4 | Organizing fragmented counter-hegemonic energies

My main argument in this chapter and in Chapter 5 is that, contrary to the opinion of its critics, the WSF has shown a remarkable capacity to reform itself. The issues of organization and representation have been the main playing field upon which such capacity has been tested. I will try to demonstrate that the limitations of self-reform have lain so far less in the WSF itself than in the global and national structural conditions under which it unfolds.

In the words of Francisco Whitaker, one of the organizers of the WSF, 'the idea for the WSF was struck among a bunch of Brazilians who wished to oppose resistance to neoliberalism's single way of thinking, so obsessively expressed in the annual meetings of the World Economic Forum in Davos' (Whitaker 2002b). A resistance, that is, which aimed to go beyond protests and rallies. According to Whitaker,

> [...] the idea was, with the participation of all the organizations that were already networking in the mass protests, to arrange another kind of meeting on a world scale – the World Social Forum – directed to social concerns. So as to give a symbolic dimension to the start of this new period, the meeting would take place on the same day as the powerful of the world were to meet in Davos. (Interview, 5 September 2003)

Whitaker himself and Oded Grajew presented the idea to Bernard Cassen, editor of *Le Monde Diplomatique* and president of ATTAC.[1] Cassen was excited by the idea and proposed that the Forum take place in Brazil, in the city then already praised worldwide for its municipal participatory democracy, known as participatory budgeting – Porto Alegre. Soon a Brazilian Organizing Committee (OC) was put together to organize the WSF from 2001 onwards (see Table 4.1).[2] During the first WSF it was decided to set up a loosely structured International Council (IC). It met for the first time after the first WSF, in São Paulo, in June 2001.

In June 2001, a delegation of the organizations presented the Forum to the movements gathered together in Geneva for a parallel summit to the UN 'Copenhagen + 5' summit. The idea was very well received and

TABLE 4.1 Composition of the WSF Organizing Committee

ABONG	Brazilian Association of Non-governmental Organizations
ATTAC–Brazil	Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens
CBJP	Brazilian Justice and Peace Commission
CIVES	Brazilian Association of Entrepreneurs for Citizenship
CUT	Central Trade Union Federation
IBASE	Brazilian Institute for Social and Economic Studies
CJG	Centre for Global Justice
MST	Landless Movement

an International Council to support the Forum was promptly created. The first WSF was under way. The programme was put together according to two dynamics. In the morning there would be four simultaneous panels on each one of the four chosen thematic areas: the production of wealth and social reproduction; access to wealth and sustainability; civil society and the public arena; political power and ethics in the new society.

Panellists, invited by the organization, were, in Whitaker's words, 'leading names in the fight against the One Truth' (interview, 5 September 2003). In the afternoon there would be workshops coordinated by the participants themselves to engage in debate and exchange experiences. Sessions were also planned to allow for testimonies from people involved in different kinds of struggles.

This structure was kept in the second WSF. It was somewhat changed in the third, though the basic structure of two kinds of sessions was still there: sessions organized directly by the OC, featuring guest speakers invited by the OC itself and by the IC; and sessions submitted by the participating movements and organizations. In the fourth meeting in Mumbai there were some significant organizational changes: more space was allowed for activities beyond conventional sessions (rallies, artistic, theatrical and literary shows) and part of the plenary sessions were self-managed by the organizations and movements, not by the OC as in the past. Along the same lines but resorting to a more participatory methodology to decide upon changes, more organizational innovation was implemented in the 2005 WSF. I will analyse these changes step by step.

The exciting but also overwhelming and at times traumatic experience of the first three meetings of the WSF was rich enough to identify the main organizational problems and also to show that such problems,

although organizational in nature, were political as well. I will analyse these problems under the following headings: internal democracy – the relations between the OC and the IC; transparency and hierarchies in participation; parties and movements; size and continuity; the new organizational challenges – the evaluation of the 2003 WSF; the new organizational models – the WSF in Mumbai and the 2005 WSF (the Mumbai demonstration; the 2005 WSF); the 2006 polycentric WSF.

Internal democracy: relations between the Organizing Committee and the International Council

During the second WSF the decision was taken to confer more power on the IC for the planning of the Forum, while ascribing mainly an executive role to the OC, composed of Brazilian organizations. The first document of the IC was issued by the Brazilian OC after its first meeting in São Paulo in June 2001 and states that

> [...] the creation of the IC reflects the concept of the WSF as a permanent, long-term process, designed to build an international movement to bring together alternatives to neoliberal thinking in favour of a new social order, one that will foster contact among a multiplicity and diversity of proposals. Accordingly, the IC will be set up as a permanent body to give continuity to the WSF beyond 2002, to consolidate the process of taking the WSF to the world level.

