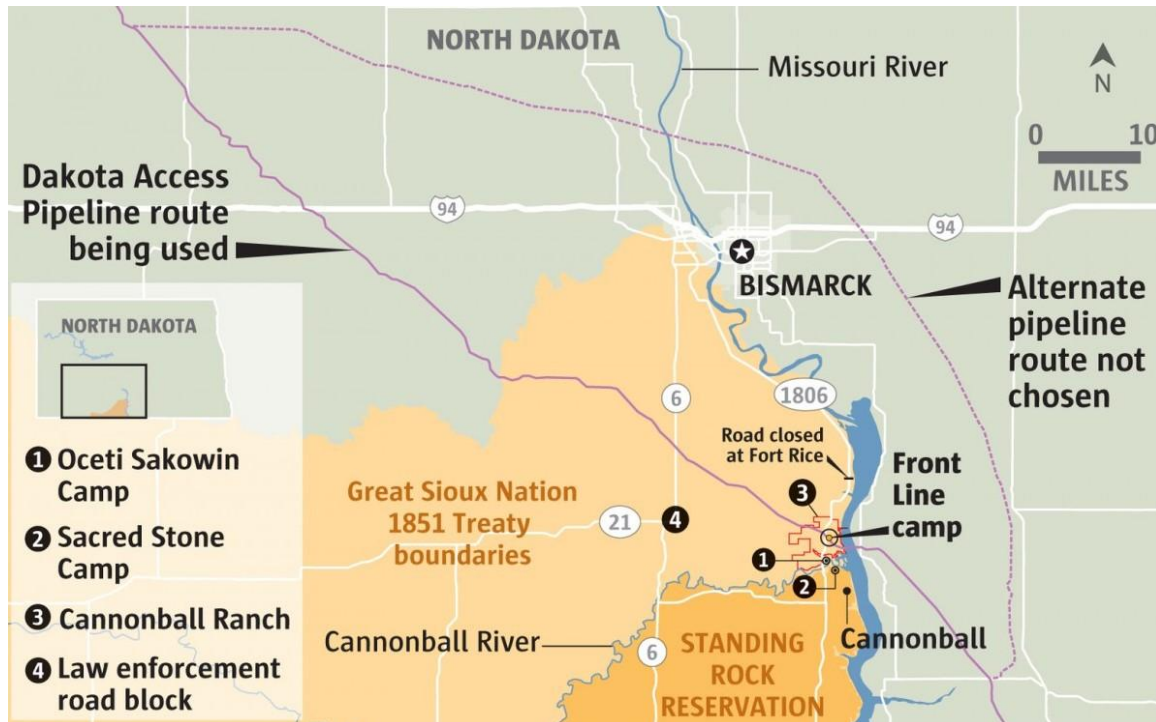


Illustration 1. Geography of resistance at Standing Rock
 Source: <https://sites.evergreen.edu/> (Accessed September 10, 2024).

2.3 Adapting Logistical Practices in an Uncertain Environment

Social movements evolve in unstable environments, characterized by significant uncertainty and rapidly changing economic conditions (Buechler, 1999). This instability arises from police or military intervention, shifts in public opinion, legal restrictions, or unexpected climatic events. In response to these variables, social movements must exhibit substantial logistical flexibility to ensure the fluidity and continuity of their actions. For instance, during impromptu protests or traffic circle blockades, the ability to swiftly mobilize groups while securing essential materials (such as food, communication tools, or first aid supplies) can determine whether an action succeeds or fails. The importance of responsiveness in operations management underscores the critical role of agile processes within the logistics of resistance, demonstrating a proven ability to adapt quickly to unforeseen circumstances. Social movements, confronted with sudden shifts in participants, resources, and targets, serve as innovative models of resilience in the face of uncertainty, continually adjusting their strategies to maintain momentum, achieve goals, and overcome obstacles. This organizational agility highlights the movement's strength in navigating complexity and maintaining sustained actions in a constantly evolving environment.

2.4 Empowering Communities

The logistics of resistance is inherently participatory because, unlike businesses, where hierarchy often enforces a rigid structure, activist mobilizations depend on horizontal collaboration and a negotiated sharing of responsibilities. This approach empowers participants and strengthens their commitment (Jiang & Bowen, 2011). At Standing Rock, for instance, volunteers were encouraged to contribute to the mobilization based on their skills, whether in stock management, meal preparation, or first-aid coordination. The participatory inclusion in logistical processes not only enhanced camp efficiency but also strengthened community ties, which are crucial for maintaining participant motivation and morale over the long term. The examples of Standing Rock and Occupy Wall Street emphasize that the logistics of resistance is not just about optimizing material flows; it also embodies a philosophy of collective management, where each participant plays an active, collaborative role in ensuring the success of the movement. This model serves as a powerful source of inspiration for humanitarian organizations

striving to improve their resilience and operational effectiveness when facing complex, unpredictable challenges (Bealt & Mansouri, 2018). By promoting shared leadership, it encourages an empowering, inclusive environment, essential for lasting engagement and success.

