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Diversity and Social Opposition in the 21st Century: The Trajectory of the World Social Forum (2001–2005)

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April 2007

IDS Institute of Development Studies

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Summary

This paper analyses the experience of the World Social Forum in its five initial editions, from 2001 to 2005, all of them but one held in the Southern Brazilian city of Porto Alegré. Two main objectives are addressed: firstly the paper offers a profile of those in attendance at these events. Secondly, it discusses the permanent, albeit not clearly explicit, tension surrounding the event from the beginning, opposing those who would rather change it to a new political tool to promote traditional goals of left-inspired traditions and those, on the contrary, who would prefer to see the WSF as a new and innovative space for social diversity. The paper consists of three sections. The first presents a descriptive characterisation of the event under its five editions, specifically focusing on the profiles, activities and structures created over time. It also discusses the importance of the 'Charter of Principles' and how the ensuing so-called 'methodology' has entered the scene and dominated the event. The second section describes the existing diversity that is a trademark of the Forum, identifying the main networks that converge in this process, the relations between diversity and collective identity, and the different positions that oppose diversity and the political efficacy of the forums. The final section focuses on the positions and conflicts in relation to the 'methodology', and analytically explores the growing visibility of this dilemma and its potential divisive nature; from those who advocate a more unified political action in the short run *vis-à-vis* those who consider that the World Social Forum is not a political party, but rather a space of diversity. It concludes by suggesting that this remarkable experience is most probably on the verge of rupture, given the mounting tensions created by these polarising perspectives.

Keywords: collection action, social movements, anti-globalisation movements, World Social Forum

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Introduction

In Brazil and throughout the world, the social sciences have increasingly turned their attention to the process of acceleration, increasing complexity and interdependence at global level, perceived through still highly imprecise concepts of 'globalisation' and/or 'transnationalisation'. Even without a consensus on the meaning of this process, it is agreed that a set of significant transformations is taking place in terms of the current configuration of the world system.

Evidently, this dynamic of 'temporal-spatial compression' (Harvey 1993) also has repercussions on the constitutional and operational processes of contemporary organisations and social movements. To the degree that until recently, the social construction of collective action was analysed fundamentally within frameworks established by the frontiers of national states, we may observe a certain difficulty and imprecision in the analytical treatment of this new configuration of processes of socio-political organisation and mobilisation, which increasingly take place within the context of relations that transcend those frontiers.

To a large degree, one finds an observation in the literature on the occurrence of changes in the construction of collective actions within this context of increasing interdependence on a global scale. That is, we may identify the emergence of new actors, new forms of organisation and action, new fields of conflict, new interpretative frameworks, new structures of opportunity, which distinguish themselves to a greater or lesser degree from those which were analysed by researchers at the start of the 1990s. As Smith and Johnston (2002: 8) note:

> Globalisation implies substantial changes in both the scope and character of social relations, and we should expect it therefore to affect the ways that people engage in collective political action. Global processes of cultural and economic integration and the rise of global political institutions affect how people organise, how they interpret the sources of their problems, and how they frame prospects for change.

The identification of these transformations has led to a search for new categories to deal with the new actors and the fields of relations formed by them. In this way, from the second half of the 1990s onwards, terms such as 'global civil society',[1] 'transnational social movements',[2] 'transnational *advocacy* networks',[3] 'transnational citizenship',[4] 'cosmopolitan democracy',[5] 'global resistances',[6] among others[7] have begun to emerge and spread.

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1   See, for example, the special edition of Courrier de la Planète (2001), entitled 'Société Civile Mondiale: la Montée en Puissance'. See also Gómez (2001); Ponniah and Fischer (2003).
2   See Evans (2005).
3   See Keck and Sikkink (1998).
4   See Fox (2005).
5   See Costa (2003).
6   See Seoane and Taddei (2001).
7   A criticism of the lack of theoretical precision in many authors who deal with the 'new global actors' may be found in Tarrow. For him (2001: 2) 'they fail to adequately distinguish social movements, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), and transnational networks and do not adequately specify their relations with each other or with states and international institutions. In particular, few mechanisms are proposed that link domestic actors to transnational ones and to states and international institutions.'

This emphasis on the 'radical newness' of 'transnational' and/or 'global' actors and processes began in part to be relativised in the first years of the twenty-first century, when it started to become evident that there was not indeed a mere passage to a supranational environment, but a complex process of interpenetration and interdependence between local, regional, national, international and transnational structures and dynamics. That is, against the idea of the 'global' that imposes itself mechanically, homogeneously and in a way that causes the disintegration of the specificities of other areas of social action, we may observe an extremely complex situation formed by permanences that are resignified within the new configuration and changes which operate within frameworks defined by previously existing local and national elements.[8]

This relativisation of 'globalisation' has implied the search for analytical perspectives and concepts that are adapted to a highly complex field of actors and relations. This effort is principally expressed in the development of more refined forms of analytical treatment of the relations between actors and local/national configurations and actors and international/transnational configurations, in such a way as to overcome both the limits of the approaches restricted to local/national contexts which neglect the impacts of the increase in interdependences at global level, as well as those which merely emphasise the supranational context and lose sight of the importance of specific national configurations for the understanding of contemporary collective actions. As Della Porta and Kriesi (1999: 9) highlight:

> The growing importance of international, transnational and supranational factors notwithstanding, the sovereign nation-state will continue to dominate all other forms of organisation of political life for the foreseeable future: nation-states are still the principal actors in international relations, and the national political context continues to constitute a crucial filter which conditions the impact of international change on domestic politics. National political institutions and national political coalitions will continue to shape in characteristically different ways the issues on which people mobilize, the ways in which they organise and act, and the outcomes their mobilizations are like to have.[9]

This study locates itself within the search for perspectives and interpretative instruments that are more suitable for dealing with actors and processes of

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8   Ancelovici (2002) criticises the tendency to consider processes of opposition as a 'natural' development of globalisation itself, losing the internal dynamic of their own social construction. According to the author (2002: 429), 'the opposition to globalisation cannot be reduced to a structural side effect or a spontaneous countermovement. It is the result of a political and cultural process conditioned by previous contentious episodes and struggles'. The same criticism may be found in Keck and Sikkink (1998: 33), for whom 'theorists who suggest that a global civil society will inevitably emerge from economic globalisation or from revolutions in communication and transportation technologies ignore issues of agency and political opportunity that we find central for understanding the evolution of new international institutions and relationships.'

9   Other analyses which identify the emergence of new relations and opportunities with 'globalisation' at the same time as they avoid neglecting the maintenance of the centrality of the national context for processes of opposition may be found in Ancelovici (2002), Tarrow (2001, 2002), Evans (2005), Smith and Johnston (2002).

opposition on a transnational scale, which over the last decade have increasingly caught the attention of social scientists. The study takes the five editions of the World Social Forum (WSF), held annually since 2001, as its empirical focus. The WSF stands as an object of significant relevance for dealing with contemporary social conflicts, since on the one hand, it is one of the most important consequences of the cycle of protests against 'corporate globalisation' or 'neoliberal globalisation', which has gained a high profile after the clashes at the meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Seattle in 1999, the so-called 'Battle of Seattle'.[10] On the other hand, the WSF expresses in condensed form a set of positions, ambiguities, disputes and absences of definition that mark this 'field of opposition', which some analysts and militants term a 'global justice movement',[11] an *'altermondialiste'* movement'[12] or 'global civil society'.[13]

This 'field of opposition' which is expressed at and through the WSF exemplifies all at once the potentialities and the obstacles that the process of increasing collective actions in a global context imposes on the dynamics of opposition. In this way, on the one hand, we perceive that this 'movement'[14] rests largely on unprecedented possibilities for communication, interaction and the articulation of action that were opened up by the development of new information technologies (in particular, by the internet)[15] and by the intensification of contacts and relations between actors increasingly included within organisations, movements, networks and institutions on an international and/or transnational scale.[16] On the other hand, this same process of 'globalisation' of the processes of collective action revealed the need for the actors involved in it to deal with a diverse range of actors, interests and world visions that is much greater than that present in distinct national contexts, with this representing a source of significant tensions within the same 'movement'.

In this way, the WSF presents itself as an exceptional object for the analysis of these potentialities and obstacles, to the degree that it is one of the principal expressions of the process of increasing 'transnational networking' among organisations and social movements. In this sense, the WSF has gradually constituted itself over the course of its five events, as a space for the progressive convergence of a broad and diversified range of actors involved in the criticism of and/or opposition to various structures of domination present in the world. At the same time, these actors, despite the fact that they are increasingly involved in events and/or collective actions of protest that are coordinated at supranational level,

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10   Levi and Olson (2000).
11   Evans (2005).
12   Aguiton and Cardon (2005).
13   Ponniah and Fischer (2003).
14   The term 'movement' shall be used in inverted commas since it is a 'native' category, i.e. a denomination forming part of the discourse of actors who are being analysed. I.e. such use does not imply that we are apprehending our object as a 'social movement'. We shall return to this discussion in Chapter 2.
15   As Tarrow notes (2002: 16) 'the use of the Internet as a network-building node enhances the possibility of building rapid and resilient transnational activist connections'.
16   Tarrow (2001: 2): 'I do not see international institutions as the antipode of transnational contention; they offer resources, opportunities, and incentives for actors in transnational politics'.

tend to show a significant diversity with regard to their conceptions of contemporary society, forms of domination and transformational projects. Such conceptions in turn express to a large degree interpretative cultural frameworks and mobilisation structures that were constructed in extremely diversified local/national contexts that are often largely incompatible with each other.

In this way, we may observe that the WSF carries within itself a 'dilemma' which bypasses the set of this 'field of opposition' discursively unifying under the name 'global justice movement', *altermondialiste* movement' or also 'global civil society'; the tension between the tendency to expand contacts and links between the actors involved in 'transnational opposition' and the tendency towards conflict and fragmentation promoted by the significant diversity of the actors placed into interaction with each other. That is, we may observe a tension between, on the one hand, the recognition and appreciation of the diversity of the actors of this hypothetical 'global civil society' and, on the other hand, the efforts aimed at unification, coordination, or at least, convergence between these actors around programmes, projects and/or common priorities that strengthen actions aimed at transforming global power relations.

In the absence of a totalising and unifying reference framework (as was provided, for example, by Marxism as an ideology that characterised the 'Socialist movement'),[17] how is this 'dilemma' to be confronted? Is it possible to, and if it is, how do we construct a 'collective identity' that is shared to a minimum degree among this universe of actors that form the 'field of transnational opposition'? What are the perspectives that emerge for anti-systemic movements within this new configuration forged by the processes that are grasped in an imprecise way by the concept of 'globalisation'? More specifically: how was this 'dilemma' confronted over the course of the five WSF events?[18] How are the differences

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17 As Aguiton highlights (2002: 188–9): 'The history of the last few centuries has witnessed many other periods of instability; at the same time, these were never linked to such an ideological disarmament. This is the logical consequence of the weakening of the "great founding myths of our modernity: reason, progress, growth", myths common to both the defenders and the challengers of the system. It is this which makes the instability of the period particularly critical. (...) This is valid for the movements: the unease over the division between the search for identity and universal responses would not be the same if there were a *common vision of the world* and the means necessary for its radical transformation' (my emphasis).

18 This dilemma is clearly illustrated in the following stance by Gupta (2005: 2): 'The opening march in a way depicted the diversity of the Forum, and possibly also brought out the dilemma that the Forum may face. While all those who are at the Forum (or most at least!) acknowledge the need to come together to face the imperial power of globalisation led by the US, the WSF "open space" continues to be a space that is bitterly contested at the level of ideas. The major actors in the WSF include the Left of various shades (communists, social democrats, fourth internationalists), religious groups (many ascribing to the "liberation theology" positions and genuinely opposed to imperialism) and NGOs. There are obvious differences within all these groups regarding the characterisation of globalisation, and the tactics and overall strategic understanding regarding it. So, while what knits the Forum together is an opposition to neoliberal or imperialist globalisation (there are differences among Forum participants even about the term globalisation), there is no consensus on how it is to be opposed.'

and divergences on the meaning and the strategy of social transformation expressed and processed within the context of the WSF? Indeed, how does the WSF seek to articulate diversity and convergence in the sense of political action that is effective from the viewpoint of social transformation? What does 'political effectiveness' mean in the current context?

The hypothesis orienting this analysis is that the 'methodology' of the WSF has increasingly presented itself as one of the central foci of the dispute between the different positions presented at the Forum on how to deal with the diversity of actors and perspectives in the process of social transformation. As the WSF 'methodology' has emerged as an attempt to create an organisational format capable of incorporating diversity, not as a problem to be overcome, but as an intrinsic characteristic of contemporary social struggles, and for some, a value to be preserved, it has become a target for criticism by certain actors who see diversity as an obstacle and a factor that weakens the 'movement'. In the sense, the question of the 'form' of the Forum has become a strategic one, since a conflict arises around it between those who have so far predominated, who see it as a mechanism that would permit the construction of a pluralistic space for convergence rather than one which unifies the WSF actors, and on the other, those who interpret it as a tool that reproduces the fragmentation and dispersion of the 'movement's' energies, leading to the loss (or at least reduction) of its political effectiveness.

Indeed, more than a simple 'methodology' in the sense of a politically neutral instrument of organisation of the WSF event, the form in which it is structured and functions, expresses in practice a political perspective on civil society (diversified and conflictual), on the procedures for transforming political action (democratic and inclusive) and on the destination of the social struggle (plural and open), which clearly confronts the classic perspective of the 'Left', with the great majority of participants in the WSFs placing themselves under this designation and identifying with the same. In this way, the conflict surrounding the 'methodology' of the WSF expresses a more profound conflict regarding the meanings and strategies of social transformation in a world marked by the unprecedented expansion of global interdependence, and in particular, a conflict on how to deal with diversity in the process of constructing the political subject(s) of this transformation/these transformations.

In order to develop this analysis, this study has been based on a diversified set of sources providing an empirical support which permitted an extremely complex and fluid object to be apprehended with a relatively high degree of safety. In this way, we have sought firstly to collect and analyse the bibliography produced on the WSF as broadly as possible. This literature, as might be expected, is largely the result of the reflections and debates by the actors participating in the WSFs themselves. Many of these, due to their institutional positions within universities, NGOs and research centres, tend to characterise themselves by significant self-reflection and self-evaluation activity, expressed in books, articles, CD-ROMs and analyses made available on various websites.

The second source of data was websites, which present themselves as a central instrument for the communication, discussion and dissemination of ideas among WSF actors and between them and broader audiences. Of particular importance was the work of collecting and analysing the material made available on the WSF's official website www.forumsocialmundial.org.br.

Finally, data collecting also entailed the carrying out of interviews with a set of informants who have occupied and occupy a notable position with regard to the construction and maintenance of the WSF. In this way, six members of the former Brazilian Organising Committee and the current Secretariat of the WSF were interviewed.[19] On the basis of a semi-structured script, the interviews sought to generate information and analyses which, on the one hand, covered certain gaps, doubts and divergences present in the documentation, and on the other, permitted access to interpretations and evaluations of actors who were/are central to the form of the WSF, in this way achieving the rare capacity to present an overall perspective on this 'event-process'.

The analysis developed is structured in the following form: Section 1 presents a descriptive characterisation of the five editions of the WSF, focusing on the participating public, the activities developed, the organisational sections of the WSF, the 'Charter of Principles' and the evolution of 'methodology' over the course of the Forums; Section 2 deals with diversity within the context of the WSF, identifying the principal networks converging on this process, the relationships between diversity and collective identity and the different positions on diversity and the political effectiveness of the Forums; Section 3 concentrates on the positions and conflicts surrounding the 'methodology' of the WSF; finally, the conclusion resumes the questions defined in the Introduction and indicates some of the results obtained by the study.

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19   In order to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees, no characterisation of them shall be made, and the references to their testimonies shall merely be identified with a number (interviewee 1, interviewee 2, etc.).

1 The World Social Forum: characterisation and development (2001–2005)

The objective of this section is to present a characterisation of the five editions of the World Social Forum (WSF), to permit a minimal comprehension of how this event-process forms and develops, with the same marked by significant complexity. This characterisation presents a challenge, in so far as there are important gaps in terms of information and knowledge of the Forums. To the degree that most of the activities are self-organised, there is no centralised coordination and the event develops in an open way, without restrictions on participation, so that even those figures occupying central positions in the organisation of the Forums have a certain difficulty in presenting an overall vision of the events.

1.1 The public participating in the WSFs

Over the course of its five editions, the WSF has shown a tendency to increase its number of participants. Despite the fact that there is no precise information on the true number of participants at the Forums, available estimates give a rough idea of the size of the events. Regarding the evolution of participation in the five editions of the WSF, the available general data is presented in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Evolution of the number of participants in the five editions of the World Social Forum (2001–2005)

	WSF 2001	WSF 2002	WSF 2003	WSF 2004	WSF 2005
Participants	20,000	50,000	100,000	115,000*	155,000
Delegates	4,700 (117 countries)	12,274 (123 countries)	20,763 (130 countries)	74,126	**
Journalists	1,870	3,356	4,094	3,200	6,823
Media	764 (442 Brazilians and 322 foreigners)	1,066 (553 Brazilians and 513 foreigners)	1,423 (808 Brazilians and 615 foreigners)	644 (45 countries)	--

Sources: www.forumsocialmundial.org.br and www.radiobras.gov.br/especiais/forumsocialmundial_2005/quemparticipa2.php

*   Information on the total number of participants at the 4th WSF shows major disparities, with numbers varying between 75,000 and 135,000 individuals.

** From the 5th WSF in 2005 onwards, the division between Delegates and Participants was abolished, in that the Forum came to consist only of self-organised activities, eliminating the activities proposed and organised by the Organising Committee and/or the International Council (CO/CI).

This data shows a significant increase in participation between the first and last editions, showing the significant mobilisation capacity of the actors and networks involved in the WSF, as well as the recognition and relative consolidation of the

Forum as a centre for the convergence of a broad contingent of social activists sharing a critical vision of 'neoliberal or corporate globalisation'. This form of the WSF as a massive event was even the object of certain criticisms in so far as it would hinder the formation of an effective space for collective discussion.[20] At the same time, despite these criticisms, in general, the size assumed by the WSF was saluted and presented as the unequivocal expression of the vitality and legitimacy achieved by the event.

Within this large contingent of individuals taking part in the annual events there are evidently important differences in terms of linkage with the 'WSF process', and more generally, with the 'global movement'. According to one of the interviewees:

> There are three clear levels within the Forum. There is the level of the participants in the Forum, of the protagonists of this global movement, which are the organisations that generally identify with and have links to the organisations of the International Council. This is a group, I'd imagine, of a thousand to two thousand organisations all over the world that are connected. This is the Forum process. (...) the first block of these, let's hazard a guess and say 500, although it could be a thousand, which is heterogeneous. Extremely heterogeneous. This reflects a range, a rainbow of political/ideological positions. But they have a common objective and represent an alternative to neoliberal globalisation. (...) these people do global politics. (...) then, in each country in which you hold a Forum, you've got the Left, which 'goes along for the ride'. These are national organisations that are seeking a dialogue, experience, participation, to listen. And these consist of a natural core and another portion who are not natural participants (...) And then you have the third level, the party crowd who just go to have fun, to see the show, to see the weird people who are there.

A point that highlights the importance and visibility achieved by the WSF is the significant level of press coverage of the event. According to the data of Table 1.1, we may perceive an increase both in the number of journalists and in the number of media outlets that were attracted by the Forum, and conversely, that contributed to its visibility and to the ensuing international repercussions.

Evidently, this repercussion and visibility does not occur in uniform fashion at global level. On the contrary, there are indeed variations between countries and regions of the world in terms of access to information on the WSF. This aspect may in part be demonstrated on the basis of available data on the countries of origin of the media present at the Forum; at the 2nd Forum in 2002, of the 1,066 media outlets attending the forum, 869 (81.5 per cent) came from only six countries (Brazil – 52 per cent; Italy – 9.5 per cent; Argentina – 8 per cent; France – 7 per

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20 Some participants, such as Michael Albert, went so far as to propose that the WSF should be constituted of delegations selected at national level (on the basis of local, regional and national Forums), to constitute a 'representative' body for a process of prior mobilisation and discussion. This would limit the participants (he proposed a number between 5–10,000 delegates), but would allow a more level and productive debate, thus avoiding the current fragmentation and 'gigantism'.

cent; USA – 2.5 per cent; Uruguay – 2.5 per cent); at the 3rd WSF in 2003, of the 1,423 media outlets, 1,133 (80 per cent) came from the same six countries as the previous year (Brazil – 57 per cent; Italy – 6 per cent; France – 5 per cent; Argentina – 5 per cent; USA – 4 per cent; Uruguay – 3 per cent).[21] That is, these figures show a notable predominance of media outlets, on the one hand, from countries geographically close to the event (Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay) and on the other, of Western countries whose social organisations and movements have a dominant position in terms of the field of opposition which converges on the Forum (Italy, France and the USA). This fact points to a certain limitation of the scope of the first three editions of the WSF, the impact of which was largely restricted to the Americas and Western Europe, with far fewer repercussions on Africa, Asia and Oceania. It is precisely in order to confront this limitation and to generate an effective 'globalisation' of the Forum, and more broadly, of the 'movement', that a decision was made to hold the 4th WSF of 2004 in India.[22]

Despite the absence of a series of figures that permit the clear delineation of the profile of the participants over the course of the five editions of the WSF, the sources researched allow certain points to be specified, which aid in characterising the public brought together by the event.

