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## The Struggle Goes On!

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# Abstract

I investigated the sustained participation and disengagement of Landless Rural Workers Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* MST) activists in Brazil. The MST is the largest Brazilian social movement and has mobilized activists for over 30 years. The participation of its activists serves as an emblematic case for the study of sustained participation and disengagement in social movements in general. This research sheds new light on the study of social movements in two ways. First, some characteristics of the MST open up new possibilities for the analysis of factors that influence sustained participation and disengagement pointed out in previous studies. In addition, this research covers more variables than past studies on sustained participation and disengagement in order to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena. The second contribution is its innovative character, i.e. the study of the sustained participation and disengagement of activists who started to participate in the movement during childhood.

I used a mixed method approach, i.e. the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, for the data collection and analysis. With this research design, I aimed to obtain the most compelling and in depth information on the complex phenomena under consideration.

The activists' commitment played a central role in the understanding of their sustained participation and disengagement. In this study, I analysed the three components of commitment stated by Allen and Meyer (1990), i.e. affective, continuance and normative commitment, in order to cover different aspects of this variable. One of my main results shows that the influence of each commitment component depends on the specific stage in an activist's trajectory of participation. More specifically, continuance commitment affects the beginning of the activist's participation, affective and normative commitment are most relevant to sustained participation

over time, and only affective commitment influences the activist's willingness to participate in the future. In addition, I found that gratifying participation plays an important role in the sustained participation of the MST activists as a whole. My analysis of disengagement shows that this process is dominated by the personal characteristics of each activist rather than following a theoretical model. Finally, I observed that affective commitment and the context in- and outside of the movement play a major role in the participation and disengagement of activists who grew up in communities formed by MST activists.

*Keywords:* sustained participation, disengagement, commitment, gratifying participation, MST, children's participation.