3. Digital Tools—Catalysts for the Logistics of Resistance

Whether in logistical bases dedicated to protracted actions or during one-off events, the logistics of resistance demonstrates how the principles of coordination, adaptability, and resourcefulness can be reinterpreted in militant contexts to turn limited resources into powerful drivers of collective action. However, such collective action is impossible without advanced information systems (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014). The digital revolution has fundamentally transformed the way social movements organize, offering powerful tools to optimize their logistics of resistance. In environments heavily monitored and constrained by limited resources, advanced information systems enable efficient coordination, secure communication, and enhanced responsiveness. Digital tools—whether messaging platforms, collaborative management software, or social networks—now play an indispensable role as catalysts for the logistics of resistance, amplifying the impact of actions while ensuring their success amid instability, increased surveillance, and unpredictable political climates. These tools not only streamline logistics but also foster stronger networks of solidarity, allowing movements to scale quickly and remain adaptable, even in the face of rapid political shifts and unexpected opposition.

3.1 Instantaneous Communication

Applications like Signal, Telegram, and WhatsApp have become indispensable tools for social activists, providing instant, secure, and encrypted communication solutions (Milan & Barbosa, 2020). Their ability to ensure the confidentiality of communications is vital in environments where surveillance by police or military forces poses a significant risk of arrest and imprisonment. These platforms allow organizers to share sensitive information swiftly and discreetly, particularly regarding protest routes, meeting points, or action instructions, while minimizing the risk of interception. For instance, during the 2019 pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, Telegram played a pivotal role in enabling the real time dissemination of instructions to activists, allowing them to coordinate large-scale actions, respond quickly to the movements of law enforcement, and adapt to rapidly changing circumstances (Urman *et al.*, 2021) (see Box 2). The organizational flexibility made possible by digital tools provides a crucial strategic advantage, especially in contexts where the ability to respond swiftly can determine the success or failure of a large-scale activist mobilization, enhancing their overall impact and resilience in the face of opposition.

Box 2. Occupation of Hong Kong International Airport

In 2019, Hong Kong protesters had no centralized leader, but they did have a platform: Telegram. The movement's most emblematic action, the occupation of the Hong Kong International Airport, was conceived and coordinated through this social network. The idea emerged in a Telegram group at 8:50 pm on August 11, 2019, following a photograph of an injured participant. A debate quickly ensued on Telegram, discussing the pros and cons of the occupation. Supporters argued that it would severely disrupt the local economy, while skeptics feared it would tarnish the movement's image abroad. After just over an hour of deliberation, at 10:02 p.m., the Telegram group administrator called for a poll. The result was clear: 79% of members favored occupying the airport. By 1 a.m. that night, the first flyers were circulating in Telegram groups, and by 4 p.m., Hong Kong International Airport announced the cancellation of all flights, which would remain grounded for two days. Who organized this operation? The responsibilities were so diffuse that the Hong Kong government could not pinpoint anyone to blame.

Source: Adapted from <https://lanetscouade.com/> (Accessed April 16, 2024).

3.2 Social Networks

Social networks, such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram, play a crucial logistical role beyond simply facilitating mobilization. These platforms enable real time information to be disseminated to a broad audience, significantly streamlining protest organization. During the Arab Spring in 2011, for instance, posts on Twitter (X) and Facebook kept activists informed of changes to rally locations or security measures in response to unfolding events (Khondker, 2011; Arafa & Armstrong, 2016). Social networks were also instrumental in coordinating the distribution of material resources—such as water, medicine, and equipment—by connecting donors with activists on the ground. Additionally, these platforms provide activist movements with enhanced visibility, drawing attention from the media, international supporters, and global sympathizers, which can generate key logistical support in the form of donations, materials, and expertise. The ability of activist movements to integrate digital tools into the logistics of resistance exemplifies how they leverage global connectivity to overcome local barriers while optimizing coordination amid rapidly changing conditions. Research by McKeon & Gitomer

(2019) in New Jersey on social media protest tactics reveals that most posts are geared toward sharing information for planning and coordinating protests.