1.1.1 Profile of participants at the 3rd WSF (Porto Alegré – 2003)

On the basis of certain data made available in the study carried out by the NGO IBASE among the public attending the 3rd WSF (2003),[23] we may trace a summary profile of the participants:

● Nationality of the 58,758 accredited participants[24] – 86 per cent (50,532) Brazilians and 14 per cent (8,226) foreign; among the 13,514 delegates, 67 per cent were Brazilians and 33 per cent foreign;

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21 Source: www.forumsocialmundial.org.br (accessed 24 August 2006).

22 In fact, the holding of the 4th WSF in India represents the outcome of a concern with the 'internationalisation' of the Forum and the realisation of actions to this effect that were present from its outset. This is clearly expressed in the definition of 2002 as 'the year of internationalisation of the World Social Forum', or in the following evaluation drawn from the document drawn up by the CI in January 2003: 'We were clearly victorious in our objective of globalising the WSF process, incorporating a great variety of situations and themes, and mobilising, in different models and formats, sectors of civil society from the most diverse countries. This process took place without this entailing fragmentation, main taining a unity of method. We are promoting contact between different political cultures, reinforcing the capacity of the WSF process to carry on a dialogue with specific realities and an ever greater diversity of processes, albeit while maintaining a process that is open and true to the essential meaning of the proposal summarised in our Charter of Principles'. (Source:www.forumsocialmundial.org.br).

23 The data from the survey of participants in the 3rd WSF were divided into two types: firstly, there was a characterisation of the participating public on the basis of accreditation forms, which thus referred to the 58,758 accredited participants in the event; secondly, on the basis of the universal figures provided by the accreditation forms, a sample survey was carried out by presenting a questionnaire to the participants. (IBASE 2003: 9–10).

24 Of this total, 23 per cent (13,514) were delegates, 50 per cent (29,379) non-delegate participants and 27 per cent (15,865) participants in the Encampment.

- Distribution of the 8,226 accredited foreign participants by country of origin –
  13.1 per cent Argentina; 9.5 per cent Uruguay; 8.7 per cent Chile; 8.4 per cent
  Paraguay; 7.2 per cent France; 6.6 per cent USA; 46.3 per cent other 123
  countries;
- Distribution of the 4,460 accredited foreigners by country of origin – 10.4 per
  cent USA; 8 per cent France; 6.9 per cent Chile; 6.4 per cent Argentina; 4 per
  cent Uruguay; 2.4 per cent Paraguay;
- Distribution of the 58,758 accredited participants by age group – 37.7 per cent
  14–24; 25 per cent 25–34; 19.9 per cent 35–44; 12.6 per cent 45–54; 4.9 per
  cent 55 or older;
- Distribution of the 13,514 accredited delegates by age group – 13 per cent
  14–24; 23.9 per cent 25–34; 29.8 per cent 35–44; 22.7 per cent 45–54; 10.7 per
  cent 55 or older;
- Distribution of the 58,758 accredited participants by educational level – 4.7 per
  cent 0–8 years of study; 21 per cent 9–12 years of study; 36.2 per cent
  incomplete higher studies; 27.5 per cent completed higher studies; 9.7 per cent
  master's degree and doctorate; 0.9 per cent no reply;
- Distribution of the 13,514 accredited delegates by educational level – 3.5 per
  cent 0–8 years of study (4.5 per cent of Brazilian delegates and 1.3 per cent of
  foreign delegates); 16.1 per cent 9–12 years of study (20.3 per cent of Brazilians
  and 7.7 per cent of foreigners); 23 per cent incomplete higher studies (25.1 per
  cent of Brazilians and 18.9 per cent of foreigners); 39.1 per cent completed
  higher studies (38.4 per cent of Brazilians and 48.5 per cent of foreigners); 17.8
  per cent master's degree and doctorate (11.7 per cent of Brazilians and 30.1 per
  cent of foreigners); 0.4 per cent no reply;
- Distribution of interviewees with regard to inclusion in associations – 65 per
  cent participated in social organisations and/or movements and 35 per cent did
  not participate;
- Distribution of interviewees with regard to participation in political parties – 35
  per cent were affiliated to political parties and 65 per cent were not affiliated.

On the basis of this information, it is possible to identify, as might be expected, a
strong numerical predominance of participants from Brazil and neighbouring
countries (Argentina, Uruguay, Chile and Paraguay), who together represented over
90 per cent of the registered participants in the 2003 Forum. This predominance
demonstrates the importance of geographical proximity for the feasibility of access
for participants.

At the same time, when we observe the segment of those accredited as delegates,
we may note two significant changes with regard to the general data: firstly, the
participation of foreigners is much more significant, amounting to a third of all
delegates; secondly, the main foreign delegations were not from neighbouring
countries but from the USA and France. These figures indicate that within the 'hard
core' of the WSF, consisting of delegates, there is a greater 'internationalisation'
of participants, at the same time that there is a greater presence of activists and
organisations from countries with greater resources[25] and a history of involvement
with actions of opposition to 'neoliberal globalisation'.

The information on the age distribution of the accredited participants at the 3rd
WSF indicates, on the one hand, a significant youth presence (14–24 years old),

which accounts for almost 40 per cent of the Forum public. On the other hand, when we observe the data relating to the delegates, we may identify a relative 'aging', as would be expected, to the degree that this segment is composed of individuals who, in general, already possess a certain experience and track record of action in social organisations and movements. This major presence of young people among the participants at the WSF has been evaluated as one of the great 'conquests' of the Forum, as may be observed in the following passage from the document drawn up by the International Council, in January 2003:

> Perhaps the best barometer of the success of the WSF process has been its enormous capacity to attract young people.

> (www.forumsocialmundial.org.br)

Data relating to the educational level of accredited participants in the 3rd WSF is highly significant and clearly demonstrates that the WSF tends to inform a public characterised by a relatively high level of education, expressed in the fact that over 73 per cent of participants had received or were receiving higher education (incomplete, complete or postgraduate). This high educational level is more evident when we observe the data relating to delegates, among whom the percentage relating to those with higher education (incomplete, complete or postgraduate) reaches 80 per cent. Among the delegates, for their part, foreigners showed even higher figures, with as many as 97.5 per cent having received or receiving higher education (incomplete, complete or postgraduate), i.e. practically all foreign delegates (with 78.6 per cent having completed university degrees and almost a third postgraduate degrees).

Another relevant piece of information for characterising participants in the 3rd WSF relates to the activities of the same participants in social organisations and movements. According to the data collected in the sample survey, 65 per cent of individuals present at the Forum participated in social organisations and movements, while 35 per cent did not participate. Among interviewed delegates, the percentage of participants rose to 89 per cent.

The information on the profile of organisations and/or movements in which interviewees participated provided important elements for characterising the public of the WSF: 68 per cent of organisations or movements were local/regional,

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25 The question of inequality of resources that make participation in the Forums feasible is an aspect highlighted by one of the interviewees: 'I think that it's a certain challenge, in the sense of bringing certain movements that don't have the financial conditions to come to the Forum, to participate as a process, as their personal struggle. This is a question of democratisation of the process itself, and this is a major debate within the Forum. As much as it expands, there are certain sectors which have access to resources, to hard cash. NGOs can do this more easily. The trade unions have it. Movements find it much harder. Professors can usually wangle a couple of plane tickets or have the odd project that allows them to get round this hurdle. Middle class sectors can manage it. But popular sectors find it very difficult. Community-based groups have a very hard time. So it's more in this sense, the democratisation of the Forum, than a major challenge that we tried through voluntary actions, through solidarity funds, to ask agencies to fund, in the same proportion as they fund their own staff, also to give priority to funding other grassroots militants' (interviewee 04).

36 per cent national, 16 per cent international and only 2 per cent continental.[26] That is, these numbers indicate a limited degree of internationalisation of social organisations and movements present at the Forum, with their horizon for action largely limited to a local/regional and national context.[27]

On the other hand, when we observe the data relating to foreign delegates who were interviewed, we may identify significant differences: among the organisations and/or movements in which they are active, 40 per cent were local/regional, 45 per cent national, 36 per cent international and 4 per cent continental. In this way, we may perceive that foreign delegates (unlike Brazilians, whose percentages are practically the same as those relating to all of the interviewees) tend to be involved in an associative network characterised by a much higher degree of internationalisation.

With regard to the institutional nature of social organisations and movements, those with the greatest presence at the 3rd WSF were: social movements 25.7 per cent; NGOs 19.4 per cent; trade unions 16.3 per cent; political parties 8.8 per cent; class associations 8 per cent; religious/ecumenical associations 5.5 per cent and universities/research centres 5.5 per cent.

Another piece of information that is interesting to observe relates to affiliation to political parties among the participants at the 3rd WSF: only 35 per cent of those interviewed declared an affiliation to a political party. Among delegates, this number was 44 per cent.

With regard to positioning on the political spectrum, the vast majority of participants interviewed (84 per cent) declared that they were 'left-wing', with the following distinctions: 6 per cent defined themselves as far left, 63 per cent as left and 15 per cent as centre-left. Among the Brazilian delegates interviewed, there was an even stronger identification with a position 'on the left', with 90 per cent placing themselves in this category.

1.1.2 Profile of participants in the 4th WSF (Mumbai – 2004)[28]

Information from the survey carried out by the NGO IBASE on the public participating at the 4th WSF, held in Mumbai, India in 2004, points to some

26 The data refers to the 65 per cent of individuals who participate in social organisations and/or movements. They exceed 100 per cent in so far as many of those interviewed were involved in more than one association.

27 This information corroborates the arguments presented in the Introduction, of the authors who criticise the notion that we have before us a 'global civil society' or 'transnational social movements'. To a certain degree, the interpretation of Ancelovici (2002: 454), appears correct. i.e. that actors such as those who are involved in the WSF: 'rather than constituting the backbone of a transnational social movement, they fit what Tarrow calls "transnational political exchange", that is, a temporary form of cooperation across boundaries involving national actors that have ideological affinities and something to gain from the exchange but whose existence is independent of it. Therefore, the driving force can still be domestic issues, and international events are then simply a way of acquiring additional symbolic resources'.

28 It was not possible to obtain the complete data for the survey on the participants in the 4th WSF, held in 2004, limiting the possibilities for comparing available information for the editions of 2003 and 2005. The small amount of data was taken from the website: www.radiobras.gov.br/especiais/forumsocialmundial_2005/quemparticipa2.php (accessed 25 August 2006).

changes with regard to the edition of the previous year, albeit while at the same time reproducing certain characteristics that tend to emerge as standard for WSFs, regardless of their location. Available information is as follows:

- Nationality of the 115,000 participants – 91 per cent (104,650) Indians and participants from neighbouring countries; 0.74 per cent (854) Brazilians; 0.67 per cent (772) Americans and Canadians; 0.57 per cent (661) French; 7.02 per cent other countries;
- 63 per cent of participants interviewed were in the 14–34 age group; 37 per cent were aged 35 or more;
- 37 per cent of participants interviewed were in the category of no or only basic education; 63 per cent had higher education (of these, 42 per cent held master's degrees or doctorates);
- 64 per cent of participants interviewed participated in social organisations and/or movements while 36 per cent did not participate;
- 17 per cent of participants interviewed were affiliated to political parties and 83 per cent were not affiliated.

This information confirms, on the one hand, the importance of geographical proximity in defining the public present at the WSF. In this sense, the shift in the fourth edition of the WSF to India allowed the unprecedented possibility for individuals, and social organisations and movements of that region, to participate in a significant way in the Forum, internationalising its reach and repercussions. On the other hand, the information also demonstrates that the principal foreign delegations, with the exception of those from neighbouring countries, tend to be from countries with a central position in the 'global movement'. In this way, as was observed at the 2003 edition, Brazilians, North Americans and French emerged as the most numerous delegations (excluding those from countries close to the event).

Despite the limited amount of information relating to the age distribution of the participants in the 4th WSF, that available confirms the predominant trend of a young public: 63 per cent of those interviewed were in the 14–34 age group, a number virtually identical to that observed at the WSF of 2003 (for which 62.7 per cent of participants were in the same age group).

With regard to data on the educational level of participants, we may observe a small decline in the level of the public at the WSF in India compared to the public of the 2003 WSF in Porto Alegré. At the same time, this decline does not imply a reversal in the trend that the WSF has been establishing as a space for attracting and mobilising a public largely characterised by a high educational level: 63 per cent of the participants interviewed at the 4th WSF had received higher education (and of these, 42 per cent held postgraduate degrees).

With regard to data on the social and political activity of participants in the 4th WSF, we may observe continuities and changes. In terms of inclusion in associations, the numbers for Mumbai practically reproduce the pattern identified at the WSF of 2003: while at this latter event, 65 per cent of participants were active in social organisations and/or movements, at the former, the figure was 64 per cent. In terms of participation in political parties, we may observe a significant change between the two WSFs: affiliation to political parties among the participants in the 4th WSF was less than half (17 per cent) that observed among the participants

in the 3rd WSF (35 per cent). I.e. the WSF held in India brought together a public characterised by a relatively high level of associative involvement, but with a much lower degree of political/party linkage. In addition, we may infer the existence of important differences in this data in terms of traditions of political organisation and action between different regions of the world, which ultimately had direct repercussions on the WSF.

1.1.3 Profile of participants at the 5th WSF (Porto Alegré – 2005)[29]

As had occurred in previous years, in 2005 a survey was again carried out among the participants of the 5th WSF, coordinated by IBASE. Some preliminary data from this survey which is presented below, allow a characterisation of the public present at this edition, as well as the identification of changes and continuities with regard to the editions of 2003 and 2004:

- Nationality of the 92,281 participants – 80 per cent (73,856) Brazilians and 20 per cent (18,425) foreigners;
- Distribution of the 18,425 foreign participants by country of origin – 13 per cent Argentina; 9.5 per cent USA; 7.5 per cent Uruguay; 5 per cent France; 4 per cent Chile; 3.5 per cent Colombia, Paraguay and Canada; 50.5 per cent other 140 countries;
- Distribution of the participants in the Forum and the Encampment interviewed by age group – 42.1 per cent 14–24; 28.5 per cent 25–34; 15.1 per cent 35–44; 10.3 per cent 45–54; 4.1 per cent 55 or more;
- Distribution of the participants in the Forum and the Encampment interviewed by educational level – 0.9 per cent 0–4 years; 21.3 per cent 5–12 years; 67.7 per cent incomplete or complete higher education; 9.8 per cent master's degree or doctorate; 0.3 per cent no reply;
- 55.4 per cent of the participants in the Forum and the Encampment interviewed took part in social organisations and/or movements and 44.6 per cent did not take part;
- 23.4 per cent of the participants in the Forum and the Encampment interviewed were affiliated to political parties while 76.6 per cent were not affiliated.

The information presented above points to a certain similarity between the publics present at the 3rd, 4th and 5th editions of the WSF. Despite a small decline with regard to 2003, there is still a clear numerical predominance of 'local' participants (in this case, Brazilians) with regard to participants from other countries.

On the other hand, even with some alterations in terms of the order between countries, most notably the increase in the American delegation, foreign participants remained largely constant, with a greater presence at the 2003, 2004 and 2005 editions of the WSF. On the one hand, neighbouring countries (in the case of 2005, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile and Paraguay) and on the other, countries

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29   The data for the 5th WSF establish a distinction between participants (92,281 individuals) and participants in the Youth Encampment (35,000 individuals). (Source: IBASE 2005).

with organisations holding resources and a strong presence in the 'movement of opposition to neoliberal globalisation' (USA and France).

The data on the age composition of the participants at the WSF of 2005 show a broad similarity to those of 2003 and 2004. At the same time, there was a significant increase in the younger public at the Forum, with the 14–34 age group rising to 71 per cent of total participants (against a figure of 63 per cent at the two previous editions).

Data on the educational level of participants at the WSF also showed a stability with regard to the two previous editions of the WSF. In this way, this event maintained itself as a space for the convergence of a public characterised by a relatively high educational level: in 2005, the percentage of the public with higher education (uncompleted or completed), rose even further to 77.5 per cent of participants. That is, the (limited) increase in the share of the public with a lower educational level observed in 2004 in India, was inverted.

As in 2003, the levels of participants with higher education were even higher for foreign participants, as is shown by the data in the Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Educational level of participants at the 5th WSF, Porto Alegré – 2005

Years of study	Total	Brazilian participants	Latin-American participants	Participant from other countries	Youth Encampment
0–4 years	0.9	0.7	0.9	1.6	1.0
5–12 years	21.3	23.5	17.5	10.0	21.1
Higher (uncompleted and completed)	67.7	65.9	70.2	57.6	74.0
Masters/doctorate	9.8	10.0	9.9	29.0	3.6
Don't know/No reply	0.3	-	1.5	1.8	0.3

Source: IBASE (2005).

An interesting aspect indicated in Table 1.2 is the high educational level among the participants in the Youth Encampment, indicating that the public attracted to this space tends to be predominantly a public that is studying for university degrees or that has completed them.

With regard to the inclusion of participants of the 5th WSF in social organisations and/or movements, a significant decline may be observed by comparison with the years of 2003 and 2004: in those years, the participation in social organisations and movements covered respectively, 65 per cent and 64 per cent of the participants in the Forum: in 2005, this percentage fell to 55.4 per cent, i.e. almost half of the public attracted by the WSF in 2005 was not included in the organisations, movements and network that structured the event, indicating the massive presence of individuals characterised by a personal and probably less 'organic' relationship with the 'global movement'.

When the institutional nature of the social organisations and movements is observed in which 55.4 per cent of the public of the 2005 WSF were active, certain continuities as well as changes may be identified with regard to the data available for the year of 2003. On the one hand, the same types of organisations and movements remained among the most frequent (NGOs, social movements, trade unions, professional associations and political parties). On the other, there were some significant changes in terms of the relative weights of distinct types of institution: the NGOs increased their presence, rising to 31.6 per cent of associations present at the 5th WSF (the figure for 2003 was 19.4 per cent); social movements represented practically the same percentage, 26.6 per cent (against 25.7 per cent in 2003); trade unions and class associations saw a relative fall in their presence to 14 per cent (the figure for 2003 was 24.3 per cent); while political parties witnessed a slight increase in their presence to 10.6 per cent (the figure for 2003 was 8.8 per cent).

Despite this increase in political parties as one of the most frequent types of organisational link among the participants of the 5th WSF active in social organisations and/or movements, it is important to observe that among the public of the 2005 Forum as a whole, there was a relative decline in the participation of political parties relative to 2003 (despite representing an increase relative to 2004): in 2003, 35 per cent of participants declared an affiliation to a party; in 2005, only 23.4 per cent declared such an affiliation.

1.2 The activities developed at the WSFs

In the same way that there was a certain difficulty in obtaining precise and consistent information on the participants at the five editions of the WSF, the same was the case for the activities developed. In particular, we may observe a relative ignorance of the effective development of 'self-organised' activities (the 'workshops'), proposed and executed by social movements and organisations. At the same time, even with this limitation, the data in Table 1.3 offer an overview of the five events.

Table 1.3 Evolution of activities at the five editions of the World Social Forum (2001–2005)

	WSF 2001	WSF 2002	WSF 2003	WSF 2004	WSF 2005
Activities organised by the CO/CI	16 conferences 22 testimonies	27 conferences 96 seminars	10 conferences 22 testimonies 36 panels 4 discussion tables	13 (panels, round-tables, conferences and public meetings)*	*
Self-organised activities	420 (workshops seminars, meetings)	622 (workshops seminars, meetings)	1,300 (workshops seminars, meetings)	1,238 (workshops seminars, meetings)	2,500 (workshops seminars, meetings)

Source: www.forumsocialmundial.org.br
* From the 4th WSF in India onwards, there was a sharp reduction in the activities proposed and organised by the Organising Committee/Secretariat and International Council. Already for the 5th WSF, the event came to consist exclusively of self-organised activities. These changes shall be dealt with below, in the section on changes in the 'methodology' of the WSF.