Echoing criticisms of an excessive Brazilian influence in the organization and design of the WSF, the statement goes on to emphasize that 'the Council will play a leading role in defining policy guidelines and the WSF's strategic directions. National Organizing Committees will serve as organizers and facilitators in tandem with the IC.' The coexistence of the OC – up until 2004 exclusively Brazilian and now composed of Brazilian and Indian members, successively renamed as the International Secretariat (IS) and, since 2005, as the Facilitation Group (see below) – and the IC is today uncontested, even though it began by giving rise to some tension, both at the organizational level and as regards the representativeness of the Forum.

Both the OC/IS and the IC were put together by co-optation. Their legitimacy derives from their having organized the WSF with relative success. Their members were not elected and they are not accountable to any jurisdiction. The Brazilian OC kept its constitution from the beginning until the meeting of Mumbai. It functioned simultaneously as the local organizing committee and as the IS. After Mumbai, and with the expectation that the WSF would in the future be convened in

different countries, the IC decided that in the future the local organizing committees and the IS should be strictly separated and that the latter should integrate representatives of the local OCs of the previous meetings of the WSF.[3] Accordingly, since the Mumbai Forum, the IS integrates some representatives of the India organizing committee. Furthermore, the IC has been in a process of permanent structuring since its creation in 2001 with the objective of becoming more global and balanced in terms of thematic, regional and strategic representation, a process that is far from being completed, as I will show in Chapter 5.

Although, according to the Charter of Principles, nobody represents the WSF, in practical terms the IS has been assuming some kind of representative function, and that has been a source of tension. Among other reasons, the fact remains that the IS is in practice almost exclusively Brazilian, whereas the WSF aims to be global. The IC was actually created to solve this problem, and the tendency has been to strengthen the IC's role in its relations with the IS. This is no easy task. Since the WSF took place for three consecutive years in Porto Alegre, the Brazilian OC/IS tended to play a crucial role in organizational and other kinds of decisions. The difficulties piled up during 2002, when the IC wanted to assume the WSF's strategic leadership and give general recommendations for its organization. In the course of the year, the IC held meetings in Porto Alegre, Bangkok, Barcelona and Florence, important decisions having been made each time, most of them addressing the need to internationalize the WSF more and more. In fact, the IC had declared 2002 as the year of the internationalization of the WSF (among other initiatives, through the organization of regional and thematic forums). It seems that it was not always easy to coordinate the IC's and the IS's work. According to some members of the IC, the IS resisted its loss of autonomy. For instance, the decisions made by the coordinators of the thematic areas were not always respected by the IS, especially as far as the choice of guest speakers was concerned. Without wishing to dismiss this point, I believe that the lack of coordination had a lot to do with conjunctural conditions. The IC became stronger in 2002, at a time when the IS lost some of its effectiveness owing to internal political conditions in Brazil – 2002 was election year, and there were state and federal elections (both legislative and presidential). The Workers' Party (PT),[4] ever a staunch supporter of the WSF in Porto Alegre, at both the organizational and financial levels, lost the elections in Rio Grande do Sul, whose capital is Porto Alegre.[5] This fact not only provoked a financial crisis but also upset the administrative apparatus, which had contributed so much to the success of the two previous forums.[6]

Be that as it may, there emerged a tense climate of mutual accusations of lack of transparency and accountability. Although none of these committees was elected by the movements and organizations that take part in the WSF, the truth of the matter is that the IC has been assuming the position of the most representative structure of the WSF, as well as a promoter of its internal democracy. Furthermore, the IC has been assuming a decisive role in strengthening a broad conception of the WSF, turning it into a permanent process and promoting the continuity among its many initiatives, so as to transform the WSF into 'an incremental process of collective learning and growth', as stated in the resolutions adopted at IC meetings during the 2003 WSF.

