

ON THE WSF FUTURE

A contribution by
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after a participated debate in the Italian Coordination for WSF and ESF

a) From 2001 till today: a slow work in progress. The evolutionary value of tensions and internal debate.

We start the debate on WSF future seven years after from the first event in Porto Alegre.

During these years, committed movements and the International Council have always discussed and debated, sometimes in a harsh way but always without producing permanent breaking.

And the Forum process has, even if slowly, changed.

In the debate we are going to start, it is useful to remember some elements of the debate which have produced an objective evolution of the process.

1. The reference to the Charter of Principles remains, as well as the Forum openness and inclusiveness. But in the continental, regional, national, thematical dynamics, Forum are organized in a different ways. Each of them present positive and negative points, which are impossible to be investigated now. What is important to say is that one Forum “orthodoxy” doesn’t exist, and it give us more freedom in the debate on possible innovation.
2. The relation between WSF, continental, national and thematical Forum has never be formally clarified. It is one of the most difficult issue to be solved in a mathematical way. Nevertheless this issue is always running across our debate, and it is good to maintain a positive tense on it, aimed to enlarge relations and interconnections within the global process.
3. The decision to have WSF events not only in Porto Alegre was difficult to be taken, but nowadays it is considered as useful by everybody. This choice (together with the resistance to all political exploitation coming also from supposed “friend governments”) helped the autonomy of the process and gave a contribution to the development of a really global process, which has to remain a fundamental goal.
4. The tense between Forum as space for debating and Forum as space of convergence and organization has never been solved. Nevertheless, the harsh discussion of the first years has been replaced by a common research. In some Forum -such as the European one- the preparatory assembly includes one day

devoted to thematical network meetings and, during the ESF events, special spaces for Thematical Assemblies are provided. In Nairobi WSF the Fourth Day devoted to thematical convergences was organized: it is a positive evolution even if it was not realized in a good way. The Assembly of Social Movements itself more and more is an occasion to present decisions taken during WSF by different coalitions and campaigns.

5. The harsh discussion on WSF event periodicity is going to be solve in practice, even if a formal decision was never taken. In 2008 the WSF event has been replaced by the Global Day of Action. This discussion too is linked to the dynamics of the global process, of the continental Forum and of movements' campaigns.
6. The decision to held the Global Day of Action gave us the opportunity to realize a laboratory of relations with local and widespread articulations of the huge altermondialistic network, and provide us with important elements for the future of the WSF process.

b) The situation of the altermondialistic movement. The categories of effectiveness and ineffectiveness should be used looking at a new phase and at a different movement.

We believe it's impossible to evaluate the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of WSF process neither in a abstract way nor using categories which belong to previous historical periods.

1. The Forum process is seven years old. A very short period, compared with an historical era as we consider neoliberal globalization and permanent war. It is impossible to defeat them, to produce a real crisis or to stop them in seven years.
2. The need of change is enormous, as well as the frustration due to the incapability to influence in the necessary way the global political agenda. Nevertheless, this responsibility cannot be put only on the shoulders of WSF and social movements. It is a general problem involving politics, institutions, the crisis of liberal democracy and there is not an easy solution to it.
3. The Forum process should devote time to a collective discussion on these difficulties and limits, which are accompanying the social movements' life as well as the struggles, giving value in the same time to the positive results we are able to achieve.
4. The Forum process helped very much in providing visibility to the widespread rebellions against capitalistic ideology and policies and its attempt to conquer global hegemony. It's a fundamental result, which in a very short time has given new legitimacy to opposition and alternative thoughts and practices.
5. The Forum process has been a fundamental tool for a new convergence of different elements of alternative, built in struggles and practices in many regions in the world and in many different fields, which could run the risk of isolation and fragmentation.

6. The convergence of an alternative project promoted by the Forum process can't be built by imposing it: different political positions and cultural visions live together in the Forum process (anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism, the will to make globalization more human, thematic struggles...). This pluralism can be considered by somebody as a weakness, for us on the contrary is a crucial strength of the Forum process.
7. We indeed believe that change can't be achieved by small vanguards or by one principal actor: it can be achieved only by the real participation of the majority of humanity. This is the reason why the convergence of the thousands reasons of opposition to a society funded on profit, on goods, on war, on patriarchy, on environmental devastation is so important. And this is the reason why it is impossible to decide permanent hierarchy or fixed priorities concerning issues and themes. A mosaic has to be built, where everybody can find their own space, without be obliged to queue behind the "most important contradictions".
8. The Forum process has to invest on the historical evolution of antiliberalistic movement without anticipating its outcome, giving a space for political and cultural debate as well as for struggles' and practices' convergence, being aware that only the common commitment can produce collective advancement and unity in thought and actions.

c) In these seven years globalization appears as changed. The WSF process has to face it and to use appropriate tools.

The way in which we looked at globalization in Seattle is different from the way in which we look at it now, and it has concrete consequences in the development of social movements and Forum process.