These data show what some (critics or not) define as the 'gigantism' (Santos 2005:78) assumed by the WSF over the course of its five editions, i.e. since the first edition in 2001, the volume of activities proposed has tended to go well beyond expectations, and to a certain degree, the structure assembled by the organisers of the events. At certain times, this fact has generated confusion and problems which had a negative impact on the realisation and the results of specific activities, albeit without compromising events overall.

Another important aspect of the activities developed at the Forum that deserves highlighting is that at the first three editions (2001, 2002 and 2003), a certain tendency was observed for the Forum to divide into two relatively independent areas. On the one hand was what may be defined as the 'official' event, comprising of the activities proposed and realised by the actors/organising bodies of the WSF and largely directed towards a specific and restricted public composed of the delegates. Within this area, a more 'traditional' dynamic tended to prevail, based on the expounding of ideas and the debate between certain invited 'personalities' and 'specialists'.

On the other hand was the 'parallel universe' of self-organised events proposed and realised independently by social organisations, movements or networks.[30] These activities, open to the whole of the public interested in the themes considered, were characterised by a great diversity of formats and dynamics, with a broad space for innovation and a more horizontal interaction between participants. At the same time, these self-organised activities tended to be realised in a fragmented form, closed in on themselves, without the non-participating public and the organisers themselves at least being aware of their contents and results (not to say a greater integration between activities and between these and the 'official' part of the WSF).[31]

One of the mechanisms constructed over the course of the five editions of the WSF to articulate and integrate the set of activities were the so-called Thematic Axes, by means of which an attempt was made to establish a minimum parameter in terms of the discussion agenda for the events. Table 1.4 presents these Thematic Axes.

As may be observed in Table 1.4, the first four editions of the WSF were marked by the definition of a small number of Thematic Axes, albeit with these formulated in a highly abstract and generic way. This fact caused the majority of activities grouped under each Axis to be marked, in general, by an enormous thematic heterogeneity and a lack of effective integration (Pacheco 2004).

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30   It is important to highlight the fact that not all the self-organised activities that were proposed actually took place. Whether because of organisational problems, withdrawal of proposers or lack of a public, the fact remains that a significant number of activities did not take place. In 2003, for example, of the 1,619 activities initially proposed it is estimated that around 1,300 were actually realised.

31   A first more systematic attempt to confront this problem occurred at the 3rd WSF, with the realisation of a survey of self-organised activities. Through a sample study of 288 activities (22 per cent of the 1,300 activities), an attempt was made to map the discussions carried out. The results of this survey may be found in IBASE (2003). An analysis with asample centred on the themes of sustainability and the environment may be found in Pacheco (2004).

Table 1.4 Thematic Axes at the five editions of the WSF (2001–2005)

	Thematic Axes
1st and 2nd WSF (Porto Alegré–2001–2002)	Axis I – Production of Wealth and Social Reproduction; Axis II – Access to Wealth and Sustainability; Axis III – The Affirmation of Civil Society and Public Space; Axis IV – Political Power and Ethics in the New Society
3rd WSF (Porto Alegré–2003)	Axis I – Democratic and Sustainable Development; Axis II – Principles and Values, Human Rights, Diversity and Equality; Axis III – Media, Culture and Alternatives to Mercantilisation and Homogenisation; Axis IV – Political Power, Civil Society and Democracy; Axis V – Democratic World Order, the Struggle against Militarisation and the Promotion of Peace
4th WSF (Mumbai–2004)	Axis I – Militarism, War and Peace; Axis II – Information, Knowledge and Culture; Axis III – Environment and Economy; Axis IV – Exclusion, Rights and Equality
5th WSF* (Porto Alegré–2005)	**Thematic Spaces:** 01. Affirming and defending the common goods of the Earth and of peoples – as an alternative to mercantilisation and control by transnationals; 02. Art and creation: constructing cultures of resistance among peoples; 03. Communication: anti-hegemonic practices, rights and alternatives; 04. Defending diversities, plurality and identities; 05. Human rights and dignity for a just and egalitarian world; 06. Sovereign economies by and for peoples – Against neoliberal capitalism; 07. Ethics, cosmic visions and spiritualities – Resistances and challenges for a new world; 08. Social struggles and democratic alternatives – Against neoliberal domination; 09. Peace and demilitarisation – The struggle against war, free trade and debt; 10. Autonomous thinking, the reappropriation and socialisation of knowledge and technologies; 11. Towards the construction of an international democratic order and the integration of peoples. **Cross-cutting Axes:** 01 Social emancipation and the political dimension of struggles; 02. The struggle against patriarchal capitalism; 03. The fight against racism and other forms of exclusion based on ascendancy; 04. Gender; 05. Diversity.

Source: www.forumsocialmundial.org.br
* At the 5th WSF in 2005, contrary to the definition of the Thematic Axes by the organisers of the Forum, the bodies participating in previous editions were consulted. On the basis of the results of this consultation, to which 1,863 social organisations and movements replied, this list of themes and axes was drawn up. These changes in the methodology of the WSF shall be considered later in the text.

In 2005, we may observe the broadening and concentration of the Thematic Spaces, circumscribing more precisely the areas of interest for the participants in the event. At the same time, such a definition was the object of certain criticisms precisely because it created a dynamic opposed to that of previous editions: the dispersion of participants, restricted to spaces marked by specific interests, due to the lack of integration mechanisms for the whole of the activities and themes. As Callinicos and Nineham (2005) note critically:

> One of the great beauties of our movement – and of the forums that have emerged from and helped to sustain it – is the way in which people from all sorts of backgrounds and with the most diverse preoccupations come and mix together, participating in a process of mutual contamination in which we learn and gain confidence from one another. This dynamic was greatly weakened by the thematic fragmentation and vast size of the WSF site in Porto Alegré this year [2005].

1.3 Bodies of the WSF

The organisational structure responsible for taking decisions relating to the WSFs basically consists of two 'bodies'. Firstly, there is the Brazilian Organising Committee (COB), initially formed of eight Brazilian organisations, which in 2000 assumed responsibility for organising the 1st WSF: Associação Brasileira de Organizações Não-Governamentais [The Brazilian NGO Association] (ABONG), Comissão Brasileira de Justiça e Paz da Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil [The Brazilian Justice and Peace Commission of the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops] (CBJP/CNBB), Associação Brasileira de Empresários pela Cidadania [The Brazilian Association of Businessmen for Citizenship] (CIVES), Central Única dos Trabalhadores [the leading Brazilian trade union] (CUT), Instituto Brasileiro de Análises Sócio-Econômicas [Brazilian Institute of Socio-Economic Analyses] (IBASE), Centro de Justiça Global [Centre for Global Justice] (CJG) and Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra [The Movement of Landless Rural Workers] (MST). These same organisations coordinated the organisation of the 2nd and 3rd WSFs. From 2002 onwards, at a meeting of the International Committee in Barcelona, the COB changed its name to the International Secretariat of the WSF, with the following attributions:

> The Secretariat of the WSF is a technical, service-providing body formed from the former Brazilian Organising Committee, together with the Organising Committee of the location in which the World Social Forum is to be realised. The division of functions and tasks between the former Brazilian Organising Committee and the committees mentioned above shall be decided between the same bodies.
>
> (www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/dinamic.php?pagina=ci_regras_miami_por)[32]

Despite the fact that its name merely indicates an organisational role, the COB/Secretariat came to assume a central position in the form of the structure and

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32   After the 4th World Social Forum, the Indian Organising Committee shall be incorporated into the International Secretariat of the WSF. Website accessed 25 August 2006.

functional dynamic of the first Forums, establishing a 'standard' which, even though it changed in certain important aspects, to a large degree directed the subsequent editions of the event.[33] This 'standard' generally considered to be the 'methodology' of the WSF, expresses the attempt to realise the orientations contained in the 'Charter of Principles', defining procedures and indications for the organisation of Social Forums. According to the analysis presented in the following sections, this 'methodology' expresses certain ethico-political conceptions that dispute the meaning and future of the WSF with others (and on the basis of this, the field of opposition itself, from which the WSF emerged and of which it is one of the principal expressions).

The constitution of the COB arose from relations between actors who, despite their differences (and in some cases, significant divergences), shared a certain common course forged in the struggle for the redemocratisation of Brazil from the 1970s onwards, that was consolidated in the different political disputes surrounding the direction of the democracy under construction in Brazil in the 1980s and 90s. As one interviewee highlights:

> I think that Brazilians have a political culture on the Left that in my view has to do with the struggle against the dictatorship, those fronts where everyone was together, and that this political culture allows us to work together much more easily. We were thus able to create a body here which offered to organise, call together the Forum, and which brought together a range of people from businessmen to the MST. It was extremely easy for us to do this in Brazil. To have these more pluralistic platforms and so on, I think is a very important fact. When we called the first edition of the Forum with the MST, Abong, CUT, the business community, the Church, you give a multiple face to the thing. It was very easy because we already knew each other. There's an anthropological side there too. So, I already knew everyone, everyone already knew me. In this way, we'd followed common paths …
>
> (Interviewee 01)

This common experience, added to a certain balance of forces between the actors involved could be highlighted as an important factor, both in the sense of blocking the risk of exploitation and control of the Committee by a given actor, and in the sense of establishing criteria for coexistence and trust that permitted a process of

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33   This ambiguity in the degree of 'direction' exercised by the bodies of the 'WSF process' is expressed in the following commentary by an interviewee: 'we decided that we, the Organising Committee, would not have decision power over the Forum. We classified ourselves as facilitators. Evidently this facilitation has an extremely strong political character. For example, this year in 2005, in encouraging the process of agglutination of activities, in taking the Forum away from PUC and locating it in the centre of Porto Alegré, in abolishing the division between self-organised activities and central activities, as they were called, we gave a different form to the Forum. This is a political decision, of course. But we said, that we would never try, for example, to push the Forum towards a given position and so on. And the same went for the International Council. It doesn't define the direction of the Forum, it defines the format of the Forum' (interviewee 06). What we intend to show with this study is that the definition of the 'format' has a direct impact on the 'direction' of the WSF.

negotiation and confrontation of divergences that did not lead to ruptures and divisions.[34]

In 2004, by virtue of the transfer of the WSF to India, a General Indian Council (CGI) was formed which could draw on the support and monitoring of members of the COB and the International Council. The CGI was formed by representatives of 135 organisations which accepted the WSF's Charter of Principles and was responsible for taking decisions on the general guidelines of the 5th WSF. At a lower level, an Indian Working Committee was formed by 67 organisations, responsible *for formulating policy guidelines that form the basis for the functioning of the WSF India process* (www.wsfindia.org/?q=node/5). Finally, an Indian Organising Committee (COI) was formed, with 45 members, whose task was the organisation of the event on the basis of the guidelines defined by the other two bodies (Murthy 2004: 35–6; www.wsfindia.org/orgstructure.php).

An important aspect of the organisation of the 4th WSF in India, to a certain degree distinct from that observed in Brazil,[35] was the explicit presence of political parties in the process of organisation and direction of the event (Callinicos 2004: 28–9). This fact was the object of discussions and conflicts, but was imposed as a necessary condition for the feasibility of the WSF in a political context marked by the presence of left-wing parties with significant mobilisation capacity, that were at the same time divided and without a tradition of articulation and joint action.

With the return to Brazil, the preparation of the 5th WSF will be carried out by a new COB, formed by eight social organisations and movements that formed part of the original composition, plus fifteen new organisations, networks and social movements.

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34   As an interviewee highlights: 'Since the Forum opened a very broad environment, evidently not directed by any political sensibility, it succeeded in attracting trade unions, peasant movements, the huge range of human rights movements, movements for freedom of sexual orientation, the progressive churches and environmentalists. Thus, in a certain way, we created a chemistry which showed that the Forum would not be appropriated by anyone, no-one would go there to 'scratch anyone's back'. (...) I have the impression (...) that this set of organisations was capable of making the Forum, because it was visibly incapable of assuming the direction of the Forum. Firstly, on account of the weakness of the attending organisations in the face of the task, which would theoretically be to direct the Forum, and secondly, on account of the non-homogeneous positions. How could you imagine, for example, CUT which has a different sensibility from the MST, which has a different sensibility from the churches, which have a different sensibility from ATTAC, which has a different sensibility from Brazilian NGOs. It was evidently a non-steering committee, a committee that served as a reference but that was not in a position to direct (...). I thus have the impression that the role we had was as guarantee that the Forum would not be, let's say, 'factionalised' (interviewee 06).

35   It is important to highlight that the distinction is merely a partial one, since there was always a strong presence of left-wing political parties (especially of the Workers' Party (PT)) in the organisation of the WSFs. As one of the members of the COB/Secretariat points out: 'We need to explain that the "exclusion" of parties from the organisation of the WSF occurred at a "later stage". Anyone who reviews the first minutes of what became the first "Organising Committee" of the WSF of 2001 will see that a representative of the national directorate of the Brazilian PT was present'. (Codas 2004:26). At a subsequent stage, this presence tended to occur indirectly, through the action of members and party sympathisers who were active in the social organisation and governments that supported the holding of the WSFs. This fact has been highlighted by critics as a sign of the 'hypocrisy' of the Charter of Principles and its defenders, who, by denying it, would block an open discussion on the relationship of the WSF (and the 'movement') with political parties and governments.

The International Council of the WSF (CI) was in turn formed in 2001, largely as a consequence of the 'success' of the 1st WSF and the need perceived at the time for the creation of an organising structure that allowed the actors who had structured the various networks converging towards the Forum to be brought together, thus permitting the continuity of the global articulation responsible for the success of the event.

Like the COB, the CI was initially formed on the basis of previously established relationships and contacts between activities and organisations who were gradually invited to join the Council.[36] At present, the CI is composed of 130 representatives of organisations networks and social movements,[37] the distribution of which by region of origin is expressed in Table 1.5.

Table 1.5 Distribution of the organisations and social movements represented in the CI by regions of location of their headquarters

Region	Number	%
Europe	32	33.3%
Latin America and the Caribbean	32	33.3%
North America	13	13.5%
Asia	9	9.4%
Africa	6	6.3%
Middle East	2	2.1%
Australia	1	1.0%
Arab World	1	1.0%
Total	96*	100.0%

Source: Santos (2005: 75).
*The numbers refer to 73% of the organisations and social movements present at the CI, for which information is available.

36 This formation process for the CI is illustrated by the following affirmation of an interviewee: 'the Council was initially formed by friends of the Brazilians, and still carries its original defect. It is thus an extremely unbalanced composition, a certain hegemony of a type of political practice that is very Western, very Latin. So the Americans and the English, the English hardly take part, but the Americans don't feel comfortable there, with its discursive manner. We have established a relationship with the Asians that could be developed, but it is not natural within the Council. There's thus a problem of composition that we still haven't succeeded in solving. But it's the Council that expresses, let's say, a certain organic accumulation. A certain organic character of a certain sector which has made a heavy investment in the Forum process in one way or another' (interviewee 05).

37 For the report on actors composing the CI, see: www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/ main.php?id_menu=3_2_1&cd_language=1 (accessed 25 August 2006).

These numbers indicate an aspect already highlighted above more clearly: the non-homogeneous character of the reach and repercussion of the WSF in global terms. That is, starting from the above information, we may perceive the notable predominance of the organisations and movements from the Americas and Europe, which together represent over 80 per cent of the members of the CI. This indicates the relative 'Westernisation' of the 'WSF process', which has already been identified by the members of the CI themselves, and which was at the root of the decision to stage the 4th WSF in India, and the 6th WSF in 2007 in Africa.

Some critical commentators (Aguitton and Cardon 2005: 12) highlight that the composition of the CI, to the degree that it arose through a process of 'co-opting' and not through a process of candidatures, elections or another public and democratic form of choice, has tended to be partly responsible for this imbalance. On the other hand, rejecting this criticism, certain members of the CI will argue that the Council is not a representative body of the WSF, and even less, of the 'global movement', and for this reason, is not obliged to follow classical procedures for choosing representatives. For these activists, the CI would express the dynamic at networks which form the basis of the WSF and the 'movement', which is precisely based on the webs of relationships established between the various actors and not on traditional structures of representation.

This reproduction of the dynamic of networks within the CI tends to create a less visible power structure, albeit by no means one that is less effective for those who have available the relationships and links that function as resources for legitimacy and power within these spaces. As Aguitton and Cardon highlight (2005: 15),

> Structure favorisant les relations d'influences informelles, le réseau apparaît alors comme un instrument de pouvoir particulièrement efficace au bénéfice de ceux qui, dotés de positions multiples et familiers des jeux d'acteurs internationaux savent le mieux circuler dans ces espaces flous. L'imprécision des statuts et des organes de décision permet à quelques acteurs, (...), sans qu'ils disposent de statut ou de mandat explicite, de jouer d'une grande influence sur les décisions du CI.

> [A structure favouring the informal influence of relationships, the network thus appears to be a particularly effective instrument of power benefiting those who hold multiple positions and are familiar with the games of international actors and who best know how to circulate within these fuzzy spaces. The lack of precision of the status and decision-making bodies allow certain actors, (…) without having an explicit status or mandate, to exert major influence on the decisions of the CI.]

In this way, despite the lack of roles that define an explicit hierarchy within the context of the CI (and the WSF in general), it is evident that there are some activists/organisations which tend to assume a pre-eminent position in terms of defining the discussion agenda and the decisions taken by the Council.[38] According to Patomäki and Teivainen (2004: 150):

> There are some 120 insiders in the International Council, 1,000 to 2,000 semi-insiders who follow, and take part in, discussions but do not participate in decision-making. Then there are those hundreds of thousands who participate

in various social forums but merely abide by decisions made by the few. This is why there is a widespread perception that the WSF is a top-down organization, despite all talk to the contrary.

From June 2003 onwards, at the meeting of the CI in Miami, a new functional structure was introduced, based on Committees, as an attempt to confront the obstacles identified in the organisation and activity of the CI. As one interviewee puts it:

> What it was in my view that put the Council at risk at a given point, was when it was unable to define what its own role was, because it's a gigantic mechanism, with over 100, 129, 130 organisations which was incapable of taking a single decision, even on its form of functioning. There was a moment then when many people asked themselves 'what's the point of this thing?' When, (...) at the Miami meeting, it was defined that the Council would work through these committees, then it found a way of working.
>
> (Interviewee 01)

In this way, six committees were created with the following objectives:

● **Strategies:** to deepen the analyses of the strategies, initiatives and actions of the agents of neoliberalism, as well as the initiatives opposed to neoliberal domination (the anti- or *altermondialiste* global movement), with a view to facilitating the debate on resistance strategies and the construction of 'another possible world';

● **Content:** collection (archiving), systematisation (analysis and thematic organisation) and the dissemination among the participants in the Forum process (through electronic means, written publications and the organisation of discussion seminars) of analyses and proposals of new initiatives and alternatives for resistance to neoliberalism and the construction of 'another possible world', that had emerged in previous forums, as well as the stimulus to intensify the relations and initiatives of the participants in the process around such proposals, evaluating the pertinence of holding thematic forums to deepen specific questions;

● **Methodology:** systematisation and consolidation of the methodology for organising the forums, on the basis of the Charter of Principles, and starting from the experience of the forums that were held, since this methodology guarantees the character of an open space that respects diversity and plurality represents its main force;

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38   In addition to the hierarchy existing with the CI, an interviewee highlighted another hierarchy between sectors with a presence within the CI and others that do not. In his words: 'There is an immense hole within the Council: there are no youth organisations there, because young people are unable to define representatives, a delegation of representatives, for someone to hold a chair there. Hence , in principle, the problem is at the origin. If the Forum is a space for renovation, for the new political generations to enter and join and the Council is incapable of reflecting this, then there's already a problem there. I keep insisting on this: how is it that we here, in this Council, don't have any youth representatives here? That we haven't found a solution for the representation of youth' (interviewee 01).

- **Expansion:** supporting the development of regional, national or local social forums on the basis of this methodology, as well as the expansion of the process to the geographical areas of the world in which the organisations of civil society are still not sufficiently familiar with it to take the initiative in promoting forums or to participate in those realised in these areas, equally helping to ensure that this expansion is reflected in the composition of the CI;
- **Communication:** construction of information systems for the WSF process beyond its sphere and among its participants, identifying methods of working at a distance for the CI and the Committees;
- **Finance:** construction of an international system of solidarity in financing activities of the WSF process.

  www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/dinamic.php?pagina=ci_regras_miami_por (accessed 25 August 2006)

These Commissions do not have a fixed composition, being on the contrary, open to participation by any member of the CI, and even of activities whose organisations do not have a position on the Council. The functioning of these Committees has been highly irregular, with variations both over time and among the different themes. One of the Commissions that has been most active is the Methodology Commission, which played a central role in formulating proposals for changing 'methodology' for the 5th WSF of 2005.