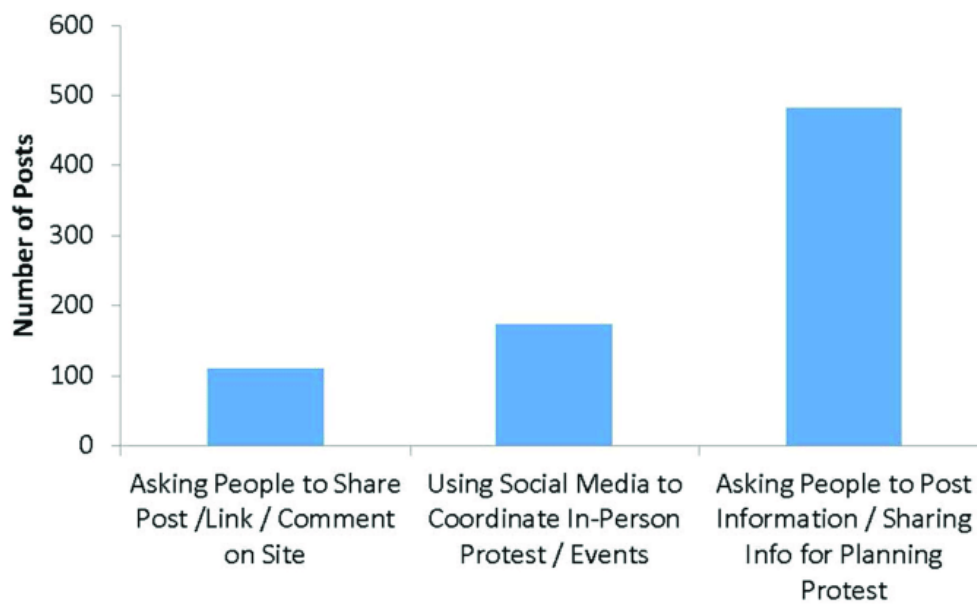


Illustration 2. Types of social media protest tactics
Source: McKeon & Gitomer (2019).

3.4 Drivers and Barriers

One of the key advantages of digital tools is their ability to provide organizational agility in unpredictable environments (Ononiwu *et al.*, 2024). As previously mentioned, social movements often operate in contexts of high uncertainty, where plans must be rapidly adjusted. Digital technologies enable activists to respond in real time to unexpected events, from changes in a march's route to escalating tensions with authorities. This agility is a critical asset in maintaining the cohesion and effectiveness of actions, even when facing unforeseen obstacles. However, the use of digital tools is not without risks and limitations. While communication platforms are designed to prioritize confidentiality, they are not completely impervious to breaches. Political authorities can infiltrate groups or monitor social networks to anticipate the actions of social movements (Earl *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, an over-reliance on these technologies can expose movements to vulnerabilities in the event of Internet outages or technical failures. To address these risks, some movements are adopting hybrid strategies that combine digital tools with traditional communication methods (Little, 2016), such as physical messages or visual signals.

4. Key Lessons from the Logistics of Resistance

As Illustration 3 from Brannen *et al.*'s (2020) research indicates, the 2010s saw a surge in political protests, making the analysis of the logistics of resistance especially relevant. Although developed in the context of protest and struggle, the logistics of resistance offers universal lessons that extend far beyond the activist framework. Conceived under severe constraints such as limited resources, emergency situations, and often adverse conditions, it highlights fundamental principles like flexibility, frugal innovation, and collective mobilization. These principles are not confined to social movements but are also increasingly valuable in other sectors. Managing resources as effectively as possible, adjusting swiftly to unforeseen events on the ground, and uniting people around a common goal are all core competencies in today's complex, volatile, and unpredictable business world, or even "chaotic" as Federici & Gandolfo (2014) point out. For companies, integrating these key lessons can strengthen their resilience, enhance their agility, and equip them to face unpredictable challenges, all while leveraging proven models developed in social activism contexts.