At the several IC meetings, other decisions were made with a view to changing the correlation of power between the IC and the IS. One important decision was to hold the 2004 WSF in India. The major reason for this decision was, as stated above, the need to deepen the Forum's global nature, encouraging the participation of movements and organizations from world regions with a hitherto marginal presence in the WSF. But the fact is that this decision deprived the IS of its former centrality, a consequence foreseen and indeed welcomed by some members of the IC. The decision to convene the 2004 WSF in India ended up having other advantages, such as, for example, enlarging the sets of organizations with the experience to put together big events. In this respect, it was interesting to observe how the mistrust of the IC members who had expressed their opposition to Mumbai as a venue (mainly Latin Americans) was gradually overcome as the Indian Organizing Committees went on demonstrating its organizational capacity.[7] The IS, in its turn, contributed with its experience whenever asked by the Indian OC. A relationship of mutual trust was thereby created which is patent today in the fact that both OCs share the IS, even though the original Brazilian OC is charged with the greater burden of the executive tasks.[8]

Relations between the IS and the IC began to change for the better after the meeting in Miami in June 2003. Between 2001 and 2003, the dominance of the IS was almost inevitable, given the IC's lack of operationality. At the Miami meeting measures were taken to increase the IC's operationality. As soon as this process was in place, functional complementarity, rather than political rivalry, between the IS and the IC began to be evident.[9] As I will show below, the organizational innovations of the 2005 WSF were already the result of a new relationship between the IS and the IC, a relationship of productive and not destructive tensions, in contrast to what threatened to happen in the past.

The relationships between the IS and the IC changed qualitatively in the IC meeting of Barcelona on 22/23 June 2005. In light of previous discussions on the need to change the institutional architecture of the WSF, the Brazilian members of the IS (as seen above, the IS is also composed of Indian members) presented a document in which they proposed that the IS should be renamed the 'Facilitation Group'. This change was justified by the need to adapt the technical office of São Paulo (the headquarters of the IS) to the new concept of the IC as an effectively functioning network. The document also proposed that the technical office be based in São Paulo until 2008, moving afterwards to another location. Beyond its concrete proposals this document signalled the willingness of the Brazilian side of the IS to respond once and for all to the criticisms of centralism waged against it. The change of name coupled with the change of venue signified not only a further diminution of the dominance of the IS but also the termination of the central role the Brazilian organizations had played in it. Probably tired of the continuing organizational stress and of the recurrent controversies about their alleged centralizing control, the Brazilian organizations felt that they had done their part to build the WSF and that now other organizations should take over. Taken by surprise, the IC was unable to take a final decision on the document. It was agreed that the new organizational architecture of the WSF would be decided in the IC meetings scheduled for 2006. In the meantime, the polycentric WSF of 2006 would be organized by the local OCs jointly, helped by the commissions on methodology, contents, resources and communication of the IC.[10] It was, however, agreed that the technical office would change venue after 2008. In my view, the debates in Barcelona showed both the genuine effort to democratize the governing structure of the WSF and the operational problems thereby posed. They showed above all a positive evolution in the relationships between the IC and the IS, an evolution that reveals the new organizational and political culture the WSF is poised to create. As I will show in the following, it is a culture based on the priority given to depolarizing tensions through incremental but constant institutional innovation and self-reformability.

Transparency and hierarchies in participation

The issue of internal democracy has other facets. Two of them seem particularly pertinent to me. The first concerns the lack of transparency of some of the decisions, which, seemingly organizational, actually have or could have political meaning. Over the years the criticism has been swelling that important decisions are taken by a very restrictive

group, without the least control by the movements and organizations affected. Such decisions may include the rejection or marginalization of proposals submitted by the movements and organizations, without explicit justification. Some groups considered themselves marginalized by the organization of the 2002 WSF, a perception that was deepened in 2003.[11] Again without wishing to question the facts, I believe that, in most cases, the alleged discrimination was rather the result of the near organizational collapse of the 2003 WSF. For reasons already stated and others I shall mention below, the organization of the 2003 WSF was far from reaching the quality that distinguished the organization of the two previous Forums. The organizational changes introduced in the WSF of 2004 and 2005, analysed below, helped to discredit the conspiracy theory behind some of the criticisms raised against the IS in previous meetings of the WSF.

The second dimension of the democracy and transparency issue concerns the hierarchical structure of the various events at the WSF meetings and relates to the choice of guest speakers. This has to do with the already mentioned quality of participation. The distinction between sessions organized directly by the local OCs (in Brazil, with the decisive participation of the IS) and those proposed by the movements and organizations has created some tension. On the one hand, whereas those who participate in the first kind of session are invited by the WSF and have their participation funded (though not always), those who participate in the second kind of session must count only upon funding generated by the movements and organizations themselves. On the other hand, the sessions promoted directly by the organization are considered to be the most important and are granted time and space that the others do not have. Again, it was evident during the 2003 WSF that the most serious organizational problems had a greater effect on the sessions promoted by the movements and organizations than on the sessions promoted by the IS/IC. This issue was at the core of the organizational changes introduced in the WSF's of 2004 and 2005 analysed below.