1.4 The Charter of Principles of the WSF

The Charter of Principles of the WSF[39] was drawn up after the first edition, in 2001, as an attempt to establish certain basic ethico-political principles for delimiting the field of actors included in the WSF, as well as establishing a few orientations for future editions, both of the WSF and of any regional and/or thematic forums that might be realised. The proposal to create a Charter of Principles appears in the document drawn up by the COB at the closure of the WSF of 2001, with this being the body responsible for drawing up the first version of the Charter, on 9 April 2001. This was submitted to the CI, having been approved with a few specific alterations, on 10 July 2001.

Despite its generic character, the Charter of Principles establishes certain important parameters for the political orientation of the WSF. In the terms of ethico-political principles, the most notable are: the proposal of the WSF as *an open meeting space for deepening reflection, the democratic debating of ideas, the formulation of proposals, the free exchange of experiences and articulation for effective actions, by entities and movements of civil society which oppose neoliberalism and the domination of the world by capitalism and any form of imperialism, and which are committed to constructing a planetary society oriented towards a fertile relationship between human beings and between human beings and the Earth* (Article 1); the notion of the WSF as a space for the articulation of actors of 'global civil society', but one that does not represent this 'global civil society' (Article 5); the refusal of the WSF to constitute itself as a

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39   Available at: www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=4&cd_language=1

space for discussion, representation or a 'level of power' (Article 6); the respect for the diversity and autonomy of the actors involved in the WSF (Articles 7, 8 and 9); the rejection of participation by political parties and military organisations (Article 9); the defence of values of diversity, equality, democracy, peace and solidarity (Article 10).

On the basis of documents and interviews, we may define three principal points of dispute in the Charter of Principles.[40] Firstly, the notion of the WSF as an 'open space', which is questioned by those who emphasise the need for the Forum to assume the role of a 'political subject' in a process of global opposition, and not merely a 'space' for the convergence of different 'subjects' involved in more or less wide-ranging processes of opposition. Furthermore, critics of the notion of an 'open space' highlight the need to establish a clearer 'political identity', defining the precise sense of the opposition to be undertaken by the actors articulated within the WSF.

Directly connected with the previous point, the second controversial point of the Charter of Principles is the definition of the WSF as a non-deliberative and non-representative space, which materialises in the rejection of the notion that the Forum should produce final documents or present unified proposals and/or resolutions.[41] For many individuals, such an aspect would be a source of fragmentation and loss of political effectiveness of the WSF, making it harder to concentrate the energies mobilised around an agenda and/or common 'targets'. In view of this, the Forum would lose the exceptional opportunity generated by its huge capacity for mobilisation and its legitimacy won over time, to constitute a more effective counterpoint to the forces of 'neoliberal' and/or 'corporate globalisation'.

Finally, the third principal point of controversy in relation to the Charter of Principles relates to the role of political parties in the WSF, and more broadly, to the process of opposition and social transformation. As stated above, for many critics, the idea of excluding political parties from the organisation and running of the WSF is characterised by a certain hypocrisy, to the degree that, directly or indirectly, political parties were always present at the events. Both through an active presence and the material and financial help of governments run by political

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40 We shall return to and deepen these points in Chapter 3.
41 According to the interview, this non-directive and non-deliberative definition responds to a context of crisis of the political-ideological references of the 'left', and was indeed a factor that made possible the 'success' of the WSFs. In his words: 'the idea that Oded and Chico had and discussed with Cassen, of using the model of the World Social Forum applied to the movement was very fortunate. Because it responded to a situation of crisis in the Socialist movement, a general crisis of the Left, to which you couldn't apply the mechanisms, it was no longer natural, there was no longer a revolutionary subject recognised by all. So either you adopted a model which radically neutralised the struggles for power, through declarations, through the appropriation of the label or you wouldn't succeed in bringing together everyone who could be brought together, or what Wallenstein calls anti-systemic forces' (interviewee 05).

coalitions which were led by the Workers' Party, as was observed in editions of the WSF in Porto Alegré,[42] and by the direct presence of left-wing parties in the organising committees, as occurred in the Indian edition of the WSF, the fact remains, according to critics, that parties are central actors in the realisation and success of the WSFs. On the other hand, some critics highlight the fact that the concealment of the role of political parties in the Forums prevents a public discussion on the relations between the organisations and social movements articulated around the WSF and institutional political actors and bodies, i.e., the debate on the position of parties and governments in the transformation strategy/ strategies and project(s) present at the WSF would, to a certain degree, be blocked by a false definition that political parties and governments would be excluded from this space or would participate in it in only a marginal way.

At certain points, these disputes reached the level of explicit confrontations. By way of significant illustrations, we could indicate, first of all, the removal in the redrafting of the Charter of Principles by the Indian Working Committee during the preparation of the 4th WSF of the restriction on direct participation by political parties in the organisation of the Forum.[43]

Secondly, also during the WSF in India in 2004, the reading of the deliberations of the Assembly of Social Movements during the Forum's closing ceremony was interpreted by some as a disrespect for the rule that the event would have a non-deliberative character, given that the deliberations of the Assembly indeed came to indicate a 'final document' for the whole of the WSF.[44]

Finally, another two moments of significant aggravation of conflicts occurred during CI meetings: at the Bangkok meeting in August 2002, a declaration was supported in favour of mobilisation against the meeting of the WTO, to be held in Cancún in September 2003; at the meeting in Porto Alegré, in January 2003, there was strong pressure for a declaration against the war in Iraq. In these two

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42   According to an interviewee, it is interesting to observe that the restriction clause on the participation of political parties was in part a reaction to the problematic experience itself of the relationship between the organisers of the 1st WSF and the members of the PT linked to the state government of Rio Grande do Sul and the Municipal Authority of Porto Alegré. In his words: 'They [PT/State Government/Municipal Authority] crushed us. If we look at the first year, they virtually transformed it into their event (…). So I'd say that it was a difficult compromise. In the first year, and I don't know whether you took part, the opening was almost an official government opening and behind the scenes, we fought a lot for them to stay seated and for us to close it. We did the closing but it was difficult. (…) But it is complicated, because evidently, it also caused us after the first Forum to define the party thing in the Charter of Principles, which is still controversial, even today.'

43   See the whole of the Charter of Principles of the Indian WSF in Sen and Kumar (2003: 29–31).

44   One of the interviewees criticises this fact: 'In India, all of a sudden, these people got up during the closing and made a declaration. It gets out. Because often you're fighting with internal forces, which often break the rules. Between you and me, democracy isn't a very …' (interviewee 04).

cases, despite disagreement from important segments of the IC, the principle was maintained that the WSF as such would not issue unified declarations.[45]

1.5 The 'methodology' of the WSF

Despite the relative continuity in terms of the general lines of organisation of the WSFs, we may observe important changes, particularly in the two last editions of the event (2004 and 2005). These changes, partially described above in the section on activities developed within the Forums, are the expression of the process of seeking an organisational structure and a dynamic of functioning, a 'methodology' that expresses, and at the same time, makes possible the set of ethico-political principles embraced and defended by segments that today occupy a hegemonic position within the 'WSF process'.[46]

In this way, we may observe that the WSF was born as an event that tended to reproduce a 'traditional' dynamic, characterised by the centrality of a set of major activities (Conferences), in which analyses and proposals are presented by 'personalities' of the 'global movement' and partially debated by a restricted set of participants (Delegates). This dynamic, which especially characterised the first editions of the Forum (2001, 2002 and 2003), may be interpreted as the expression of an initial effort to construct a shared interpretative framework that on the one hand permitted the forging of a minimum degree of identification between participants, and on the other, the elaboration of a discourse that was more or less articulated towards a political and symbolic dispute with the actors of 'neoliberal globalisation'. As the document presenting the Methodology of the 3rd WSF of 2003 highlights:

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45 On these last two disputes, see Teivainen (2003). The second case is recounted in the following way by an interviewee: 'When war was imminent, the invasion of Iraq by the United States, the International Council was urged to make a declaration against the war. And for a question of method, it didn't make it. That is, what is in question there isn't whether or not the Forum is against the war, because it evidently is, but it's that the agenda of the Forum is increasingly turning from being anti-Davos, to becoming anti-Davos and anti-war. So it's not that the Forum isn't extremely anti-war. This was expressed on 15 February in 2003, but it's a question of method. Because who is the International Council to make a declaration in the name of the Forum? The Council isn't the coordination of the Forum. The Council can't speak in the name of the Forum. The Council doesn't represent the Forum. So it's more a question of method, on the meaning of the Forum and not about its merits, on the content of the question in itself.' (Interviewee 01)

46 The clear political meaning of this 'methodology' is expressed in the following testimony by an interviewee who took part in the formulation of the 'methodology' for the WSF of 2005: 'It's not a methodology, it's a bet on a new form of doing politics, of disputing the politics within the Forum. Where you bet that the real social forces will be in conflict and that agendas will be constructed on the basis of this dispute. It was this methodological bet in my opinion. It could be that others have a different opinion. I think that that was a methodology to cause disputes to emerge and to allow forces to be correlated' (interviewee 01).

> The conferences have the aim of socialising visions and analyses for the broad public of the World Social Forum. They should contribute to strengthening a very broad movement of opinion directed towards the need, the possibility and the urgency of building 'other worlds' in the face of the threats and limits of the economic and financial globalisation of neoliberalism.
>
> (www.forumsocialmundial.org.br)

At the same time, since the first edition of the Forum, surprising the organisers to a certain extent, the self-organised activities and other 'parallel' spaces (especially the Youth Camp) were marked by an enormous diversity, creativity, autonomy, and at certain moments, tension with the 'official' part of the event. While the Conferences sought to build a certain convergence of diagnoses and proposals, on the basis of a dynamic marked by the verticality of relations between 'spokespeople' and 'audience', the 'parallel universe' of workshops, experiences, marches, assemblies and various other manifestations, expressed the enormous plurality of the actors, interests and proposals mobilised and attracted by the WSF.

Despite some criticisms of the fragmented and confused (or even chaotic) character of this 'universe', it may be observed that it has progressively come to occupy a central position within the WSF. From secondary and even 'folkloric' activities, the self-organised events tend to be perceived as central spaces for the vitality and construction of collective initiatives starting from the WSF. This centrality could already be clearly perceived in 2003, on the basis of the characterisation made by the methodology presentation document of the 3rd WSF:

> The workshops are activities proposed by the bodies, movements and organisations which enrolled as delegates to the 2003 WSF. *They are the fabric of the Forum, a kind of global civil laboratory,* and have the aim of allowing the meeting, the exchange of experiences, the articulation, the planning and the definition of strategies for groups, coalitions, networks, movements and organisations, always thinking in terms of their present and future actions
>
> (www.forumsocialmundial.org.br – my emphasis)

This recognition of the importance of self-organised activities was consolidated in the last two editions of the WSF (2004 and 2005), when, according to the information presented above, there was a progressive elimination of the major activities proposed and realised by the bodies organising the events.[47] The

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47   This elimination of 'official' activities is also in part a response to the criticisms existing within the WSF, as may be perceived from this statement by an interviewee: 'it's funny how the Forum's own method shows up its own contradictions and starts to force certain things. Invitations to these people' [exhibitors of the big conferences] 'began to fall, and kept falling and falling all the way to zero. Most of this happened due to a reflection by us that within the Forum, within the Forum process, we had created a particular class of people. Partly, also, because this occurred from the outside in. So the fact that the young people went to PUC and pillaged what was called the VIP room, where people stayed and were accompanied to their tables, is a symbolic fact'. (Interviewee 04).

appreciation of the self-organised events at the Mumbai WSF may be grasped in the following extract from the document on the Methodology of the WSF of 2004:

> The programme format aims to allow a greater space for self-organised group activities. The official organisers, various groups of the WSF, such as the International Secretariat, the International Council, and the Indian Programme Committee, shall limit themselves to only part of the activities. It shall be guaranteed that the officially organised activities do not take place at the same time as the self-organised workshops/seminars. The idea is that afternoons shall be reserved for seminars and workshops
>
> (www.forumsocialmundial.org.br)

At the 5th WSF, which sought to integrate the respect and appreciation of diversity with the search for articulation mechanisms between actors and organised activities, the process of structuring the Forum underwent some important changes. Firstly, a consultation was carried out to which 1,863 organisations and social movements replied,[48] which sought to identify the themes, struggles and actions of interest in this field of actors involved in the WSF. After the deadline had passed for submitting replies to the consultation, on 3 August 2004, two procedures were established: on the one hand, organisations and social movements were encouraged to analyse the information obtained through consultation and to seek contact and articulation with other organisations and social movements that were proposing convergent actions or were interested in convergent themes; on the other hand, the CI's Methodology Commission carried out an analysis of the results of the consultation, and on the basis of these, drew up a proposal for axes and themes around which the activities of the 2005 WSF would be structured. The objectives of these initiatives are stated in the following extract from the document presenting the methodology of the 5th WSF:

> Allowing persons and organisations interested in fighting for the same objectives to meet effectively, articulate with each other and plan common actions during the World Social Forums and between themselves is as important as preserving the commitment to plurality and the diversity of ideas, struggles and projects, which has been a fundamental characteristic of the success of the WSF. The thematic consultation shall facilitate this process of approximation. By completing the consultation via Internet, each organisation may know in advance which struggles, questions, problems, proposals or challenges are believed by other organisations to be important for debate within the WSF, or which activities they intend to organise during the event. This information shall feed this large database, to which everyone has access. By means of this database, it shall be possible to carry out various research on what a given organisation is proposing, or to list all the organisations interested in carrying out activities on a given subject, as well as to obtain their contacts
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> (www.forumsocialmundial.org.br)

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48 The complete data for the consultation may be accessed at www.consultafsm.org.br.

In an attempt to contribute to the articulation process (but not to impose anything on it) of organisations and social movements, for each of the 11 thematic spaces (see Table 1.4), a group of coordinators was created, whose role was to promote contacts and convergence between the actors proposing activities for the 2005 Forum.

Finally, during the days on which the 5th WSF was held, the times at the end of the afternoon were reserved for encounters, meetings or other articulation initiatives between the organisations and social movements concerned in each of the 11 thematic spaces. During these times, there would not be any programmed activities, in order to allow participants to be available for the meetings.

The results of these initiatives, which aimed to create a 'method' capable of reconciling the heterogeneity of the actors with the convergence of actions, are ambiguous and the evaluations contradictory. On the one hand, it is possible to observe affirmations emphasising the advances achieved in the sense of constructing new articulations and collective initiatives:

> The fifth edition was this: we discovered a new path. I think that the really great thing about the methodology was that we managed to find a way of combining the diversity of the Forum, the enormous diversity, with articulation, with the possibility of articulation and agglutination. That is, our initial hypothesis went like this: 'Errm, when we, when we propose agglutination, the people will merge their activities'. This only occurred in extremely rare cases. People want to have the right to their own activity, even if it's microscopic. It's no use our wanting to say: 'Your activity will only have ten people! Isn't it better for you to join forces with the one that will talk about the same thing?'. People want to do their own. And this is great! Now, what this methodology proposed is the following: 'OK, you do your activity for ten people, but there'll be a moment when, if you want, you can join together with the others that have done similar activities and try to construct either a common action plan, or if things haven't matured enough for you to have a common action plan, at least to exchange experiences on the themes that you work on'. So let's say that the methodology succeeded in confronting what, in my view and the view of many others, could be fatal for the Forum, if it merely continued as a space for the realisation of diversity without having anything, any possibility of a meeting of this diversity. So, let's say we found the path in this direction. To maintain diversity but to produce the possibility of an encounter. And the encounter will then depend on the will of those who are meeting. Whether it's meeting just to say what you do or meeting to form a basis for moving to joint action, sharing agendas, strategies, etc. Now, what the methodology showed, that I think is important to highlight is the following: the meeting was more productive and advanced more in terms of common strategy where the social movements, the actors were already seeking to, had already trodden this path. So regardless of how much methodology we invent, the Forum is of no use, the Forum is not going to invent something which replaces real-life politics (...). I think that the methodology actually advanced more where there were already the political conditions for such a thing.

> (Interviewee 01)

On the other hand, there are the critical visions of those who highlight the continuity (and even the deepening) of a fragmentation that limits the transforming potential of the 'WSF process'.[49] One of the targets of criticism, for example, was precisely the lack of activities on a greater scale, programmed and executed by the organising bodies of the 5th WSF. This is identified by Gupta (2005: 3):

> The WSF 2005 had also departed from earlier practice by not having any events directly organised by the WSF – i.e. all events at the WSF 2005 were organised by individual participating organisations. The response to this innovation was mixed this year, and many felt that the absence of some large 'unifying' events with broad political messages led to the diffusion of the political sharpness that the Forum was able to provide. This is again an issue that will have to be evaluated by the International Council of the WSF.

2 The World Social Forum: a field in/for dispute

The objective of this chapter is to deepen the characterisation of the diversity of actors who converge on the 'WSF process', analysing the implications of this diversity in configuring this 'field of opposition' and in particular, indicating some conflicts and disputes present in it which shall be the object of analysis in the next chapter.

2.1 The WSF as a space for the convergence of diversity

As highlighted in the introduction and in the previous chapter, the WSF was established as a point of convergence for a diversity of organisations, networks and social movements, originating from the most diverse parts of the world, and thus profoundly heterogeneous in terms of political tradition, organisational experiences and more broadly, in interpretative cultural frameworks on the basis of which social reality is conceived and collective actions are developed. In fact, such diversity expresses the plurality of actors, who in an unprecedented way,[50] began to act jointly starting at the end of the 1990s, in actions and campaigns against 'corporate globalisation' and/or 'neoliberalism'. This change is highlighted by an interviewee, for whom:

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49   See the critique of Callinicos and Nineham, p.24, above.
50   As Mello highlights (2004: 7): 'During the first half of the 1990s, the vast majority of social movements that today participate in the WSF confronted inequalities and the struggle for rights in a sectorialised and often fragmented form. In various cases, these movements and campaigns underwent the experience of monitoring and participating in the so-called social cycle of UN conferences which began with Rio-92 and went via Vienna, Cairo, Beijing, Copenhagen, leading to many disappointments in relation to the hope deposited in international institutions, but which at the same time, had given these movements an opportunity to understand better the dynamics of international policies and the importance of acting at global level, above all through the organisation of so-called parallel conferences and forums. These movements expressed the sum of different struggles, which in the majority of cases, did not form articulations with each other.'

Subjects who criticise globalisation and seek an alternative, seek to create an alternative to capitalism, are social subjects of much greater diversity than in the previous social struggles. As such, they are no longer employees or feminist movements or student movements. It is a very large set, it is the 'Porto Alegré galaxy' that we're talking about, of which the Forum has become the expression.

(Interviewee 06)

And in this process of constructing joint contentious political actions, Seattle undoubtedly emerged as a breaking point. This is clearly expressed by the interviewees:

For me, Seattle thus signifies a change that reveals the possibility of joint action, but supposes that we know how to identify a number of points of a common agenda.

(Interviewee 03)

And in 99, you've got Seattle, which is, let's say, the unrest behind all this. And it's unrest in an extremely rich sense, because it not only captured the U.S. union movement. In fact, everything was there. There were the most diverse movements, of NGOs, unions, I don't know, peasants. There was a plurality there.

(Interviewee 01)

Then Seattle appeared, which was extremely interesting, because it reached a dimension that was unexpected, even by the organisers. And there weren't any organisers. There was a call. Different points of view. The objectives of each group that was there were extremely diversified. The American trade unionists with a completely different objective from that of the French farmers, even antagonistic ones at times. With objectives that were completely different from those of any people from underdeveloped countries who were there.

(Interviewee 02)

If we seek to establish a synthetic mapping of the diversity of this field of actors via the bibliography,[51] the documents and the interviews, we may identify and distinguish the following segments as being the most significant within the context of the WSF:

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51   This diversity is highlighted by Della Porta (2005: 14). According to the author: 'Our surveys indicate that activists in globalization mobilizations are rooted in a very dense network of associations, ranging from Catholics to ecologists, from social volunteers to trade unionists, from human rights supporters to women's liberationists, often with multiple memberships in associations of various types.'