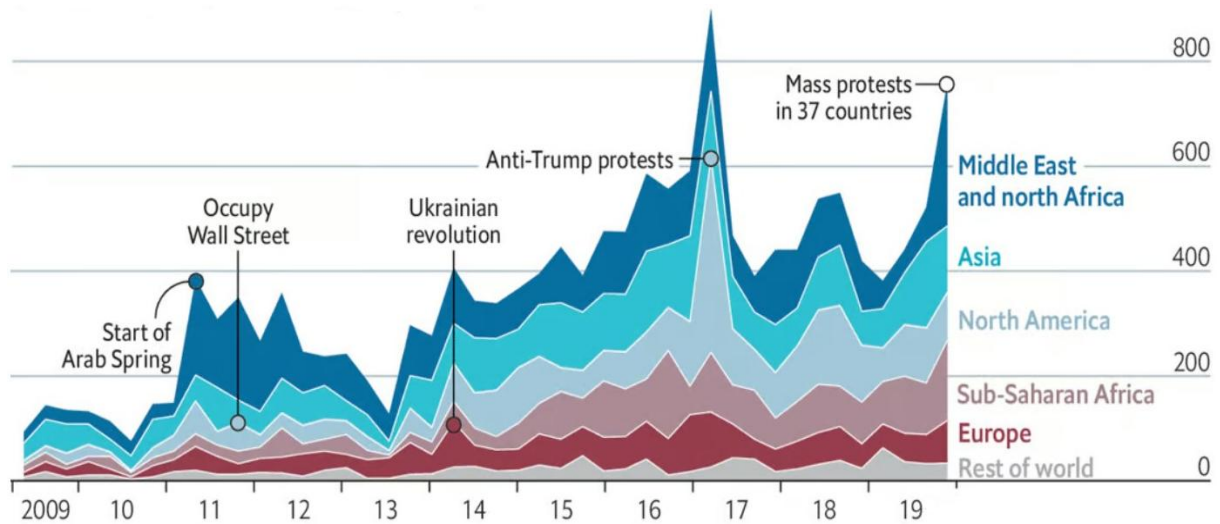


Illustration 3. Civilian anti-government protests, by region
Source: Brannen *et al.* (2020).

4.1 Flexibility and Adaptability

Flexibility and adaptability, fundamental traits of social movements, are equally essential for companies navigating a rapidly evolving economic landscape. Activists must continuously adjust their plans in response to unpredictable factors, such as law enforcement reactions or shifts in public opinion about the merits of their cause. The ability to reconfigure strategies in real time is a skill highly applicable to global supply chains. For instance, during crises like the Covid-19 pandemic or the war between Ukraine and Russia, companies that quickly adapted their logistical flows in response to shortages demonstrated remarkable resilience, drawing on principles like those used by social movements (see the JD.com case studied by Shen & Sun [2023]). Activist adaptability, often driven by a culture of experimentation and responsiveness, also offers valuable insights into risk management practices for businesses. By anticipating disruptions and preparing alternative plans, companies can integrate this agility into their operations, diversifying their supply sources, investing in AI technologies, or creating alternative routes to avoid bottlenecks. The ability to adjust operations in real time can significantly enhance a company's competitiveness in uncertain markets.

4.2 Community Mobilization

Community mobilization, a cornerstone of social movements, brings together human, material, and financial resources to support causes deemed just (Almeida, 2019). Rooted in cooperation and solidarity, the principle of community mobilization can be effectively transposed to business practices to enhance stakeholder engagement within supply chains. By actively involving employees, suppliers, customers, local communities, and even shareholders, companies create collaborative logistical ecosystems that strengthen trust, transparency, and collective accountability. The adoption of participatory practices encourages the development of solutions in partnership with stakeholders, particularly in areas such as sustainable sourcing, waste reduction, and ethical production. In an increasingly conscientious business world, where consumers demand social and environmental responsibility, companies could leverage community mobilization techniques to bolster their *moral legitimacy*, as described by Suchman (1995), meaning legitimacy based on actions perceived as fair, equitable, and aligned with social or ethical standards. By meaningfully involving both external and internal stakeholders in their logistical strategies, companies not only enhance their performance but also foster positive systemic change in sustainability, equity, and broader social impact.

4.3 Frugal Innovation

Another key lesson from social movements is their ability to maximize media impact with limited resources, a practice that exemplifies frugal innovation—the capacity to create simple, effective, and economical solutions that deliver value using scarce resources (Radjou & Prabhu, 2015). This skill is particularly relevant in today's context of dwindling natural and economic resources, where companies face challenges related to sustainability, profitability, and human development (Singh, 2014). Activist campaigns are experts in optimizing available resources, as evidenced by the example of the ZAD (Zone to Defend) of Notre-Dame-des-Landes in France (see Box 3). Whether through reusing materials, occupying public spaces, or leveraging low-cost technologies, activists make the most of what they have—particularly evident in the use of open-source digital platforms for organizing protests, which underscores the power of simple organizational tools. Companies could adopt a similar approach by optimizing processes to reduce costs, minimize waste, and maximize customer value. More broadly, the

practice of frugal innovation in social movements should inspire the development of more inclusive supply chain models that prioritize low-cost solutions, especially where logistical infrastructure is limited, such as crowd delivery (Gläser *et al.*, 2023).

