

Who are the 99%?

Public opinion on the Occupy movement in the Netherlands
Irene de Goede, Jacquélien van Stekelenburg & Christine Carabain

In September 2011 demonstrators occupied Wall Street in New York. Inspired by the Arab Spring and the Spanish 15 May movement they protested against economic inequality and greed in the financial sector. With the slogan “We are the 99%” they refer to the cliff between the elite who command the financial and political power and the rest of the population. In October 2011, Occupy protests also arose at several locations in the Netherlands, inspired by Occupy Wall Street. What is new about the Occupy movement? What do the Dutch think about the Occupy movement? Do people feel sympathy towards this movement? And is there support for the points of view of the Occupy movement? NCDO studied, in collaboration with TNS/NIPO, what the Dutch think of the Occupy movement, the financial sector in general and the division of welfare in the world.

Confrontation by ‘occupation’ with campsites

Occupy confronts people by occupying central public spaces with campsites to visualize who they are and what they want. The ‘occupation’ strengthens the message, serves as a base for political action, inspires and mobilizes the public, and strengthens the collective identity and rituals of the Occupy movement. The Occupy movement chose to use the financial crisis and greed in the financial sector to create awareness about the unequal division of wealth.

An open and flexible group of individuals with a patchwork of ideas

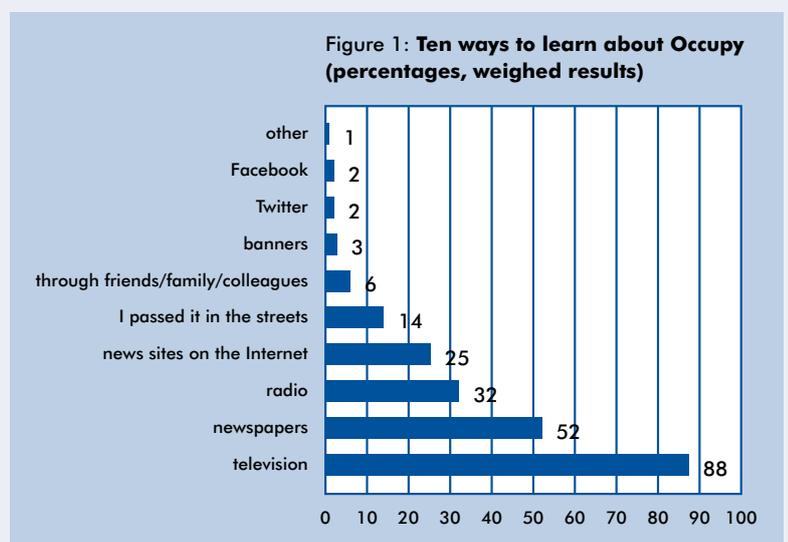
The Occupy movement is a product of this time; the protest is partially influenced by individualisation and informatization in society. Everyone is welcome as an individual, but not necessarily as a representative of a trade union, political party or other organisation. It is a movement without formal leadership and there is no ‘old-fashioned’ top down organisational structure, but an inclusive and collective identity based on a deep feeling of frustration about the unequal division of welfare and on solidarity. The ideas arise from the bottom up and in this way a patchwork of ideas is formed. The connections between people in current society are increasingly open and flexible. The Occupy movement, with its collection of individuals who join temporarily, is therefore a genuine product of this time.

Fast, worldwide spreading through social media

The social media play a significant role in initiating protest movements and they helped with the fast and worldwide spreading of the Occupy movement. Social media can mobilise the critical masses and can keep large groups of people constantly informed. In addition, bloggers and Twitter users can immediately share their version of reality with the rest of the world and ward off their opponents.

Well-known in the Netherlands through the ‘old media’

Almost all people in the Netherlands (85%) have heard about the Occupy movement. They learned of the Occupy movement especially through television (88%), newspapers (52%) and radio (32%). So, the ‘old media’ mainly helped with making the Occupy movement widely known (see Figure 1).



Many people neutral about Occupy movement

A quarter of the Dutch (28%) is in general positive about the Occupy movement. A large group does not have a clear opinion about this: 41% is neutral about the Occupy movement and another 10% says they have no opinion about it. A fifth of the Dutch (21%) is negative about the Occupy movement. It is remarkable that young people are less positive about Occupy than older people. A majority of the Dutch (58%) is however positive about the way in which the Occupy movement protests without violence. People with a higher education are in general more positive about this way of protesting.

Support for ideas on division of welfare and government control

There is a lot of support for the Occupy points of view. A majority of the Dutch (68%) thinks there should be a fairer division of welfare. The Dutch are also positive about government control in the financial sector. A large majority of the Dutch (83%) thinks that banks should be controlled constantly by the government. Furthermore, a large majority of the Dutch population (75%) thinks that politicians should set up binding rules regarding the power of banks.

Source:

De Goede, I., van Stekelenburg, J., & Carabain, C. L. (2012). *Nederlanders & de Occupy-beweging* [The Dutch and the Occupy movement]. Amsterdam: NCDO.

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