- Networks of NGOs;
- Networks of union organisations and professional associations;
- Networks of social movements;
- Networks of religious organisations;
- Networks of political groups and parties with a socialist/communist tradition;
- Anarchist networks.

These networks in turn tend to present great internal diversity, with very different degrees and dynamics of articulation between the social organisations and movements that compose them. In certain cases, such as that of certain networks of socialist/communist political forces or certain religious segments, the relationships tend to be old and consolidated, generating a high degree of identity between the inserted actors. Conversely, in other cases, as in most of the NGO and social movement networks, relations tend to be relatively recent, i.e. constituted during the last two decades. This fact leads such networks to be characterised by a much greater degree of heterogeneity among the actors constituting them.

Another factor which influences the degree of internal diversification of networks is whether or not formal and hierarchical articulation structures exist between actors. In this sense, certain union, party political and religious networks present a high degree of institutionalisation, constituting permanent bureaucratic structures which guarantee a constant and intense tie between their members. Furthermore, in certain cases, the directorates and/or coordinating bodies of these formal structures define certain directives which establish parameters and orientations for joint action by the actors, in the sense of producing a degree of unification of discourses and practices.

On the other hand, many NGO networks, social movements and anarchist groups are characterised by a high degree of informality and by the preservation of a wide margin of autonomy among the actors involved. This aspect tends to generate a certain instability and discontinuity in relations between actors, at the same time that it blocks any attempt at establishing a unified line of orientation for the practices of the same agents.

Another aspect which contributes to the generation of the significant heterogeneity encountered within the different networks present at the WSFs is the diversity of themes, on the basis of which actors organise themselves and on which they act. Under the 'umbrella' of criticism of the process of 'corporate globalisation', organisations, movements and networks divide into various foci of interest and thematic intervention, each one with its own dynamic, its agenda of questions, its debate, its articulations and conflicts, its proposals and initiatives. In this way, observing the field of NGOs, for example, we may identify a significant segmentation according to the areas of action: feminism, indigenous peoples, solidarity, economy, ecology, popular education, etc. The same thematic segmentation is present in the field of social movements.

In the case of religious and trade union networks as well as political organisations, the segmentation arises through the divisions themselves, present in each of the fields in which they are constituted, i.e. the distinct religious manifestations tend to constitute specific articulations between their members; the union organisations

tend to divide themselves both into professional sectors and by political orientation; the political organisations tend to form' sub-networks' on the basis of distinct politico-ideological identifications.

The plurality of the actors who converge towards the WSFs is also expressed in the diversity of organisational structures observed: social movements, NGOs, trade unions, political organisations, bodies representing interests, self-managing groups, religious institutions, business foundations, etc. This organisational diversity is the expression of a diversity of forms of action, of objectives, of strategies, i.e. of politico-ideological conceptions which characterise this multi-organisational field.

Another distinction highlighted by certain interviewees refers to the differentiation between actors from the countries of the 'Global North' and those from the countries of the 'Global South'.[52] Firstly, in so far as the former tend to have far more 'resources' than the latter, there is the risk of constituting power relations within the 'global movement' which would reproduce the hierarchies historically constructed in the process of global expansion and domination of European and American states and corporations. Secondly, the differentiated positions of countries, in terms of 'development',[53] power and concentration of wealth, establishes specific problems for the intervention of social actors who, in certain cases, set interests of the 'Global South' and the 'Global North' against each other. Finally, the diversity of national socio-cultural contexts also differentiates actors from countries of the 'North' and 'South' at the same time as it establishes very significant distinctions within each of these 'fields'.[54]

Finally, the diversity is also manifested in relation to the context of action of the actors involved in the networks indicated above. At an extreme, we find organisations marked by a high degree of transnationalisation, composed of members of different nationalities and intervening in spaces and processes that transcend the frontiers of a specific country.[55] At another extreme, we have

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52 The terms 'Global South' and 'Global North' form part of the discourse produced by actors of the 'global movement', seeking to avoid a mere geographical counterpoint between 'North' and 'South', given that the perverse effects of 'corporate globalisation' would also be present in the countries of the geographic North, and on the other hand, there would be privileged sectors among the economic and political élites of the countries of the geographic South.

53 The term 'development' is used without any evolutionist connotation, but merely to designate important differences between countries, both in terms of technological-productive standards and in terms of living conditions among their populations.

54 Here we highlight the significant changes caused by the shift in the 4th edition of the WSF from Brazil to India, which placed a set of themes on the discussion agenda (such as caste structure and communal fundamentalism) that were absent from the centre of debates realised in the first editions of the Forum in Porto Alegré.

55 The principal example of these kind of organisations are those which Tarrow (2001) defines as 'International Nongovernmental Organisations' (INGOs). According to the author (2001:12), 'International non-governmental organisations are organisations that operate independently of governments, are composed of members from two or more countries, and are organised to advance their members' international goals and provide services to citizens of other states through routine transactions with states, private actors, and international institutions.'

community-based social organisations and movements, fundamentally inserted into social and political processes on a local scale. While, according to the data presented in Chapter 1, the first tend to constitute a group with only a few members, albeit with considerable influence within the WSFs, the second, on the contrary, tend to dominate in quantitative terms, albeit with a marginal position in terms of the power relations established within the Forums. Their local character, generally combined with major limitations on resources, causes social organisations and movements which act locally to participate in a sporadic way in the Forums, on the basis of possible opportunities arising from geographic proximity.

2.2 Diversity v identity

As observed in the previous section, the WSFs were characterised as a space for the convergence of an extremely diversified range of actors. Cultural, political, thematic, organisational, and resource differences, among others, were present since the first edition, and may even have grown during the following editions, to the degree that the 'success' of the Forum boosted its capacity for attracting new actors.

In analytical terms, this diversity poses a number of significant difficulties for the definition of the 'WSF process' itself. Firstly, we need to break with the representations of certain participants, who presented the WSF as a 'unified actor', as is expressed in its definition as a 'movement of movements'. This unifying force, which forms part of its own symbolic construction, may, in the event that it is accepted uncritically by the investigator, be converted into an obstacle to an analytical treatment more suited to the complexity of the Forum. In the face of this, the most correct methodological orientation appears to be the one indicated by Melucci (1990: 2);

> the task of sociological analysis should be to question the datum in order to ascertain how it is produced and dissect the empirical unity to discover the plurality of analytical elements – orientations, meanings and relationships – which converge in the same phenomenon.

Taking this perspective as a reference, we start from the notion that diversity is, to a greater or lesser degree, a characteristic that is intrinsic to all collective actions, which, if they wish to acquire continuity, need to construct collectively shared references on the sense of collective action. This construction, which we may term a process of identification, is the mechanism which permits an intensification of the symbolic ties that maintain collective actors united, without however, homogenising them.

On the other hand, being a social construction, a 'cultural arbitrariness',[56] which is based on a diversity of interests and orientations, 'collective identities' are always in

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56 In the sense defined by Bourdieu and Passeron (1982). For this author (1989: 113), the struggles surrounding the construction of collective identities 'are a particular case of the struggles for classifications, of struggles for the monopoly on making people see and believe, of making aware and causing to happen, of imposing the legitimate definition of the divisions of the social world, and by means of this of making and unmaking groups.'

confrontation with other interpretative references which, both internally and externally to collective actors, dispute the meaning of the action and hence, the identification and adhesion of individuals. It is on account of this characteristic of collective actions (and within these, of social movements) that Melucci (2001: 29) highlights:

> We often tend to represent movements as characters, as a defined and homogeneous structure, when in most cases, they are heterogeneous and fragmented phenomena which are obliged to direct most of their resources to managing the complexity and differentiation that constitutes them.

Once this constitutive diversity of collective actors is recognised, the question which emerges relates to the minimum degree of identification required for a given process to be apprehended as, for example, a social movement, or conversely, the need arises for another concept more suitable for its configuration. Such a conceptual definition is particularly important with regard to the 'WSF process', precisely as a function of the major diversity characterised above. As Crossley notes problematically (2002: 674);

> It is this concentration of so many opposing forces in a common social space which makes the question, 'is this a movement?' a genuine and difficult question. The literature of social movements is replete with definitions which refer to the heterogeneity of movements, in contrast to parties and pressure groups, but just how much heterogeneity can the concept of social movements sustain?

In order to reply to these questions, it seems useful to start from the perspective developed by Melucci (1990, 1994, 2001) for dealing with identification processes. For the author:

> Actors produce collective action because they are capable of defining themselves and defining their relationship to their environment (other actors, available resources, possibilities and obstacles). The definition that actors construct is not a linear one, but is produced through interaction, negotiation and the opposition between different orientations. The actors form a 'we', pooling and laboriously adjusting three orders of orientation: those relating to the ends of the action (i.e. the meaning that the action has for the actor); those relating to the means (i.e. to the possibilities and limits of the action); and finally, those relating to the relations with the environment (i.e. the field in which the action is realised). (2001: 46)

Observing the actors united by the 'WSF process', we perceive that it is only partially correct to speak of the construction of a 'collective identity' which transcends diversity and establishes a set of collectively shared orientations. On the basis of the information obtained in the survey, we may perceive the constitution of a relative identification between the actors of the Forum with regard to the interpretation of 'corporate globalisation' and its 'perverse effects' (whether these are economic, social, environmental, cultural or political). The multi-faceted process of discussions, protests and denunciations, in which, most notably from the mid-1990s onwards, various social and political actors, intellectuals and academic investigators participated, forged a critical reference which is apprehended in a more or less unified way by the actors present at the WSFs.

This new interpretative framework[57] may in part be characterised on the basis of the analysis made by Ancelovici (2002) on the birth of the organisation ATTAC in France, during the second half of the 1990s. According to this author (2001: 429):

> During the 1990s, the political process brought about the development of a new interpretive frame that I call the 'Politics against Global Markets' frame. I will argue that this frame became a sort of discursive paradigm that shaped the emergence and content of subsequent claims and demands of social and political actors.

This interpretative frame starts from an appraisal which emphasises the advance of the mercantilisation of social life, which is increasingly subordinated to the imperatives and interests of private corporations (especially financial ones). In this sense, social relations, political institutions, the environment, culture, ethics, among other dimensions of social life, are being progressively oriented and exploited by the hegemonic rationality of the globalised capitalist market.

Against this subjection to the actors of the 'global market', which naturalise their domination by presenting it as an inevitable and inalterable result in a discourse which combines technological determinism and economic determinism, is placed the defence of 'politics'. That is, the fight for the guarantee of a social dimension in which social and political actors may intervene and participate in the definition of the orientations and actions that structure the organisation and development of society. In opposition to the notion of the 'absence of alternatives' of the hegemonic discourse, in this way, a reference is constructed based on the right of citizens to participate through political institutions in decisions that affect their present and future.[58]

By forging a shared appraisal (the negative effects of 'neoliberal corporate globalisation'), an 'adversary' (corporations, international bodies and political élites which adhere to the neoliberal ideology) and an 'alternative' (the resumption of

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57 The concept of 'interpretative frames or frameworks' *(frames)* is defined in the following way by Ancelovici (2002: 432–33): 'Collective action frames do not entail a consensus or support for specific policies, and they are not as elaborated, encompassing, and coherent as ideologies. They are an interpretative schemata that simplifies events and experiences, redefines situations as unjust, and connects several distinct grievances. To be effective and turn passivity into action, they must be different from the dominant, conventional discourse that fosters compliance. They must be adversarial and action oriented. They must transform a given phenomenon into a social problem, attribute the responsibility for it to someone, and possibly propose general solutions and strategies.' A theoretical discussion and examples of the application of this concept in the empirical investigation of social movements may be found in McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1999).

58 This defence of 'politics' (defined as the 'reinvention of democracy') is clearly expressed in the following position of Ponniah and Fischer (2003: 13): *'Essentially, the convergence of difference is best reflected in the widely asserted commitment to the reinvention of democracy. We define 'the reinvention of democracy' to mean* the reinvention of society such that the mode of economic production, the structures of political governance, the dissemination of scientific innovation, the organisation of the media, social relations and the relationships between society and nature, are subjected to a radical, participatory and living democratic process' (emphasised in the original).

'politics' starting from the proactive stance of social actors), this new interpretative framework allowed the articulation and condensation of actors increasingly involved by processes of opposition around a 'common struggle'.[59]

Taking up again the dimensions of 'collective identity' defined above by Melucci (ends, means and environment), we may perceive that the reference provided by the 'Politics against Global Markets' framework tends to take the 'environment' (appraisal and adversary) as its central focus and only partially the 'means' (recovery of 'politics'). With regard to the sense of the action for the actors, the 'ends', these are largely open. As Ancelovici (2002: 444) highlights:

> Although widespread, the Politics against Global Markets frame does not contain a substantial analysis of globalisation nor a clear set of demands. It only connects several distinct grievances, defines the situation as unjust, and blames global markets and its allies.

In this sense, we may grasp the WSF as a space of convergence for actors who to varying degrees share a critical interpretation of 'corporate globalisation' and 'neoliberalism', at the same time as they maintain a high degree of diversity among themselves in terms of the 'means' and especially, the 'ends' of their collective action.[60] This position confirms the conclusion of Tarrow (2002), for whom the interpretative framework based on the critique of 'globalisation', while contributing to the integration of different actors around common actions, presents limits in terms of the construction of effective 'collective identities'. In his words, (2002: 23): ' "Globalisation" as a mobilising frame lacks the definitional capacity to produce sustained mobilization around common collective identities.'[61]

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59 Tarrow (2002: 22) highlights that 'globalisation', as a certain element of the interpretative framework underlying international protests (which the author denominates 'Global Justice'), performs two fundamental 'functions': firstly, what the author terms 'frame bridging' (Globalisation has an extraordinary 'frame-bridging' capacity, bringing together opponents of free trade, supporters of a cleaner environment, those who demand access for third world farmers to western markets, opponents of neo-liberalism and supporters of global democracy); and secondly, the function of 'condensation' (Globalisation is an effective frame for transnational contention because it facilitates the Condensation of distinct targets in the same protest campaign).

60 This identification of actors in relation to 'targets' of their criticism is clearly expressed in the following words of a 'WSF process' activist: 'In the middle of diversity, there are some things which are generalised, such as the rejection of neoliberal globalisation, the rejection of the superconcentration of wealth and power, the rejection of the hegemony and monopolarism in existence in the world today' (Pedro Santana, Corporación Viva la Ciudadanía/Colombia – *Democracia Viva* 2003: 60). The same idea is expressed by Stédile (2005: 10): 'From the viewpoint of doctrine, the Forum has been a space for criticising neoliberalism, and the possible unity has occurred within these frameworks.'

61 This limitation in terms of 'collective identity' may be illustrated by the following position by an interviewee: 'when an anti-globalisation movement, in inverted commas, arises, it is at first a highly heterogeneous movement, much more so than today, it is a movement that is very … that still hasn't clarified its … It has a certain focus, it has a clear target among the multilateral institutions: it is a movement against the IMF, the WTO, the World Bank, G-8. But it has to constitute itself as a movement, it has to constitute itself through the formation of its own identity' (interviewee 05).

The diversity in relation to the 'means' and 'ends' of collective action between the actors of the 'WSF process' may be characterised on the basis of certain points of divergence and disputes present throughout its five editions. In this way, the principal debates took place on the following themes:[62]

1. strategies of struggle against 'corporate globalisation', with the counterpoints between reform or revolution (or also regulation or rupture), direct action or institutional action, the nation state as enemy or potential ally;

2. the tensions between environmental protectionism and the search for economic growth;

3. the divergences between the defence of 'social clauses' which avoid predatory commercial competition and the critique of protectionism by wealthier countries;

4. the debate between those who argue for the universalisation of human rights and critics of the imposition of Western European cultural standards;

5. the different visions of 'scale' (local, national, continental, global) promoted in a contentious and transforming process of 'corporate globalisation';

6. the discussion of the 'role' of the WSF in the transformation process, with the counterpoint between the visions of the 'Forum as movement' and the Forum as space'.[63]

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62 For more information and interpretation of these discussions, see Ponniah and Fischer (2003), Santos (2005) and Seoane and Taddei (2001).

63 An important aspect highlighted by Santos (2005: 90), refers to the discussion on the effective centrality and extent of these discussions. According to the author: 'given the strong presence of movements and organisations of the North Atlantic, and white Latin America, in particular in the first three editions of the WSF, it is not surprising that the most salient fractures reflect the political culture and historical trajectory of the Left in this region of the world. This means, on the one hand, that many movements and organisations of Africa and Asia, the indigenous and black Americas and the Europe of immigrants do not recognise themselves in these fractures and on the other, that the alternative fractures that these movements and organisations intend to make explicit shall be hidden or minimised by those which are dominant.'

Specifically on the reach of the debate in relation to the last item, Aguiton and Cardon (s/d: 16) highlight : 'L'opposition entre « forum-espace » et « forum-mouvement », véritable enjeu concurrentiel entre groupes luttant pour la définition de la bonne forme du forum, n'occupera cependant véritablement que ses acteurs centraux. L'expérience enthousiaste que font des forums sociaux leurs participants rend, en effet, assez théorique le débat sur les diverses potentialités de son architecture. [The opposition between 'the forum as space' and 'the forum as movement', a genuine competitive challenge between groups fighting for the definition of the correct form of the Forum, will only genuinely occupy its central actors. The enthusiastic experience that the participants in the Forums make of them actually turns the debate on the different potentialities of its architecture into a theoretical one].'

That is, we need to bear in mind that the inequality between the actors of the WSF, in terms of visibility and the capacity to direct the discussion agenda, may lead to a distortion in the analysis of the real importance of the terms of the debates held within the Forum: certain themes may be highly visible but involve a limited but prominent set of actors; other themes may arouse great interest but remain hidden since they involve actors with little influence and/or visibility.

In this way, to the degree that we observe this merely partial identification between the diversity of actors united in the 'WSF process', the most adequate theoretical framework for the analytical treatment of this 'object' appears to be that offered by the concept of 'field' and not the one of 'social movement'.[64] By apprehending the WSF (and more broadly, the 'global movement') as a 'field', the aspects of identification between the actors highlighted above are preserved, at the same time that we avoid the risk of obscuring the fundamental differences and divergences that are maintained between the actors.[65] As Crossley highlights (2002: 676);

> The field exists because people both inside and outside believe that it exists, act 'as if' it exists and thereby afford it, through their actions, an existence in practice. This shared 'definition of the situation' by no means precludes vehement disagreement and diversity (…). There is a tacit de facto agreement that corporate power is a problem and should be tackled, and it this tacit agreement, however minimal it may be, which provides the axis around which these groups are able to disagree, compete etc. and thus to form a common social space: a field.

64 A clarifying distinction between the concepts of 'network', 'coalitions' and 'social movements' may be found in Fox (2005). According to this author (2005: 179), 'The construction of a transnational public sphere involves a wide range of face-to-face encounters, information sharing, exchanges of experiences, and expressions of solidarity. Sometimes these exchanges generate networks of ongoing relationships. Sometimes these networks in turn lead to coalitions and generate the shared goals, trust, and understanding needed to collaborate on specific campaigns. Yet most encounters do not generate ongoing networks, and most networks do not produce sustained active coalitions. (…) Networks, unlike coalitions, do not necessarily coordinate their actions, nor do they come to agreement on specific joint actions. In addition, neither networks nor coalitions necessarily involve significant horizontal exchange between their respective bases. Indeed, many rely on a handful of interlocutors to manage relationships between broad-based social organisations that have relatively little awareness of the nature and actions of their counterparts. The concept of transnational social movement organisations, in contrast, implies much higher density and much more cohesion than networks or coalitions have. The term 'transnational movement organisations' suggests a collective actor that is present in more than one country. (…) In short, transnational civil society exchanges *can* produce networks, which *can* produce coalitions, which *can* produce movements—but not necessarily.'

65 An example of the use of the concept of 'field' to think about *'movimentalista'* actions, highlighting precisely the coexistence of elements of identification and differentiation, may be found in the work of Doimo (1995), which seeks to grasp popular mobilisations that marked the redemocratisation of Brazil through the concept of a *'movimentalista'* field'. According to Doimo, this 'field' is characterised by the 'existence of a common sociability, characterised by a sense of belonging to the same shared space of inter-personal relations and cultural attributes, such as signs of languages, identification codes, religious beliefs and so on. I am also assuming the predisposition to participation, which, leveraged by interactive connections between certain groups and institutions, generates regular sets of actions and continuous flows of demands. *It should nevertheless be noted that I am not speaking of identity, precisely because a field is not only multi-centred, but entails not one but various identities that fight among themselves for the socio-political resources and energies that arise within it'* (1995: 68 – my emphasis).