Box 3. Example of frugal innovation at an occupied protest site

The ZAD (Zone to Defend) of Notre-Dame-des-Landes, an occupied protest site created to oppose the construction of a new airport near Nantes in southwestern France, developed a sophisticated logistics of resistance to support occupiers and coordinate their actions. Activists established collective infrastructures, such as kitchens, workshops, and living spaces, using locally sourced and reclaimed materials. This organization fostered an autonomous community capable of withstanding eviction attempts and maintaining a long-term presence on the site from 2008 to 2018. In 2018, after President Emmanuel Macron decided to abandon the new airport project, activists erected barricades and dug trenches to prevent law enforcement from carrying out eviction operations, demonstrating a strategic use of available resources. Although certain illegal structures were eventually dismantled, some occupiers continue to remain on the ZAD, focusing on developing alternative agricultural projects.

Source: Adapted from <https://basta.media/> (Accessed July 6, 2024).

4.4 Ethical Perspective

Companies could greatly benefit from integrating an activist ethic into their logistics operations, moving beyond mere profitability considerations. This approach not only emphasizes optimized management practices for greater efficiency but also encourages a deep reflection on the social, economic, and environmental impacts of their activities. Social movements, often guided by principles of justice, sustainability, and equity (Kothari, 1996), remind companies of the importance of aligning operational performance with ethical responsibility in an increasingly interconnected and complex global economy. Key areas such as resource management, respect for human rights, and reducing ecological footprints demonstrate how these activist values can be applied to enhance business practices (Georgallis, 2017). In short, the key lessons drawn from the logistics of resistance go far beyond social protest and offer valuable insights for rethinking traditional supply chain practices. By fostering greater resilience, encouraging sustainable innovation, and promoting genuine stakeholder engagement, companies can improve their performance while actively contributing to the development of a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable economic system for future generations.

5. Conclusion

This article emphasizes the central importance of the logistics of resistance, an aspect often overlooked in the study of protests, even though the meticulous management of human, material, and informational resources is crucial to the success of collective actions. Drawing on concrete examples such as the Yellow Vest movement, Occupy Wall Street, and Standing Rock, it becomes clear that the logistics organized by activists rely on universal principles that are also identifiable in commercial supply chains. These principles include flow planning, resource optimization, and organizational agility in the face of uncertainty. Encrypted communication tools and social networks enable efficient coordination and enhance reactivity, playing a crucial role in improving the “performance” of social movements in complex, unpredictable environments. Moreover, they also foster solidarity among participants, allowing for quick adjustments to changing situations. Finally, my contribution highlights the key lessons learned from social movements that can be applied to other business sectors. Flexibility, community mobilization, and frugal innovation can inspire more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable logistical practices, fostering long-term systemic change while contributing to ethical business practices and social responsibility.

5.1 Limitations

Despite its contributions, the article has several limitations. On one hand, the analysis is based mainly on illustrative examples, which raises questions about the generalizability of the results. Examples such as Standing Rock or Occupy Wall Street, while relevant, do not fully reflect the diversity of logistics of resistance practices, including activist mobilizations operating in different cultural, political, or economic contexts. On the other hand, the emphasis on the positive aspects of logistics of resistance provides a somewhat idealized vision, whereas it can be hampered by internal conflicts, limited resources, strategic errors, or organizational challenges. For instance, horizontal coordination, while effective in empowering participants, sometimes slows down decision-making, and while digital tools have undeniably improved logistics of resistance, their use carries risks, particularly in terms of cyber-security and surveillance. Finally, the transposition of logistics of resistance practices to the business world remains a theoretical proposition, requiring detailed empirical studies to demonstrate the concrete applicability of

the key lessons to companies, as well as the adjustments necessary to guarantee the success of such transfers in diverse sectors.

5.2 Research Avenues

These limitations open up four exciting avenues for further research. The first research avenue would involve broadening the scope of the study by including cases that have received less media attention or come from underrepresented geographical regions, particularly in countries with authoritarian regimes (China, Russia, Turkey, etc.). This would allow for testing the robustness of the framework proposed here and examining the diversity of logistics of resistance practices across different socio-political contexts. A second research avenue would analyze logistical dysfunctions within social movements to better understand the constraints and potential shortcomings of current models, while identifying the mechanisms through which social movements overcome their own challenges. The third research avenue would focus on possible response strategies in the face of political surveillance, offering valuable insights into how to strengthen the success of legitimate social movements in an increasingly hostile digital environment. Finally, the fourth research avenue would involve multiplying case studies within companies and NGOs to identify the most effective ways to adopt and assimilate practices such as community mobilization or frugal innovation. This is undoubtedly a crucial issue for young researchers in economics and management.

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