1. No-global movement was born and grew up mobilizing against international financial and political institutions: WTO, World Bank, IMF, G8. The opening of the new millennium has been characterized by the debate on decline of nation states and on the growing importance of international market's institutions and transnational corporations power. This idea produced an impact in the movements' dynamics, which invested main part of their energy at the international level. Nevertheless National Governments are the components of the International Institutions: struggles and pressures must also be implemented at national level, as it was shown by some cases in the South of the world.
2. In addition, a contradiction between a new growing role of nation states and the international bodies like WTO, G8, IFM, World Bank is arising. New explosive conflicts between powerful nation states are bringing back the attention of movements on national problems, with a positive attempt to build solid bases in their territories and communities to achieve results at the national and local level. In this new situation the international engagement is facing some difficulties. At the same time the struggles against transnational corporations should become more and more transnational as well, in order to build up a new and more effective level of solidarity among workers and communities.

3. This are reasons why we can't measure the movement's effectiveness only by taking in consideration the poor international participation in important events like it happened, in example, in Hong Kong during the mobilization against WTO (and of course we fully understand the disappointment of the more committed movements in this event).
4. A big attention should be paid in order to establish a permanent dialogue with all the local movements which fully share the antiliberalistic, no-war, antiracist, anti patriarchy, ecological approach of the no-global movement and which de facto arise from it. And we have to measure the success and effectiveness of Forum process on this basis.
5. The choice not to give specific priorities to the Global Day of Action was useful to involve many of these movements, by respecting their own specificity, and we feel that characteristic should be kept.

d) The Forum process lives in the struggles, mobilizations, alternative practices all over the world.

We should investigate much more, in the WSF process, the altermondialistic articulation at the local, national, regional level.

1. The struggles for water, for peace, for common goods and public services, for workers' rights and employment, for food sovereignty, against privatization, against war and military bases, against environmental destruction, patriarchy and sexual discrimination spread all over the world, in a process of cultural, political, social mass contamination. They are building a universal language which gather million of people at the level of daily life and commitment.
2. We repeat that, in our opinion, fixed and common main issues, according to whom everybody should adequate their own priorities, do not exist. It is useless and harmful try to impose them. Everybody follow their cultural, political and social vocations, also because the problems created by globalization really affect all the aspects of life.
3. The are extraordinary occasions, like it was February 15th 2003 against the war in Iraq, but we have to consider them exactly as exceptions. The Forum process can help very much to develop the possibility of convergence in these specific moments, by establishing links, permanent connections with movements all over the world, and useful tools.
4. Unfortunately, the possibility to move automatically the local and decentralized dimension of struggles and practices into a global scale is not realistic. We experienced it in the Global Day of Action, the first WSF attended by many person who don't travel around the world because of economic, cultural or personal conditions. The Forum process should be committed to help development of their possibility to have international relations and interconnections.

5. A specific attention should be given by the Forum process to the weak and isolated regions, the ones living in war and occupations, or in difficult conditions. We can't simply hope that democratic civil societies and movements from that regions will arrive by themselves in the Forum process: we have to search for them, take care of them, support and strengthen them.
 6. The Forum process should be aimed to promote the development of a real global and universal altermondialistic language and project: the attention to Arab world, to Eastern Europe, former Soviet Union and to China is a fundamental condition to achieve this goal, breaking ideological "western-focused" barriers.
- e) **Relation with institutional politics. The European example. Difficulties exist in the Forum space too. The challenge is to live differences without breaking the common space, and to go on building dialogue and trust.**

The different development of capitalism in globalization era is reflected in the movement situation which present nowadays big differences in terms of strength and brightness. We feel the responsibility to present an evaluation on Europe, which seems to be inside a worrying stagnation.

1. By sure in Western Europe the breaking of capitalistic hegemony is difficult, because of the combination between some remaining of welfare state, a still widespread well-being and neoliberalistic policies. The organization of new social uneasiness is still at the beginning. The consumerism conquer also a big part of poor and new poor population. New actors, like migrants, in many countries don't have participation rights.
2. Berlin Wall collapsed almost twenty years ago, but has been replaced by a new virtual and very high wall. The antiliberistic social forces and movements too don't pay attention to the social reality in Eastern countries. It weaken the capability to stop exploitation and social devastation in the East, which help so much the total achievement of liberism also in the West. The European Social Forum in Malmo is aimed to make a step forward in improving East-West relations. But a big work has still to be done.
3. Relations between antiliberistic movements and leftist institutional political forces are in many countries difficult, often conflicting when that forces take responsibility in the governments. In some cases, their presence in the government has been lived in a lacerating way by many movements' components, producing (at least in Italy and beyond the different evaluations of this text signers) divisions and therefore a weakening of the unitary movement referring to the WSF process.
4. Autonomy of movement, facing any governments or institutional political forces, seems crucial for us: more in situations such as in Europe where political parties, even if they are inside a deep crisis of consensus and legitimacy, still maintain strong links with organized civil society actors (big trade unions, associations,

committees). WSF process should discuss much more on this issue, which is a critical one.