In this sense, the 'field' is not an actor, but a social space constituted and reproduced by the relations established between the different actors and networks that intervene within it.[66] And this inter-relational dynamic in turn tends to influence, to a greater or lesser degree the representations and practices of the actors involved. As Crossley observes (2002: 674), the actors of the 'field of anti-corporate global struggle':

> have radically different views about most things, but however much they disagree, they nevertheless interact in both direct and indirect ways, co-constituting a shared sui generis social space of contention. They stand in structured relation to one another and their actions mutually interfere with one another and interpenetrate, giving rise to an irreducible dynamic of interaction. Each responds and reacts to the actions of the others (or the effects of those actions), generating, in turn, situations, opportunities and provocations to which the others must respond. And as they do this they lure other agents and groups into the fray, indicating by their actions that 'this is where the action is'; that is to say, their actions and interactions create perceived opportunities for other groups and generate a general framework of meaning which suffices to incite other groups into action.

2.3 Diversity and/or political effectiveness

To the degree that the 'WSF process' was constituted within a space of convergence for social organisations and movements characterised by great diversity, it also became a field for forces disputing the Forum itself. As Klein highlights (2002: 273);

> The Forum accommodated an extraordinary spectrum of visions, and it was precisely this diversity that made conflicts inevitable. Bringing together groups with such different ideas about power, trade unions, political parties, NGOs, street demonstrators and the 'Sem Terra', the WSF merely made visible the tensions that always existed under the surface of these fragile coalitions.

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66 This 'tension' between the recognition of the expansion of relations between contentious social actors, and on the other hand, the limits in terms of the constitution of a unified political actor, is apprehended in the distinction drawn by Aguiton and Cardon between 'transnational networks' and the 'global political subject'. According to the authors, 'Ces diverses formes d'action collective orientées vers un but précis et circonscrit ont contribué à instaurer des systèmes d'échanges et de concertation entre différentes composantes des réseaux de militants transnationaux qui ont souvent montré une certaine efficacité. Cependant, en dépit des efforts conceptuels de nombre d'interprètes pour voir dans ces mobilisations inter-organisationnelle l'infrastructure émergente d'une hypothétique «société civile globale» (...), elles n'en constituent pas pour autant une architecture stable et globale de coordination des activités des mouvements sociaux et civils à l'échelle internationale [These different forms of collective action directed towards a precise and circumscribed goal, contributed to creating systems of exchange and consensus seeking between different components of transnational militant networks which often showed a certain effectiveness. At the same time, despite the conceptual efforts of a number of interpreters to see the emerging infrastructure of a hypothetical 'global civil society' in these inter-organisational mobilisations (…), for all this, they do not constitute a stable and global architecture for coordinating the activities of social and civil movements on an international scale]' (n/d: 6).

A central point in the discussions between activists involved in these disputes on the meaning and future of the 'WSF process' (and on the basis of it, of the 'global movement' itself) refers precisely to the form of dealing with this diversity of the Forum and the 'movement' in a 'politically effective' way. The question that arises, in the words of Mello (2004: 8), is:

> What may be the possible intermediation between maintaining an open space, which many consider will ultimately become a great fair without any political effectiveness, and the expectation that we shall take some initiative that makes the difference in the correlation of current forces, and which contributes in a more direct and immediate way to social transformation?

In schematic terms, this debate may be divided into two opposing positions:[67]

a) The value of diversity

The first position is of those participants who consider diversity not as a problem to be overcome, but on the contrary, as a value and signal of the vitality and capacity for mobilisation achieved by the Forum, indicating its legitimation and consolidation over the course of the five editions realised to date. As Hardt and Negri affirm (2003: XVII);

> Recognising and constructing what we have in common is what unifies the network. It is not really a matter of fixing a point of unity or, worse yet, identity, but simply finding what is common in our differences and expanding that commonality while our differences proliferate. This proliferation of differences went to Porto Alegré to discover it was a common network, and from this new condition it will go back out to establish new differences everywhere.

For this position, the preservation of the Forum as a space for the expression of diversity is what will guarantee its continuity and force, at the same time that it is the only possible form of building alliances, articulations and collective actions between actors as diverse as those united by the WSF. As Bullard states (2002: 233–4):

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67 This dichotomous 'typology' of positions merely constitutes an effort towards the analytical organisation of the field of disputes. Indeed, in empirical terms, the positions do not represent such a clear distinction, and often, the same activists/organisations transit between them. In addition, there is a set of actors occupying a position that could be defined as 'the pragmatic acceptance of diversity'. These actors, even identifying the lack of a greater unity as a limit to be confronted, understand that the objective and/or subjective conditions that would allow such a unity to be constructed are currently lacking. Hence, for this 'intermediate' position, the defence of maintaining the Forum as a space open to a plurality of actors, themes, proposals, action strategies, ideologies, etc., should not be taken as a normative commitment to such diversity, as in the first position, so much as a 'pragmatic' recognition of the unfeasibility and the political risks associated with an attempt to impose an 'artificial' unity.

I think that the best way of characterising what is developing now is to treat the movement as a process and a culture rather than something characterised as a clear and defined political project. What is happening in the World Social Forum, and more generally, in the global movement, is a genuine desire to be open and to maintain an open process, without trying to predetermine the results. Because, indeed, depending on where you live, what your history is, your culture, your economic and political reality, this will mould the best alternatives, the type of political, economic and social solutions that people are seeking (...) even if some criticise the global movement, saying 'Yes, we know that you're against, but what do you want?', I think that we have to strengthen constantly the idea that we are anchored in reality, we are in favour of diversity, we are in favour of people making their own choices. This allows the movement to absorb the energy of struggles. The more open the movement is, the more radical it becomes. Because if we really do want to find a space for articulating very diverse realities, people have to find space to feel their own identities and their ties with the movement, as well as to support each other's struggles.

That is, instead of a fruitless and even risky[68] effort at unification, the source of an effective 'political effectiveness' lies exactly in an action in the opposite sense: blocking 'artificial' attempts at unification, so that diversity expresses itself, and possibly, processes of identification and collective actions are constructed between actors. This vision is summarised in the words of one of the principal critics of attempts at unification, Francisco Whitaker (2002: 241):

When one thinks of unification, one thinks of a command unit, discipline, goals, objectives...every one making an effort to realise that objective in a disciplined way. We won't beat capital in this way, because capital doesn't behave like this (...) The political struggle in today's world has different characteristics. There is no need to be unified. (...) We need to work with heterogeneity. The network is a much stronger organisation than the pyramid precisely because of this, because it is based on a choice of all of its members, and they only do things to which they adhere out of conviction. To this degree, it's not unity, it's joint responsibility, around objectives for which people fight.

b) Criticism of diversity

The second position arises from those who conclude that maintaining the diversity represents fragmentation and a dispersion of energies, leading to a loss of political effectiveness, and if maintained, a progressive leakage. The questions asked by those

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68 Gupta (2005: 2) for example, considers that attempts to impose a 'unity' are a serious risk for the continuity of the Forums: this is a major challenge today for the WSF: how to accelerate the space for movements to forge common actions and strategies, while at the same time keeping the space friendly for everyone opposed to neoliberal globalisation to join in. Given the complex political entities that form part of the Forum, an attempt by any force within (however well meaning) to hegemonise the Forum at the level of ideas, might well sow the seeds of the Forum's ultimate collapse.

who share this perspective may be summarised by the question of Oliveira (2002: 103): *How do we unify this new movement to give it political effectiveness, from the viewpoint of confronting capital and all the discriminations? This problem remains unsolved.*

For this position, then, the construction of a greater unity in orienting the actions of the actors brought together by the Forum is possible and necessary.[69] As George highlights (2004: 45): 'if we are to take the global justice movement forward, it's time to define a minimum, common programme every activist in the world (...) can agree on and in whose service political campaigning can be undertaken and pressure applied, right now.'

This 'unification' is understood as the only means of constructing a political force capable of effectively opposing the actors of 'corporate globalisation'. Again, in the words of George (2004: 46);

> Global ills require global remedies and only international campaigning led by the international movement can provide the power to impose them. (...) How can the movement possibly score points off such powerful institutions if it remains dispersed, working on a thousand different issues, never really uniting in a single struggle around any of them?

3 'Methodology' as the core of the dispute on the meaning of the WSF

As related in the Introduction to this report, the so-called 'methodology' of the WSF, contrary to what the name suggests, is not a set of politically neutral procedures for the organisation of the event. Indeed, the 'method' which orients

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69   Some critics of this 'unifying' position do not question its value, but its feasibility. This position emerges in the following comments by an interviewee: 'I think that this' [Susan George's proposal to build a unified agenda for the Forum] 'is a genuine issue. I'm not like (xx), for whom this isn't an issue. I think that it is, it's an issue that troubles a lot of people as well as myself. That is, we produce a mega-event, a capacity of mobilisation, of adhesion, as the Forum is, and from there you leave empty-handed in terms of what you're going to do from now onwards, this is painful. It's obvious that it is. There were other attempts to table actions to produce concrete results, like Arundhati Roy, in Mumbai: do one, choose to boycott one transnational, something which unifies all of us, one action so that we can say: 'Look, the whole world, the Forum planet adhered at global level'. This would be powerful, except that we didn't achieve this. So we have to consider this, that's to say, Arundhati, who was the great leader in Mumbai, made this proposal and nobody adhered to it. (...) It's not because no-one wanted to adhere. How do you do this in practice? Who will build this movement? Well, I think that there's the practical side of the thing and there's the side of, let's say, whether Planet Forum is capable of achieving unity around such a question? What's this about it being able to unify that gigantic universe? It's something complex. Boycotting Coca-Cola in principle is obvious. But within agendas as multiple as those, perhaps it's not a priority. When you go to your practical life, movements fighting for generics, against the privatisation that the United States is carrying out within the WTO which prohibits the production of generics. Their priority is that and they're going to put all their energy into that, they're not going to boycott Coca-Cola' (interviewee 01).

the format and the dynamics of the Forums is the result of an effort to materialise a set of more or less explicit ethico-political principles, supported by a segment of actors which has risen to a dominant position at the start of the 'WSF process', succeeding over time in maintaining control over the running of the same.

On the basis of the characterisation presented in Chapter 1, we may identify two central 'mechanisms' in the definition and realisation of structuring principles of the Forums: on the one hand, as its own name expresses, the 'Charter of Principles'; on the other, the functioning 'methodologies' of the annual events. In fact, the 'methodologies' may be defined as attempts at realising the principles contained in the 'Charter', being transformed over time, on the one hand, on the basis of a dynamic of 'trial and error' and on the other, on the basis of discussions, evaluations, divergences and agreements established between the actors intervening in the WSF.[70]

The 'Charter of Principles' establishes a set of ethico-political principles, whose origins go back to the libertarian traditions, to the social movements that have emerged since the 1960s, to the criticisms of political practices oriented by the Leninist model of organisation and revolution, among other sources. To a large degree, these principles are summarised in the following affirmation of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN 1994: 97–8):

> Nosotros pensamos que el cambio revolucionario en México no será producto de la acción en un solo sentido. Es decir, no será, en sentido estricto, una revolución armada o una revolución pacífica. Será, primordialmente, una revolución que resulte de la lucha en variados frentes sociales, con muchos métodos, bajo diferentes formas sociales, con grados diversos de compromiso y participación. Y su resultado será, no el de un partido, organización o alianza de organizaciones triunfante con su propuesta social específica, sino una suerte de espacio democrático de resolución de la confrontación entre diversas propuestas políticas.

> [We think that revolutionary change in Mexico will not be the product of action n a single sense. That is, it will not, in a strict sense, be an armed revolution or a peaceful revolution. It shall be above all a revolution that arises from a struggle on various social fronts, with many methods, under different social firms, with different degrees of commitment and participation. And its result shall be not that of a party, organisation or alliance of triumphant organisations with a specific social proposal, but a kind of democratic space for resolving the confrontation between different political proposals.]

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70 As already highlighted above, we need to break with the vision of the 'WSF process' as a network characterised by a broad symmetry, recognising the existence of a significant 'hierarchy' between the actors present in this 'field'. This asymmetry confers a central position on some activists/organisations in defining the 'methodology' of the Forums. In this way, many of the divergences and disputes to which this chapter refers tend to be restricted to a specific segment of the actors participating in the 'WSF process'. On the other hand, we need to highlight that the configuration of the Forums allows the same actors that do not take part in the bodies (especially the CI) in which the 'official' definitions are given, may, through their actions during the events, alter those definitions in a more or less meaningful way: this is exemplified both by the importance assumed by self-organised activities throughout the five editions, and by the difficulty of generating the articulations proposed by the methodology for the 2005 WSF.

In this sense, the central values highlighted in the Charter are: respect for the diversity and autonomy of the actors involved in the 'WSF process', the rejection of hierarchical and vertical forms of organisation; the criticism of traditional mechanisms of political representation and/or delegation and the negation of a single and pre-established 'end' for contentious social action. The tensions that these values bring to a political culture of the 'classic Left' are suggested in the following commentary by an interviewee:

> The greatest barrier, and also the greatest victory that the Forum could achieve, is articulating two things, which in the tradition of the Left were always unarticulated: equality and diversity. Our whole tradition was one, the anti-capitalist struggles of past centuries always had a social subject that was hierarchically superior to others, a form of struggle hierarchically superior to others. There were controversies, but always the dispute, always the logic of the dispute. Such as, reform or revolution, the role of the proletariat or its non-role. So I think that diversity is a value that more recently has entered our imagination. (...) I think that the greatest difficulty we face is to articulate, as two non-antagonistic values, the idea of equality with the idea of diversity. This is the greatest success that the Forum could have. And at the same time, it's the greatest challenge, the greatest difficulty that it faces.

> (Interviewee 06)

As a function of these values, the Forum is defined as an 'open space' that is non-representative and non-deliberative, in which the right of autonomous expression is guaranteed for all of those social actors who share a critical perspective with regard to 'corporate globalisation', to the different forms of domination and/or the destruction of the environment. Such a 'space' should provide conditions, without previously established impositions or definitions, for social actors to establish contacts, exchange experiences and knowledge, construct articulations, plan joint actions and ultimately, construct new and diversified collective actions aiming at social transformation. This perspective is expressed by the recurrent designation of the WSF as an 'Open University' of global civil society, as is observed in Grzybowski (2003: 7):

> Since it's a Forum, the WSF is an open space for reflection, exchange and the mutual recognition of our diversity as subjects bearing politico-cultural identities and dreams, practices, ideas, proposals and strategies for implementing them. It consists of discovering, mapping, appreciating what we do and how we do it, opening ourselves to a mutual questioning of its possibilities and limits. It assumes the democratic confrontation of ideas, elaborating consensuses, deepening and legitimating divergences. Thinking through an action, on the basis of the action and for the action, seeking, creating and strengthening politically useful knowledge. This is a kind of university of global citizenship.[71]

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71 The same conception is expressed in the definition of the WSF as a 'public sphere', as is found in Della Porta (n/d: 28): 'In the global justice movement, the awareness of the movement's pluralistic composition is intertwined with an appeal for the construction of a common discourse. The Social Forums, at different geographical levels, are indeed understood as *public spheres* where actors meet and debate, but also move towards mutual understanding and a common conception of the public good' (my emphasis).

This set of 'methodological' principles and developments contained in the 'Charter', to the degree that it was referenced within the context of the CI, as a normative parameter for the organisation of events constituting the 'WSF process' was transformed into a flashpoint between those who adopt and defend the orientations of the 'Charter' and those who criticise and oppose it.

The arguments of the defenders of the principles of the 'Charter' are based, firstly, on the value of diversity. Taking up again a number of aspects highlighted in the previous Chapter, for these actors, diversity is the true source of the force and continuity of the 'WSF process'. The artificial imposition of any unity would mean not the strengthening of the Forum, but its end. As is summarised by Grzybowski (2003: 6), 'without this basic commitment to diversity, taking the Charter of Principles as a reference, the World Social Forum would implode.'

Furthermore, those who defend the principles of the 'Charter' also highlight the impossibility of constructing a unified agenda, either of themes, of proposals, or even of actions), for the set of social organisations and movements present at the Forums. According to an interviewee:

> So, for example, there's no agenda that can, let's say, become 'the agenda' for the Forum. It is this diversity, this multiplicity of agendas. And there are always some who try to transform the subject of agendas into the main agenda. But the rule of the Forum is not to have a main agenda (...) It won't allow it, it has no way of doing it. If it edited a final document, it would have. And then there'd be the most appalling pressure for the final document to say certain things. There isn't one. So that point of tension is eliminated. So what happens? Everyone does as they please. So if the kids down at the Youth Encampment want to discuss the Forum itself, or discusses it, then fine, let's discuss it. Or if they want to discuss the problem of, like they had really interesting things there at the Youth Encampment this year, the question, for example, of IT, free software or knowledge, things like that, they discuss it. Others will discuss other things; solidarity, money [and so on]. Others will discuss spirituality. Others will discuss the external debt, payment of the debt, debt cancellation ...

> (Interviewee 02)

But more than a risk for the continuity of the 'WSF process', for an important segment of actors, the attempt at unification and homogenisation of the Forum should be the target of criticism in terms of political principles. That is, contrary to the pragmatic notion that diversity is a 'necessary evil', to be preserved to the degree that the conditions do not exist for overcoming it,[72] those actors argue for diversity as a fundamental value for a social transformation that aspires to be genuinely emancipating and democratic. As Grzybowski highlights (2003: 8);

> The problem is not the greater or lesser divergences, but the way in which we deal with them as visions and analyses, proposals and practices. To exercise the form of comparing forms of thinking and ideas gives life to the WSF. But disqualifying the differences and divergences kills the Forum i.e. we can't frame the WSF in a form of simplification of the thinking of the majority, reproducing any kind of single form of thinking to combat the single form of thinking of Neoliberalism.

In this way, for this position, the Forum cannot and should not develop in the sense of constitution, a 'directorate' for the field of global opposition, i.e. it should not seek to be an 'actor' that would impose a hegemony and unity under a common 'programme' on a set of actors involved in the criticism and/or confrontation of 'corporate capitalism'. On the contrary, its value would rest precisely in the constitution and preservation of a space in which the actors of this field can meet and elaborate their convergences and divergences.[73] In this sense, in response to the question posed by Aguiton and Cardon (Comment construire un acteur collectif doté d'une certaine forme d'identité publique, de permanence organisationnelle et d'intentionnalité stratégique, tout en préservant la structure fondamentalement hétérogène et plurielle des composantes qu'il associe?) [How do we construct a collective actor equipped with a certain form of public identity, of organisational permanence and strategic intentionality, while preserving the fundamentally heterogeneous and plural structure of the components that associate on account of it] – (n/d: 7) this problem would problematise the intention itself of seeking, through the 'WSF process', to construct a unified political subject of a process of transformation, conceived in a homogeneous form, or even worse, to transform the WSF into this subject.[74] As Ponniah and Fischer (2003: 6) observe: 'Many

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72 This more 'pragmatic' position may be exemplified with the following statement by Codas (2004:24): 'The period in which we are in is one of the reorganisation of the programmes of the Left, without syntheses. This was originally expressed in the *method* of the WSF, which has a central value making *diversity* visible, without hierarchies. More recently, the same method has incorporated the stimulus to convergences, albeit without them being compulsory. The question of programme(s) has its own time of maturity, and we are far from reaching it.' (highlights in the original) As may be observed in this discourse, to the degree that the obstacles generated by a political crisis of the Left are overcome, there is the expectation of a possibility of advancing from the phase of 'making diversity visible' to that of constructing common 'programmes'. The same expectation is expressed by the following comments by an interviewee: 'I agree with Susan George. You need to create mechanisms within the Forum' [to reach a minimum consensus agenda], 'only that you can't, perhaps the mechanism is not this one of defining in the name of the Forum, a set' [of priorities]. 'I think that the mechanism has to be more natural. And I'll go back to drawing attention to the small impact that the so called document of the 19 had. I think that this feeling that exists within the Forum, that things have to be done jointly, have to be done with everyone, that cannot be directed, that diversity always has to be preserved, I think that today it's still an obstacle, but that it's a good obstacle for creating these consensuses. I say a good obstacle, because I'm in favour of these consensuses, but I think that they have to emerge. Perhaps they take a bit longer to emerge, but they have to emerge, more or less naturally' (interviewee 06).

73 This vision is present in Grzybowski (2003: 7): 'the FSM is not a global assembly of bodies of civil society which adhere to it. As such, it does not aim to define a hegemonic political orientation for them, or even to create levels of political power to direct them.' The same perspective may be found in Stédile (2005: 10): 'The World Social Forum is a space for debates, for the exchange of ideas. It's an annual season, in which aware individuals, movements, networks, non-governmental bodies fix in order to meet. There they exchange ideas, consult each other and then return to their trenches to develop their activities. And on account of this, it is a major port of call, of consultation. And it should be maintained like this, so that each network, group or class can meet there, at international level and among themselves decide what to do.'