The idea that all the different kinds of sessions should be treated the same way gained strength after the WSF of 2003. Movements and organizations were encouraged to present proposals aimed at deepening the process of experimentation in horizontal organizational practices based on co-responsibility. As much transpires from the above-mentioned IC resolution of January 2003: 'When holding the forums, to organize discussions and the search for alternatives giving equal weight to the activities scheduled by the organizers and to the seminars and work-

shops proposed and organized by the participants themselves, as well as to stimulate the international character of these forums.'

Criticism concerning lack of democracy and transparency has also been frequent regarding the selection of invited guests. The criticism is levelled both at the selection process and the specific invitations themselves (or exclusions from lists of potential invitees), namely when well-known personalities are at stake. The proposal to invite well-known names from the left, be they Fidel Castro, Hugo Chavez, Ben Bella or Mário Soares, has also caused controversy.[12] The organizational changes introduced in the WSF of 2004 and 2005, in particular the increased prevalence of self-organized activities, helped a great deal to tone down the criticism and controversy in this regard. They surfaced again in the polycentric WSF of 2006 in Caracas, given the excessive presence of Hugo Chavez, who spoke to participants on two occasions with speeches that lasted for more than two hours each. This dominance became particularly objectionable in the first speech as Chavez took sides in one of the political debates within the WSF – the conception of the WSF as an open space or as a movement[13] – defending the position of those who want to transform the WSF into a structured movement with a well-defined political agenda. More than the specific position taken, it was the interference in the internal life of the WSF which provoked most criticism.

Feminist movements have been particularly critical of the selection process, because women have been scarcely represented on the panels of plenary sessions or in the more visible and well-attended sessions (particularly after the plenary sessions were abandoned in the post-2003 WSFs), even though they constitute such a large proportion of all the participants (in the 2002 WSF, women made up 43 per cent of the delegates and, apparently, 52 per cent of the participants).[14] Faithful to their two mottoes – 'another world is possible' and 'no one single way of thinking' – feminist movements have been claiming a larger presence of women among guest speakers, as well as in the organizational structures, both the IC and the local OCs. In light of the experience of the two first forums, Virginia Vargas of the Flora Tristan Feminist Centre (Peru) and the Marcosur Feminist Articulation said: 'despite women's more visible impact, women have not been proportionally represented in the Conferences organized by the Forum or on the Organizing Committee. This is still one single way of thinking, huddled away amidst strategies for change' (2002: 56).

With reference to the first two meetings of the WSF, other critics mentioned the top-down nature of the conferences and the coexistence

in the WSF of a top-down organization, comprising the initiatives of the IC and the OC/IS, and a bottom-up organization, comprising the large majority of the participants. Commenting on the experience at the 2002 WSF, Hebe de Bonafini, of the Argentinean 'Mothers of Plaza de Mayo', criticized the inequality of representation, of which she distinguished three levels: the organizers, the official participants and the 'rank-and-file'. According to her: 'There were three different levels to this WSF. First, there were the small gatherings of those who were in charge, controlling things [...]. Then there were all the commissions and seminars where all the intellectuals, philosophers and thinkers participated. And then there were the rank-and-file folks' (Bonafini 2002).

Viewing herself as part of the last group, she concluded: 'We [Mothers of Plaza de Mayo] participated at that level and discussed with all sorts of people. But the fact is that we were brought to the WSF to listen rather than to participate.' Other participants were likewise critical of the forum's top-down organization. Commenting on the third WSF, Michael Albert (2003), for instance, distinguished it from all the others (regional and thematic forums) that were occurring in different parts of the world, often inspired by the WSF. According to him, whereas the WSF was top-down, the others were bottom-up. 'Without exaggerating the virtues of the forums worldwide,' added Albert, 'they are having positive effects and moving in participatory, transparent, and democratic directions. The WSF, however, is different.' Albert offered several proposals aimed at deepening the WSF's participatory and democratic nature (more on this below).