5. Nevertheless, we feel that a possible way to prevent these tensions to destroy the unitary framework exists: we have not to be afraid to divide ourselves when to be together is impossible, but we have to be able to converge any time it can be possible, and we have to preserve the unitary relation in the international Forum process.
6. In Italy, in the last two years, we experienced divisions between us regarding some mobilizations, overall regarding Prodi government evaluation and relation with the parties supporting it. In this situation, the reference to WSF and ESF helped us. Even if we were not able to avoid difficulties, divisions and problems in the movement, this reference gave us the possibility to preserve a unitary space in the “Italian Coordination for WSF and ESF”. It gave us condition to arrive in the international Forum and events with a good dialogue and cooperation, like we are doing now with this paper which comes from a large collective discussion.
7. An additional real and difficult problem, which according to us has not solution, is the relation between the actors involved in the Forum process, because some of them not always accept to cooperate with others. In Europe it happened among ETUC and other trade unions, but also between different civil society organizations. The WSF process can't obviously impose lines of conduct, and in any case the process is really important to help coexistence and trust building. Therefore, these remains real problems, which in several occasion weaken the capability of action and mobilization.

f) Forum process don't have tools to solve all the movements' problems. Nevertheless, it can be an essential tool to help their growth, diffusion and evolution.

Many problems and needs we mentioned, as distinctive of the present situation of the altermondialistic movements, can't be solved in the debate of WSF future and by the solution we will find together.

These issues concern the state of the world, of international relations, of political and institutional dynamics, of different movements' cultures -which we can't pretend to rule.

1. The role WSF can go on playing usefully is to hold the space for the large antiliberistic network to meet, carrying on with helping dialogue, trust building and convergences. It has a concrete as well as a symbolic value, and shows that many social organizations all over the world want to go on feeling themselves as a part of a global alliance for social transformation.
2. Network and coalitions mainly interested to mobilize have to proceed autonomously, using Forum process to communicate and contaminate with their own ideas as much as possible persons and organizations, without claiming to

force to action the actors who take part in the Forum process only for dialogue and discussion, or which are committed only on specific issues.

3. The Forum space nevertheless have to pay much more attention to give visibility to campaigns and struggles which develop inside the process. It can also help in attracting new altermondialistic and no-global actors, and it has to provide useful tools to encourage relations, convergences and interconnections.
4. A real innovation is needed, and possible, in the World Social Forum process which has to be daily useful to movements, campaigns, struggles in order to achieve more visibility, more capability of communication inside and outside the network, more possibility to converge. A big attention should be paid to support regions and sectors where altermondialistic movements live in difficult conditions.

Some concrete proposal

1. **TO DEVELOP THE FORUM PROCESS.** We agree with the proposals coming from Mobilization Working Group and Communication Commission after the Global Day of Action: we have not to lose the contacts we were able to establish all over the world. The tools produced for the Global Day of Action should become permanent, as well as the commitment to support Forum and movements all over the world to develop communication and interconnections. Forum has to put energies and resources in relations with movements in new and difficult regions and sectors, also by organizing visits, meetings, events. The work for internal and external communication must be a priority for the whole International Council.
2. **TO ORGANIZE A FIRST OCCASION OF DEBATE AMONG INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL AND CONTINENTAL AND REGIONAL FORUM.** An open meeting for dialogue with delegations of continental and regional Forum should be organized during the next International Council meeting. It can be considered as a part of the discussion on the WSF future, and it can be prepared by Internet discussion.
3. **TO LINK NETWORKS AND CAMPAIGNS TO FORUM PROCESS.** The International Council meetings should include one day devoted to self-organized meetings of thematic networks and campaigns, in order to encourage permanent relations of movements with the Commissions and International Council.
4. **TO DEVELOP AND IMPROVE THE FOURTH DAY OF WSF EVENT.** Our proposal is to devote one day in Belem WSF to Assemblies aimed to encourage interchanges and convergences inside the thematic axis (or, much better, inside thematic issues). In the Assemblies proposals and decisions should be presented. They should be well publicized in a real advance, and they could produce short reports to be spread using WSF website and newsletter. The Assembly of Social Movement should become the space where reports could be presented to the interested people, without any hierarchy or priority.

5. **TO HOLD WSF EVENT EVERY TWO YEARS.** The Forum periodicity should be biennial, in alternation with Continental Forum who should decide to synchronize. In this way, WSF people could take part in different continental Forum to help contamination, and Continental Forum could fulfill WSF event with their experiences without obstacles. The triennial periodicity is too much dispersive and doesn't fit with the Continental Forum. During WSF space and visibility should be given to connections realized all over the world by interested organizations and groups (with linked events or video-audio-internet connections).
6. **TO HOLD THE GLOBAL DAY OF ACTION EVERY TWO YEARS (WHEN WSF WILL NOT BE ORGANIZED).** The Global Day of Action should be held in the year in which there will not be a WSF event. In this way everybody could put all their energies and resources in organizing it, which is impossible if GDA will be held in the same days of WSF event.
7. **A DATE CHOSEN BY US, NOT BY THE MASTERS OF ECONOMY.** The link with Davos lost all its symbolism, and the end of January presents big difficulties because some regions in the world are in the deep core of summer and other in the coldest part of winter. We could decide, in full autonomy, a useful day for us. The period around March equinox could present symbolic and concrete positive features as useful date for WSF event as well for Global Day of Action.