74 This search for a 'new subject of the transformation' is identified and criticised by Scott (1990:80), for whom 'the fundamental motivation of much of the theory of social movements within sociology remains essentially Marcusian in inspiration, that is, it is a search for some substitute for the working class, for a new focus of opposition to society in its totality.'

activists talk about the World Social Forum as if it were a new political agent. It is not an agent, but is instead a pedagogical and political space that enables learning, networking and political organizing.'[75]

What underlies this assignment of a positive sense to diversity is a profound change in the conception itself of the meaning of the social transformation of the contemporary world. Despite the absence of a clear and structured discourse expressed in this change, we may observe that the defenders of the autonomy and diversity of the actors composing this field of opposition have tended, in a more or less radical way, to abandon the prospect of transformation that to a large degree marked the discourses and oriented the practices of socialist and communist parties and movements of the last two centuries.[76] As an interviewee states, what predominates within the Forum:

> is a vision that there is no single solution. That is (…) the idea that we had a model of socialism and that we had to reach it, well that isn't, let's say, 'the Forum worldview'. It starts from an implicit assumption that solutions are different. That there is no single solution. That societies are different and that there are, that there's a need for different models, albeit with principles of equality, principles of democracy, which can be shared. So this is the first strong idea of the Forum.
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> (Interviewee 01)

i.e. there is a rejection of the idea of total transformation realised by a unified political subject who bears the 'universal interests' of humanity through an open confrontation aiming at the conquest of the hegemony and power of the State.[77]

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75 Whitaker argues for the same idea (2002: 238): 'the Forum is not a body, a movement. It doesn't claim to be a new International, or to be an organisation with a directorate. It intends to be a space.'

76 As an interviewee highlights: 'this reflection on diversity doesn't come from the Left, it doesn't derive from the Left. The Forum presents us with the challenge of making it radically Left-wing and rethinking what liberty and equality means within it' (interviewee 03). The difficulty of this transformation is expressed by another interviewee: 'I think that [our greatest problem] is our training, the experience of many years within a guiding scheme. For a lot of people. And perhaps I wouldn't say that there's a certain fear, but we don't have the certainty that this is going to work, this other path. I'm sure that any other won't work… (laughter). I shall throw myself into this one, but let's see … In general, people don't have this certainty that it's possible. The greatest problem is it being swallowed by an old world again' (interviewee 02).

77 An activity that had a major impact during the 5th WSF in 2005 was the table entitled 'Another world is possible without taking power: from antiglobalisation to alterglobalisation', where the discussion revolved precisely around the proposal of John Holloway to shift the centrality of taking the state's power to strategies of social transformation. This proposal is based on the Zapatista ideology, expressed above (p.55) and on the following passage: 'Es el momento de decirlos a todos que no queremos ni podemos ocupar el lugar que algunos esperan que ocupemos, el lugar del que emanen todas las opiniones, todas las rutas, todas las respuestas, todas las verdades, no lo vamos a hacer [It's time to tell everyone that we don't want nor can we occupy the place that some hope we will occupy, the place from which all opinions, all courses, all replies and all truths emanate, we're not going to do it]' (EZLN 1994: 310).

Differently from this vision, social transformation comes to be interpreted as an open, multi-faceted and continuous process, in which distinct actors confront distinct forms of domination (of class, gender, sexual choice, caste, race, religion, national, relationship with the environment, etc.), which are not unified around a central conflict/contradiction.[78] And it is this argument that is found in the criticisms by an interviewee of proposals, such as that of Susan George for the construction of a unified agenda of proposals for the Forum:

> In fact, this is a vision of the Forum as a movement with courageous militants, who have to be called to the struggle. So when she says 'we', it's something that I experience the whole time in Council meetings and I say: Who's this 'we' then? We who? The organisers? The participants? All the participants? Me? Everyone? Who's this 'we'? That we should have some points of consensus to work on? How will we deal with everyone? Who's everyone? It's a task. This would mean that the Forum would go, after a Forum session, everyone who took part would go out and fight for the same things, all over the world. This is unfeasible. It's unfeasible. Because [for] each person, firstly the realities of the world are different, national. Secondly, because the feeling of whether or not it's important is also extremely variable. Thirdly, because there isn't a militant's discipline, a duty of discipline, there isn't a programme that I'm going to defend tooth and claw like the programme of my party. This isn't a political party. The Forum is a space where ideas emerge (...) this idea of Susan George is an idea from someone who feels the anxiety for effectiveness of the old type. i.e. the great leader who says, 'Alright people, let's all join forces now in order to defeat this enemy!' In today's world, this is impossible, it's impossible. There's no party, no movement that's capable of bringing everyone together around certain axes.

(Interviewee 02)

Hence, on the basis of this perspective, the diversity and autonomy of actors are insuperable and necessary conditions for any effective transformation process that intends to take on an emancipatory and democratic character, to the degree that it is this diversity and this autonomy that will guarantee that certain forms of domination are not simply replaced by others which are imposed in the name of 'emancipation'. As Ceceña highlights (2001: 135),

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78 This break with the idea of a pre-established 'destiny' for social transformation and the role of the Zapatistas in the form of a new perspective is highlighted in the following comment by an interviewee: 'I think that this is the great, great discovery of this century. That is, the ready-made model of what this society will be is absolutely impossible. Impossible. Not only because, and here the Zapatistas teach us a lesson, saying: 'You talk about another possible world, and you have to talk about other possible worlds'. Diversity, which is one of the basic values of the Forum process, is essential in the society that we want. We have to say plural. And we can't imagine a ready-made and finished society and ready-made and finished mechanisms. Look, for example, at the planning process, which is very much inside the head of someone who thought in terms of socialism. It demonstrated that it wasn't the right course ... So we have to find another way (...). In my view, and I don't have the brains to think about what, including what kind of socialism, we want, it's a collective, radical construction, it has to be radical, but we can't think of models that we're going to build, as if from a certain moment onwards, we were assembling these new pieces' (interviewee 02).

la diversidad de los explotados, y más de los dominados, obliga a repensar sobre las vanguardias, sobre el carácter privilegiado de los obreros industriales y sobre la pertinencia de una organización de los revolucionários que reproduzca las jerarquías y las relaciones estamentarias propias de la organización capitalista. Oponer al poder capitalista organizado la dictadura del proletariado es reproducir las normas sociales en un sentido inverso bastante dudoso.

[The diversity of the exploited, and even more of the dominated, obliges us to think again about avant-gardes, about the privileged character of industrial workers, and about the relevance of an organisation of revolutionaries that reproduces the hierarchies and classes that are characteristic of capitalist organisation. Opposing capitalist power by organising the dictatorship of the proletariat is to reproduce social norms in a highly doubtful inverse sense].

Such a defence of the diversity and autonomy of actors does not mean, however, a mere eulogy of fragmentation and dispersion.[79] On the contrary, those who adopt this position highlight the importance of introducing mechanisms into the WSF 'methodology' that create opportunities and stimuli for the approximation, interaction and construction of articulations and joint actions between the actors of the Forum.[80] This vision is clearly expressed by Mello (2004: 9), for whom:

Now our great challenge shall be to combine an appreciation of diversity with an approach to the small scale and high degree of fragmentation of activities and participants, which has been perceived as one of the most significant obstacles for the WSF remaining a political reference that is of use to the social movements and other forces that take part in it. Our challenge shall be to maintain the renewal of the agenda, to go beyond appraisals to make more proposals, and above all, to articulate more with each other. This requires a crucial alternation within our political culture and our form of considering the WSF. Instead of preparing ourselves to give visibility to individual activities in Porto Alegré, we must try and carry on a dialogue with other initiatives, to

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79   The defence of diversity, even against the proposal of creating an environment favourable for the autonomous generation of convergences, is something exceptional among the discourses present within the Forum. This perspective is expressed, for example, in the following comment by an interviewee, who tends to position himself as one of the most radical defenders of the preservation of diversity within the Forum: 'This is the way of thinking of lots of people with the mind of the old system, understand: you have to converge. Even through the word convergence, for example, we discuss the matter a lot, but this is merely a curiosity … Does everything have to converge? And if so, why? 'No, but it can't fragment'. But why can't it fragment? Society is fragmented' (interviewee 02).

80   The difficulty of articulating in a discursive way the defence of diversity with the search for articulations is expressed in the following position by an interviewee: 'We have to move towards certain agglutinative proposals, like certain powerful ideas, which could be converted, let's say, into a highly universal public agenda. It won't be universal, because we're not proposing a solution. In the face of a single way of thinking, it would be absurd for us to propose a form of thinking, let's say, that permits this diversity. The idea of diversity in action, (interviewee 03).

seek a consensus, to articulate proposals, invest in the interaction between agendas and struggles as a virtuous way of extending common struggles.

But this search for 'convergences' differs from the unifying intentions in at least two ways.[81] On the one hand, the concern is with creating conditions for such convergences to arise in an autonomous way, from 'the bottom up', and not as a regulation that is established and imposed artificially by a 'directorate' or 'avant garde' of the 'WSF process'. This perspective is expressed by an interviewee, in her critical evaluation of the attempt by 'intellectuals' to construct a 'summary document' at the 2005 WSF, which became known as the 'Manifesto of the 19'.

The manifesto of the 19. I had the opportunity to take part in a debate at the Youth Encampment, when the story of the business of the Manifesto of the 19 came out. It began to spread. The Encampment was really disgusted: 'This question isn't a question for us, our questions are different. Who said these are the crucial questions of the Forum. Who arranges the Forum agenda? Define the important agenda of the Forum? What kind of hierarchy of questions is this? Hence, for every person that you speak to the Forum is

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81   With this reservation, there is a questioning of the interpretation that the 'new methodology' of the 2005 WSF would be an expression of convergence between positions which are counterpoised here. This interpretation is expressed by an interviewee in the following way: 'At the start, we had no idea of the direction of the Forum, what role it would carry out. I think that two visions were very much in evidence since the start. A vision, let's say, of a more classic Marxist tradition, present not in the organisations but in the individuals in the organising committee. You're going to hear this. So even I, for example, imagined at a certain point that the Forum would be a coordinator of social movements. From the start, of course, it was evident that the Forum could never be a Communist International or the like. But a coordination of social movements (...) I have the impression that from 2003 onwards, and this materialised in the 2005 Forum, we began to build a synthesis between these two visions. What is this synthesis? The Forum continues to be a space, it doesn't take decisions, it doesn't approve, it doesn't choose. This is very important due to the diversity of the Forum. And speaking personally, it took me a while to understand this; Because you have all this baggage from previous political experience. But when you look at the face of the Forum and you see that it is repeated and so on, you ask yourself: how can you, for example, choose priorities? Priority struggles in a movement which ranges from the MST to traditions (since political parties do not participate as parties, but participate through their members), the multiplicity of political sensibilities linked to parties, gay and lesbian movements, environmental movements? What type of identity, because in order to have votes, for example, common decisions, you have to have a minimal common identity. Within the Forum, identity is very much something under construction, as we were commenting. These are organisations which realise that it's very important to be together, but which still form most of their time apart. So, little by little, even those who were in favour of a more proposal-led position of the Forum, began to recognise that its diversity obliged it to create other forms of proposal-led approaches (propositivismo)++, let's say. And the synthesis of which I was speaking, is this: the Forum should maintain itself as a space, but should seek to an ever increasing degree to promote the articulations of the Forum process. I.e. convergences during the Forum (...). So this is the synthesis that emerged within the Forum, which allows common action. Which , let's say, ensures that it's not just a festival of ideas, that it's not an event isolated from the remainder of the action of organisations which take part, but which maintain diversity like an inalienable right' (interviewee 06).

something else. Hence, on a question of principle, method, identity of the Forum, it is not an organisation that can speak in the name of all of its two hundred thousand participants (...) How do I see the Forum: it's a space of dispute in which questions are legitimated by the real movement and not by official declarations, So how is it that the question of the war was imposed in such a way on the Forum agenda? The struggle against the war. Today it has a status equal to the struggle against neoliberalism. It gradually imposed itself from the outside in. It wasn't a declaration: 'the Forum declares its opposition to the war.' The movement of society itself pressured the dynamics of the Forum for it to incorporate the agenda of the anti-war struggle with that force. So it was legitimated by another process, a process which is bigger than the Forum, which the Forum reflected. So I think that it's this that bothers those who do old-style politics, who think that they can direct the process, which is 'If we table it, then the Forum will follow behind, we're the avant garde.' And it's not like that, it really isn't!

(Interviewee 01)

It's in this same sense, for example, that the refusal to elaborate the traditional 'final documents' lies. For Whitaker (2002: 239), this:

is a fundamental option, since a document that took account of that variety, that diversity of positions would not be possible, it would not respect the path of each individual who went there. Nobody goes there to follow commands from an overall boss. Everyone goes there for the precise reason of meeting the others, to know how others see and live the changes. (...) So we need to respect this diversity, this multiplicity of actors, to allow them to locate themselves, show themselves, invent themselves.

On the other hand, the search for convergences is not defined as something that should lead to a dilution of the universe of social organisations and movements within a new unified political subject. On the contrary, the necessary convergences are understood as more or less temporary mechanisms, maintained by constant negotiation and subject to reconfigurations, which should contribute to the strengthening of this diversified field of actors. This perspective is highlighted by Hibachi in his criticism of the search for a 'unified programme' to orient the activities of actors in the 'WSF process':

un programa implica la unificación (...) de la multiplicidad de demandas, reclamos y propuestas de los cientos, y quizá miles, de movimientos que confluyen en el FSM. Implica, a su vez, que 'alguien' unifica la diversidad; ese mismo 'alguien' debe en consecuencia jerarquizar, incluir y excluir propuestas porque un 'programa' no puede ser una lista interminable de exigencias. Hacer lo anterior sería tanto como matar el Foro Social. (...) el movimiento no depende de los grandes eventos sino de la resistencia y la potencia del accionar cotidiano de los oprimidos, a lo largo y ancho del planeta. Es bueno y necesario que los movimientos intercambien experiencias y que, en ocasiones, coordinen algunas acciones. Pero esa coordinación, que puede servir para profundizar y mejorar las experiencias locales, no puede resolver los problemas mundiales existentes. Menos aún puede hacerlo actuando de forma simétrica

respeco de las élites y, mucho menos aún, a través de un programa común o de la unificación del movimiento.[82]

> [a programme implies the unification (…) of the multiplicity of demands, protests and proposals of the hundreds and perhaps thousands of movements which converge on the FSM. It in turn implies that 'someone' will unify the diversity; this same 'someone' must, as a consequence, impose a hierarchy, include and exclude proposals since a 'programme' cannot be an interminable list of demands. To do the above would be like killing the Social Forum (…) the movement does not depend on great events but on the resistance and power of everyday action by the oppressed, across the entire planet. It is good and necessary that movements exchange experiences and that, on occasions, they coordinate some actions. But this coordination, which could serve to deepen and improve local experiences, cannot solve the world's existing problems. Even less can it do it by acting symmetrically with regard to the elites, and much less, by a common programme or the unification of the movement.]

This position of defending the diversity and autonomy of social movements and organisations present in the 'WSF process', with the consequent rejection of 'spokesmen', mechanisms of representation and the taking of unified positions has been increasingly opposed by critical voices both inside and outside the 'WSF process', putting strains on a certain coexistence established in the first years:

> entre les tendances « stratégiques » du mouvement, qui insistent sur la nécessité d'un pilotage collectif des mots d'ordre et des appels à la mobilisation (…), et les tendances « pluralistes », qui insistent sur la diversité, éventuellement contradictoire, des prises de positions et la vocation socialisatrice des forums.

> [between the 'strategic' tendencies of the movement, which insist on the need for collective guidance of watchwords and calls for mobilisation (…), and the 'pluralist' trends, which insist on diversity, which may be contradictory, the taking of positions and the socialising vocation of the Forums.]

> (Aguiton and Cardon 2005: 8)

According to the authors, since the start, the WSF, (and more broadly, the 'global movement' of which the Forum would be the expression), were characterised by an attempt at reconciliation between a 'socialising' perspective, aiming to expand the number of participating actors and to guarantee the expression of diversity of the same through the constitution of a non-hierarchical and non-deliberative space, and a 'mobilising' perspective, centred on the search for articulation and the construction of collective actions through the construction of common proposals and action strategies. At the same time, for Aguiton and Cardon (2005: 24), the 'form' (or 'method') assumed by the Forums tended to favour the 'socialising' dimension, to the detriment of the 'mobilising' one, since:

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82 A similar position may be found in Grzybowski (2002: 67), for whom: 'The distinctive nature of the Forum lies in its capacity to provide a forum for meeting, dialogue, and interaction between global networks and movements, founded on mutual respect and the strengthening of its own diversity and independence. The greater challenge is to forge points of convergence from diversity.'

En accueillant tous les candidats dans l'espace du forum (…), ce qui le projette vers sa seule vocation socialisatrice (…), les potentialités de mobilisation et de convergence concrète et active autour d'enjeux constitués en cause diminue d'autant. L'ouverture du réseau affaiblit la densité des liens, autorise les stratégies opportunistes et multiplie le fractionnement en sous-espaces ignorant les uns des autres. Le forum apparaît alors comme une grand messe dans laquelle sont discutés des projets de réformes et d'alternatives avec tous les acteurs possibles, dont les représentants des gouvernements et les institutions internationales qui se tiennent en bordure de l'espace du forum. Les segments « mouvementistes » de la galaxie alter mettent alors en avant la déconnexion entre les visées socialisatrices (…) et mobilisatrices (…) des forums. En valorisant trop fortement la contrainte d'ouverture et d'extension de la forme réseau (…), c'est le projet de constitution d'un espace de mobilisation et d'activité militante au sein du forum (…) qui perd de sa consistance et est rendu impraticable par l'obligation de consensus.

[In welcoming all the candidates into the Forum space (…), which projects it towards its sole socialising vocation (…), the potentialities for concrete and active mobilisation and convergence around issues taken up as a cause is correspondingly reduced. The opening of the network reduces the density of the links, authorises opportunist strategies and multiplies the fragmentation into sub-spaces that ignore each other. The Forum then appears to be a big mass in which reform projects and alternatives are discussed with every possible actor which remain on the sidelines of the Forum space. The *'mouvementiste'* segments of the alternative galaxy will then point out the disconnection between the socialising designs (…) and the mobilising ones (…) of the Forums. By attaching too high a value to the openness constraint and the extension of the network form (…), it's the project of constituting a space for mobilisation and militant activity within the Forum (…) which loses its consistency and is made unfeasible by the obligation for consensus.]

In the face of this, one of the central foci of criticism, as was considered in the preceding Chapter, relates to the problem of 'political effectiveness', i.e. the critics of the principles and methodology of the 'WSF process' emphasise that the adoption of diversity and autonomy as principles forms an obstacle to the Forums becoming effective movements of convergence and articulation between actors around proposals, or at least, common orientations for contentious action, with some Forums fulfilling their 'mobilising' role. This position is clearly expressed in the critique by Callinicos (2004: 31) of the principle that the Forum is a space that doesn't take decisions:

Pienso que éste es un concepto que puede haber ayudado a reunir fuerzas muy diferentes en las fases iniciales del FSM, pero que ahora ya no tiene mucho sentido. Según Whitaker y Cassen, los Foros viven a través de la interacción entre los debates, seminarios y talleres a los que ofrecen un espacio y a través de los movimientos y llamadas a la acción a los que dan lugar. En vez de hacer un fetiche de las normas organizativas, desarrolladas en una fase mucho más temprana del movimiento, debemos buscar formas que promuevan esta interacción mientras mantenemos la unidad.

[I think that this is a concept that could have helped to unite very different forces in the initial phases of the WSF, but that now, it doesn't make much

sense. According to Whitaker and Cassen, the Forums live through the interaction between the debates, seminars and workshops which offer a space and through the movements and calls to action to which they give rise. Instead of making a fetish of organisational norms, developed at a much earlier stage of the movement, we should seek forms that promote this interaction while we maintain unity.]