Curiously enough, the organizers themselves acknowledged many of these criticisms, lending weight to my argument that these organizational tensions were part of the Forum's growing and learning process itself. Some of the criticisms incorporated accusations of less limpid intentions on the part of the OC/IS, and some came even close to conspiracy theories. My analysis of the OC/IS then and in the following years has led me to the conclusion that such criticisms had no grounding. The results of the decisions, some of which were rightly criticizable, had mainly to do with the OC/IS's incapacity to handle an event that became unmanageable because of its dimensions and complexity.[15]

The WSF's organizational structure was the most adequate to launch the Forum and render it credible internationally. For instance, the idea of ascribing to the OC/IS the promotion of some of the sessions and the choice of guests was adopted with a double goal in mind: first, to provide a minimal structure to the themes to be debated (for instance, to

make sure that the debates would move from the denouncing discourse of mass protests to the discourse of proposals and alternatives); second, to give international visibility to the Forum by addressing invitations to well-known personalities. The WSF saw itself as an alternative to the World Economic Forum and was ready to engage battle with it for the attention of the global media.[16] To my mind, without this kind of organization, and without the extraordinary devotion of the people charged with it, the WSF would never have accomplished what it has so far. The consolidation of the WSF led it to another phase of development, in which its organizational structure was reconsidered so as to adjust it to its new demands and the tasks ahead. This reconsideration was at the core of the changes introduced in 2004, 2005 and 2006 (more on this below).

Parties and movements

The relations between political parties, social movements and NGOs in the construction of counter-hegemonic globalization is no doubt controversial.[17] In a broad sense, they also affect the WSF. The Charter of Principles is clear on the subordinate role of parties in the WSF.[18] The WSF is an emanation of the civil society as organized in social movements and NGOs. In practice, however, things have always been ambiguous. In the first three meetings of the WSF the role of the Workers' Party (PT) in the organization was hotly debated. The PT, in its capacity as government party in the state of Rio Grande do Sul and in the city of Porto Alegre, gave decisive support to the organization of the WSFs, at both the financial and logistical and the administrative levels. Without such support it would have been impossible, at least in Brazil, to organize the WSF with the ambition that characterized it from the start. To be sure, this kind of support had its price. Particularly during the second Forum, the PT's attempt to use the WSF to spread its message and engage in political propaganda was quite visible. Many participants were ready to criticize the organization on this account. Some of them went so far as to criticize the PT for instrumentalizing the WSF. As I will discuss in Chapter 9, the issue of the relations between parties and movements cannot be decided in the abstract. The historical and political conditions vary from country to country, and may dictate distinct responses in different contexts. In the Brazilian context, the PT itself is an emanation of the social movements, and its history cannot be separated from their history. Since the mid-1980s, the struggles against the dictatorship were conducted by the unions and social movements, and the PT was founded in the midst of this

powerful social mobilization. In the ensuing years the PT continued to have a privileged relationship with the social movements. Only after the PT won the presidential elections of 2002 and Lula, the historical leader of the PT, became president of Brazil did this relationship start to be questioned. The support that the PT granted to the first three meetings of the WSF must be understood in this very context. The PT's attempt to use the 2002 WSF in its electoral campaign was rightly condemned (mostly by non-Brazilian participants). Contrary to what some other critics argued, I do believe, however, that the PT did not interfere substantially in the choices of the organization, whether as regards thematic areas or invited guests. The WSF became too big and too diverse for the PT to have a significant impact in this regard.

In the WSF of 2004 the debate on the role of political parties became mainly an Indian debate and focused not on whether the parties should have a role – the participation of the leftist parties in the different organizing committees was public and decisive – but rather on which parties had or should have a more decisive role. The ideological rivalries and divergences among different Indian leftist parties led eventually to the organization of a parallel forum designated as 'Mumbai Resistance'. In this case, the most salient divergence may well have concerned the issue of armed struggle as a political strategy, a form of struggle, which the parties and groups in the Mumbai Resistance refused, as a question of principle, to be considered unlawful, in opposition to what is stated in the Charter of Principles of the WSF. In the WSF of 2005 the PT was no longer the governing party either of the state of Rio Grande do Sul or of the city of Porto Alegre. Deprived of the financial support of the local governments, the WSF underwent a serious financial crisis from which it has not yet recovered. The issue of political manipulation was raised again in the polycentric WSF in Caracas in 2006. Besides the above-mentioned highly visible presence of Hugo Chavez, the financial support was also questioned. It appears that the foundations of the Global North which have been funding previous meetings of the WSF refused to provide the funds requested by the Venezuelan Organizing Committee. Most funding came from the government but, according to Edgardo Lander, of the OC and a very well-known and respected sociologist, with no strings attached and therefore without compromising the autonomy of the OC.