For the critics, the Forums tend, on the one hand, towards ineffectiveness, to the degree that the repetition of events marked by an extreme polyphony of actors, proposals, ideologies, etc. would form a kind of 'Babel' with scanty practical results, in terms of advances in the process of confrontation and the alteration of the correlation of forces between the contentious actors and the actors of 'corporate globalisation'. According to Teivainen (2003: 91);

> En los debates sobre el Foro Social Mundial, hay quienes argumentan que su impacto verdadero es una 'desactivación de las resistencias' o que no ha servido para avanzar las luchas populares. Hay múltiples voces que argumentan que los Foros son eventos solo para conversar y no hacer nada concreto. Hasta cierto punto, tales críticas pueden ser justificadas, en especial, si el método del WSF significa que los Foros no son espacios deliberativos o movimientos de movimientos.

> [In the debates on the World Social Forum, there are those who argue that their real impact is a 'deactivation of resistances', which didn't help in advancing popular struggles. There are many voices which argue that the Forums are merely events for conversation and not for doing anything concrete. Up to a certain point, these criticisms may be justified, especially, if the method of the WSF indicates that the Forums are not deliberative spaces or movements of movements.]

In the face of this, on the other hand, the 'WSF process' would tend to leak, since the costs involved in the organisation of and participation in the events would greatly exceed the effective results provided by the same. This 'risk' is highlighted by an interviewee, for whom:

> The Forum concentrated a moment when there was a need for the agglutination of these movements, but it runs the risk, in not giving effective responses, not from the point of view of a list, but from the strengthening of articulations, of its movements and of a common agenda, so that people take part in it and leave it saying: 'Good heavens, how important it was to come here, because now I'm charged up for a struggle, I've got a clear idea of where I need to go, and so on, and so on.' If we can't give an answer to this, the tendency, as for any movement, is for it to ebb away.

> (Interviewee 04)

What we observe in this discussion on political effectiveness, in the form in which it appears in the discourse of those who criticise the principles and methodology of the WSF, is that underlying it, there is an interpretation of social transformation that is distinct from the one on which the defenders of the current configuration of the 'WSF process' is based. In reality, the critics tend to maintain a vision of social transformation which is the heir of the classic Marxist-Leninist tradition, i.e.,

that maintains the idea that there is a principal conflict/contradiction and a protagonist actor,[83] around which all actions of opposition should be articulated and in the face of which, all other conflicts/actors appear as secondary or auxiliary.[84]

On the basis of this vision, we may understand the critical stance in the face of the defence of diversity as a value, since this defence arises from a reading, considered to be wrong, that all, or at least, some conflicts (and their respective protagonists) have a status of similar relevance. More than that, this defence of diversity hinders the distinction between what is central and what is secondary, blocking the concentration of the forces of opposition from the first viewpoint and dispersing them in a plurality of initiatives, most of which are understood as being of little significance for the intended 'project' of social transformation.[85]

In concrete terms, these critical positions are manifested in different forms. For example, in the demand that the coordinating bodies of the Forum (particularly the CI) define certain 'central' themes or questions and organise events around these, avoiding a thematic dispersion that neither hierarchises or prioritises points for a unified agenda of discussions and the planning of joint actions.[86] As Codas criticises

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83   The maintenance of this notion of 'protagonist actor' is identified, by one of the interviewees among activists trained in a Marxist tradition. According to this interviewee, these activists have a view that there is an actor 'with a vocation as protagonist, let's say, and the others will be dragged along. This is the idea. I think that this is the great new difference. Because in Marxism too, in a certain sense, this is implicit, that there is a protagonist. And the Forum tends to oppose protagonism. We're all protagonists. There's no exclusiveness' (interviewee 03). Another rejection of the 'traditional' conception present in the criticism of the 'lack of political effectiveness' of the Forum may be found in the following commentary by another interviewee: 'This is the paradigm which is being called into question. Political effectiveness, in my personal opinion, doesn't lie in this direction. You can see that we didn't succeed in changing the world. A century working with this system, with its Lenin telling us what to do, with the avant-gardes, with parties of members, training people, organising people, and it turned out the way it did, in some cases disastrously' (interviewee 02).

84   This presence of the Marxist tradition is identified by Klein in the positions of the members of ATTAC. According to the author (2001: 266), 'reflecting its Marxist intellectual roots, the group has expressed frustration with the less coherent focus of the anti-US corporation movement. 'The failure of Seattle was its inability to produce a common agenda, a global alliance at international level to fight against globalisation', said Christophe Aguiton, of ATTAC, who helped to organise the 1st Forum', in 2001.

85   One of the interviewees criticises this perspective, since it does not recognise a social change that has made a series of classic positions of socialist thought unsuitable: 'this position of the 'masses' is the expression of an impasse which is not only a conceptual impasse, but is an impasse in reality. It is a series of heterogeneous categories that are incapable of reconstituting the identity that they once had, when there was a socialist position identified with all the categories that Marx formulated in the nineteenth century' (interviewee 05).

86   In the observations realising during the 5th WSF, Emir Sader, for example, severely criticised the organisation of the 5th WSF for not giving the theme of war priority as the central focus of discussions, given that in his view, this theme is the one that would have the greatest potential for mobilisation, in addition to confronting directly the interests and power of the North American 'Empire'. The same positioning is identified and used by Callinicos and Nineham (2005: 3) in their criticism of the dispersion of the 5th WSF in 2005: 'As Emir Sader, one of the leading intellectuals of the Brazilian left and a WSF founder, put it, 'while the Forum emphasizes secondary issues, there is no major debate about the most important issue of the day – the struggle against the war and imperial hegemony in the world.'

(2004: 25), 'The issue is that the 'WSF space' has indeed been content to receive all the cultures, but has not exploited the potentialities of an explicit debate on the possibility of constructing a strategic common ground between these cultures for work.'

Another demand is for the Forum, as 'political actor' to take a position and issue declarations on those 'central' themes or questions, expressing a unified and explicit point of view.[87] This position is indicated in the cutting criticism by Sari (n/d: 52–3) of the results of the 4th WSF in India.

> Este FSM, al igual que los precedentes, ha fracasado en lo que respecta a la producción de propuestas, iniciativas o campañas concretas. El comité organizador no ha propuesto a los delegados ninguna resolución o declaración explícita posicionándose ante cuestiones como Palestina, Iraq o Myanmar (Birmania). Al final, el WSF se ha convertido simplemente en un espacio para el intercambio de ideas y la discusión intelectual. El WSF ha estado claramente dominado por organizaciones no gubernamentales y movimientos sociales que tienden a distanciarse de la cuestión del poder estatal.

> [Like the previous ones, this WSF has failed with regard to the production of proposals, initiatives or concrete campaigns. The organising committee did not propose any explicit resolution or declaration to the delegates that takes a position on questions such as Palestine, Iraq or Myanmar (Burma). At the end, the WSF has simply converted itself into a space for the exchange of ideas and intellectual discussion. The WSF has clearly been dominated by NGOs and social movements that tend to distance themselves from the question of state power.]

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87   According to one of the interviewees, this tension for the WSF, in its capacity as 'actor' to issue 'declarations' was so intense that it almost led to ruptures within the CI. In his words: 'there was a strong clash of parties, which is not explicit, but which is complicated, within the Council, within the Forum (…). I thought that it would implode, after the 2003 Forum. I thought that the Forum was lost. Because there was a pretty big dispute within the Council to remove us, the Brazilians, and control the direction of the Forum (…) it's the idea that the Forum has to be a kind of Fourth International, Fifth International, I don't know what. It's a bit in this direction. A space dispute to gain control. (…) this happened shortly after the great demonstration of 15 February. So it's the Forum, after the demonstration. And the people felt strong. So the meeting of the International Council that we had in Miami was horrible. It was a meeting to dispute power inside the Forum, literally. And personally, I thought that it would implode. To such an extent that I spent about six months more or less withdrawn from everything. But then they were defeated, because they thought that by doing this, they would be able to do the same thing. Trotskyites, groups like that. And they shifted to being no longer able to do anything. And then they came back for a reconciliation saying 'We have to be together, we have to do things together and maintain the idea of the Forum as an open space'. And with that, we made Mumbai possible, we made this year's Forum possible, where these tensions were already much weaker. At international level, today they are far weaker. There's an idea that we have to be together. More: that this is the force of the Forum which almost imploded in 2003. 2003 was critical (…) the tension exists. I'd merely say that today it has become more constructive and less destructive, let's say. It's a tension, with the awareness that together, we are seeking a new way, almost a new form of action, recognising that being alone doesn't work, and which leads us to reach an agreement in this sense. But I think that this is an awareness that arose post-2003, (interviewee 03). In these comments it is possible to observe the presence of what was previously termed 'the pragmatic acceptance of diversity', i.e. the recognition of the risk present in a rupture within the CI led to the withdrawal of the sectors opposing the principles of the WSF.

Finally, a third point defended by those who adopt the critical position is that of the need to construct an agenda, programme, list of proposals or a common political project, around which a set of actions, the set of actions developed by the organisations and movements taking part in the 'WSF process', may be united.[88] It is in this sense that proposals such as that of Sader (2001: 101) are advanced, for whom:

> El Forum Social Mundial de Porto Alegré tiene que ser, en su conjunto, un Forum de propuestas sobre los grandes temas del mundo contemporáneo. Propuestas elaboradas por los mayores especialistas y ampliamente debatidas en el Forum, para que de ellas salgan no solamente alternativas sino formas de acción que permitan llevarlas a la práctica e iniciar efectivamente la construcción de otro mundo.

> [The World Social Forum of Porto Alegré has to be, as a whole, a Forum of proposals on the great themes of the contemporary world. Proposals elaborated by the greatest specialists and widely debated within the Forum, so that from them, not only alternatives arise, but also forms of action that allow them to be implemented practically and an effective start to be made on the construction of another world].

The same perspective is highlighted by Klein as being present in the participation of ATTAC in the organisation of the 1st WSF. According to the author (2001: 266):

> ATTAC viewed the conference as an alternative for bringing together the best minds who sought alternatives to neoliberal policies: not only new systems of taxation, but everything, sustainable agriculture and participatory democracy, cooperative production, an independent media. ATTAC believed that its 'common agenda' would arise from this process of exchanging information.

The risk identified in the lack of a common programme or project is, in addition to dispersion, the co-opting of the actors in the 'WSF process' by reformist proposals and/or by the bodies and institutions of 'corporate globalisation'. As Sader alerts

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88   There are important variations on the range and degree of detailing of this 'common programme', with the presence of positions that recognise the difficulties and limitations for the formulation of a ready and global proposal. But even between actors who recognise such limits, we may observe the defence of a minimum of definition in terms of the strategic 'ends' of the 'WSF process'. As Monereo states (2001:188), 'no estamos hablando de un programa detallado, medida por medida, para implementarse en el espacio y en el tiempo como programa de gobierno mundial, para lo que no hay ni habrá a mediano plazo condiciones, sino de un conjunto de ideas-fuerza, de valores y propuestas articuladas capaces de reflejar demandas sociales y culturales y, lo que considero más importante, de articular sujetos y movimientos con posibilidades de auto-constituirse en actores políticos capaces de intervenir a escala local, regional y mundial. [We are not speaking of a programme that is detailed, measure by measure, to be implemented in space and time, as a programme for world government, since the conditions for this do not exist, nor will they exist in the medium-term, but a set of powerful ideas, of articulated values and proposals capable of reflecting social and cultural demands, and, what I consider most important, of articulating subjects and movements with the possibility of forming themselves into political actors capable of intervening at local, regional and global level].'

(2001: 96), 'Si no llenanos ese espacio con un proyecto político de gobierno, de sociedad, de poder concientemente asumido, estaremos permitiendo que otros coopten esa fuerza social. [If we don't fill this space with a political project for government, for society, for consciously assumed power, we shall be allowing others to co-opt this social force.]'[89]

4 Conclusions

Resuming the questions that have oriented this study, we may identify the fact, firstly, that the WSFs were established at favourable moments for grasping the complexity present in the current dynamics of social opposition. The most complete expressions of what the actors of a supposed 'global civil society' in formation would be like have tended to converge towards this space: networks of organisations and activists which today think and act politically on a global plane and even the more classical and localised forms of community-based movements and organisations.

In this 'field', expressed and formed by the 'WSF process', extremely diversified actors transit, interact, diverge and form articulations with each other, with these characterised, on the one hand, by the spread of relations and interpretative frameworks at global level, and on the other, by the particular political, economic, social and cultural characteristics of their respective countries or regions. That is, they express the complexity of the new dynamics of mobilisation generated by a cycle of expansion of relations and articulations on a global scale, which at the same time, only become effective to the degree that they are based on and adapt to the specific context of each 'location'.

Another aspect to be highlighted is that this form of an extremely pluralistic field for opposition occurs within a context characterised by a significant absence of politico-ideological references with the capacity to assume a hegemonic position in terms of the orientation of interpretations and political practices of the 'WSF process'. On the one hand, this lack is interpreted by some activists (particularly those with a trajectory forged in the Marxist tradition) as a major problem, to the degree that it prevents the construction of a reference framework that is common to the set of actors in the field. On the other hand, however, as many testimonies and evaluations show, this same absence could have been one of the central factors of the success of the 'WSF process' in terms of the bringing together of

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89   This criticism of the defenders of this lack of hierarchy and the preservation of diversity is highlighted by an interviewee: 'You keep going on about participation, self-management, etc., etc., and half a dozen people are chosen to prepare the red carpet for Lula to go to the Social Forum, or for Chavez to go to the Social Forum. So what happens, in practice, is that they end up occupying the political space due to the absence of this space, or due to the fact that you don't want to occupy this space'. So, this tension is permanent. (...) and people say: 'Alright, you avoid this, and in avoiding doing this at the level of the directorate, they understand that there is a directorate, you make it easier for opportunists to come, as well as those who at the last minute see the Forum as a stage for delivering their sermon' (interviewee 04).

differences. To the degree that there wasn't (and apparently there isn't) any political group or line of thought capable of imposing itself on the others as the dominant one, an important space is opened for differentiated sectors to take part in the collective construction of the Forum agenda, in addition to avoiding the rupture and alienation of those segments that do not consider themselves to be covered by the position that perchance may be constituted as the dominant one. In this sense, contrary to what is affirmed by those who identify the lack of a 'common framework' as an obstacle to the strengthening of the Forum, it would probably have been precisely this absence that made the Forum possible as a space capable of attracting and allowing the interaction of such a differentiated set of contentious forces, which in many cases, were even opposed.

It is on account of this form, which is to a large degree an innovative one, of the 'WSF process' that it seems inadequate to characterise it as a social movement (or even the expression of a social movement that is the 'global movement'). On the contrary, it seems more correct to think of this process as constituting a 'field of opposition', formed by actors who share certain very specific identifying elements (fundamentally with regard to a given 'appraisal' of the evils of 'corporate globalisation'), but who present a significant diversity in terms of 'strategies' and 'objectives', which thus become the object of a major dispute and of conflicts within the Forum.

The principles and the 'methodology' of the WSF in turn stand as the expression of an effort at 'political invention'[90] which, on the one hand, permits the diversified range of actors participating in the 'WSF process' to be maintained and broadened, and on the other, to generate possibilities (which are not impositional) for meetings, the exchange of experiences, collective learning experiences and the articulation of actions that are capable of confronting the 'powers' and forms of domination contested by the actors united at the Forum.

This position is evidently the object of various criticisms and a permanent focus of conflicts, both in the bodies of the Forum, and in the annual events. Underlying these conflicts, we find a profound divergence regarding the meaning itself of opposition and social transformation in the contemporary world. At one of the poles of the dispute, we find those segments which identify the existence of a central 'problem' in society (in generic form, 'capitalism'), the confronting of which should be the priority of all contentious forces, which, if they wish to be effective, should constitute a unified political subject which directs its action towards a reduced but 'strategic' set of 'targets'. In this sense, social transformation is conceived as a totalising process, led by a relatively homogeneous actor in terms of a shared collective identity. In the face of this, the role of the Forum should be of contributing to the creation of the conditions for transformation: the identification of the priority 'struggles' and 'targets'; the construction of a collective identity among participating actors; the definition of a 'common agenda' of actions that unify the interventions of actors on a global scale; the recovery and dissemination of a 'political project' which (re)establishes the 'destination of the social struggle', in such a way as to orient the set of contentious actions (at both local and global level).

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90   This term is used by Leite (2003).

At the other pole, in turn, are located those segments which, to date, have maintained a certain predominance within the 'WSF process', in this way, sustaining the principles of the 'Charter of Principles' and its execution within the 'methodologies' of the Forums. As analysed in Chapter 3, the stances of the radical defence of diversity, of rejecting a deliberative and directive character for the WSF, of maintaining the Forum as an 'open space' (and not as a new 'political subject'), of criticising the proposals for the construction of a unified 'agenda', among other aspects, are expression of a break that is more or less profound, with the political conceptions traditionally adhered to by those political segments which identify themselves as 'Left-wing'.

Accused by their critics of constituting a structure and a functioning dynamic for the Forums which contributes to the fragmentation, and hence to the loss of political effectiveness, these segments call into question the very notion of political effectiveness of those critics, by rejecting the parameter that these latter establish for evaluating this effectiveness. That is, to the degree that these segments reject the way in which the critics interpret opposition and social transformation, they constitute a new parameter on the basis of which political effectiveness is conceived: if the idea of a 'central conflict' is abandoned, the diversity of conflicts and actions ceases to be seen as a problem and becomes a necessity; if 'social transformation', instead of being a unified goal with a pre-defined meaning, is interpreted as a plural and open process, the absence of a pre-established 'destination' is converted into something positive; if there is no longer a single 'subject' who is the protagonist of the transformation, the multiplicity of subjects who are protagonists of multiple transformations, shifts from being a weakness to a strength.

The clash between these positions within the context of the 'WSF process', as analysed over the course of this work, may be seen as the expression of a broader conflict, on the meaning of opposition and social transformation in the twenty-first century. There is no claim that this analysis indicates who has the more 'correct' or 'right' position in this dispute, since, to a certain degree, this would be an undue displacement between the analytical apprehension of the 'object of research' and a positioning of a normative character. In this sense, we could merely conclude, on the basis of the empirical foundations presented in the preceding Chapters, that the stance of the defenders of the principles and 'methodology' of the Forum has shown itself to be more successful, and probably more suitable for the current configuration of the 'field of opposition'.[91] In addition to this, we may interpret

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91 Such an adaptation transpires in the following comments of an interviewee dealing with the so-called 'crisis of socialism': 'it is not only the crisis of socialism arising from the collapse of real socialism. It's a much more organic process, the changes, the historical transformations that have occurred over recent decades, over the last two decades. So we have to bear this in mind in order to avoid succumbing to the temptation of thinking that what we have to do is to reconstitute a Left more or less in the mould of what existed in the 1970s, and because of this, the movement is so different. The political culture which it develops, such a horizontal culture, an internationalist culture, is a culture of appreciating the difference and not of wanting to homogenise, despite all the tensions and conflicts that this represents. It's a much more Anglo-American Saxon culture, in certain aspects, in the sense of putting much greater value on practices than on discourses, than political-ideological projects. Because everyone, not everyone, but most of them have a certain doubt about the socialism of the twenty-first century' (interviewee 05).

this process (and, in particular, the 'political inventions' present in the 'Charter of Principles' and the Forum 'methodology') as a central moment in the form of a new political-ideological reference which orientates the social opposition of the twenty-first century, which could shift the centrality that the Marxist reference secured during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[92] As an interviewee highlights:

> In the long-term, I see the Forum as a possibility for rearticulating the Lefts throughout the world. And I say 'Lefts' because there are people who behave as if there's only one given Left (laughs). I think that this field which today no-one really knows what it's like, which unites these actors that fight against neoliberalism, but which is a diversified field, hugely diversified, and which is still forming as a political identity, I think that the Forum is the possibility for articulating it, of articulating something that was lost because the centrality was concentrated almost exclusively in party formations, oriented by socialism, or whatever. So I think that we have the Forum as the possibility of making a transition to a new form of articulation of the Lefts. I think that there's a major question mark as to whether the Forum will succeed. I think that the entire bet that many people are making is that it's exactly this.
>
> (Interviewee 01)

The difficulties in this process of building a new paradigm for transforming political action are summarised in the following affirmations of the interviewees on the challenges of the 'WSF process': 'I think that the major difficulty is to build a new political culture. To act within a new political culture. And at the same time, to build this new political culture. I think that this is the major challenge to the Forum' (interviewee 04); 'it's the big challenge that we have as a Forum, because basically it means managing a new political culture, a new political vision, new analytic categories' (interviewee 03).

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92 In part, this new reference is expressed in affirmations such as this one: *'In our reading, the convergence of difference among the anti-corporate globalisation movements lies less in a shared vision of an outcome than in a shared commitment to a process. Essentially, the convergence of difference is best reflected in the widely asserted commitment to* the reinvention of democracy (Ponniah and Fischer 2003: 13).

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