The relations between political parties (especially parties on the left) and the WSF will no doubt continue to be debated in the different countries in which forums will be held. In the majority of cases, the issue is not so much whether such relations should or should not exist,

but rather to define the exact terms of such relations. If the relation is transparent, horizontal and mutually respectful, it may well be, in some contexts, an important lever for the consolidation of the WSF. The European Social Forum (ESF), held in Florence in 2002, clearly illustrates this. The strength of Italian social movements made possible horizontal links between them and the parties on the left, particularly the Rifondazione Comunista and the PDS (left democrats). Such links contributed decisively to the Forum's success.[19] The relations between leftist parties and social movements in the European context was heatedly discussed in the three meetings of the ESF to date. The London meeting, in October 2004, was perhaps the one that generated more controversy in this regard. In part for this reason, and also because of the ever tense relations between movements and NGOs, some movements decided to organize a parallel and autonomous event designated as 'Beyond the ESF'. According to one of the organizers of the parallel forum, 'local authorities and political parties were dictating the rules of the Forum through control of the budget' (IPSNews, 10 October 2004).

Size and continuity

As shown above in Table 4.1, the successive meetings of the WSF have been drawing a larger and larger number of participants. In my view, the WSF of 2003 was the watershed. The participation grew from 60,000 in the previous meeting to 100,000. Though the above-mentioned local political conditions affected the OC/IS's efficiency and organizational capacity, the large number of participants led many of them to believe that the WSF was victim of its own success: its size rendered it unmanageable. Had this organizational form reached its limits? The discussions in the IC after 2003 focused on this question and, as shown below, significant changes were introduced in the organization of the WSF in 2004, 2005 and 2006. The 2004 WSF, in Mumbai, drew an even larger number of participants and, in spite of notorious deficiencies (especially in translation services), it was unanimously considered much better organized than the 2003 WSF. The 2005 WSF, an equally well-attended meeting, didn't frustrate expectations in this regard either. The structure of the polycentric 2006 WSF symbolized the most drastic departure from the previous organizational model.

Given that the WSF is a learning process, more and more voices have been supporting the idea that the WSF should increasingly turn into a permanent phenomenon, comprised of many linked meetings. In this way it would be possible to further the internationalization of the WSF, structure and focus the dialogues and debates much better, and

strengthen the formulation of alternatives. The number of participants in these other forums would certainly be lower and manageable. In this regard, the IC, in its meeting of January 2003, in Porto Alegre, decided to stimulate the multiplication of regional, national and even local forums, as well as thematic forums, which intercommunicate horizontally and which would not be considered preparatory to a larger world meeting but as meetings with their own political value.

The intention was, thus, to further highlight partial meetings to the detriment of the 'global event' that the WSF had been. Aware that such a change would call for new coordination tasks, the IC decided at the same meeting to take on the task of producing a continued and systematic analysis of the situation in the world and, on the basis of it, to assess

> the continuity of the process, to ensure the respect for its Charter of Principles when holding regional and theme forums, to identify themes for the IC's work, for the world events and for the theme forums to be stimulated, as well as to identify regions of the world in which the process needs to expand, acting in alliance with movements and organizations from these regions.

This policy orientation was sustained in the following years. It led to the decision to organize the WSF of 2006 as a polycentric Forum.

The new organizational challenges: the evaluation of the 2003 WSF

As I mentioned above, the 2003 WSF was the watershed in both organizational and political terms. In this section I will deal with the organizational issues. Of course, all the important organizational problems are political as well. Even though this idea seems self-evident, it is not subscribed to by all the members of the IC, or at least, it is not interpreted in the same way. If some agree that priority must be given to political discussion, lest decisions on organizational matters conceal the power relations within the IC, others think that the political discussion may be paralysing and prevent the timely taking of organizational decisions. According to the latter, it is easier to reach consensus on concrete questions than on questions of principle, and so, they argue, political discussion will be more productive if it occurs in the context of concrete problems, which almost always appear as organizational problems. This latter position has prevailed both in the IS and the IC.

The WSF of 2003 was a decisive turning point in the construction of the WSF process. The preparation and the evaluation of the Forum were resolutely geared to confronting the organizational challenges resulting from the success (well beyond expectations) of the two first meetings of the WSF. The WSF of 2003 set the tone for the intense self-reform impulse that informed the preparation and evaluation of the two following meetings and for that reason deserves a detailed analysis. The organizational innovations aimed at responding to two main problems:

1 how to achieve more balanced participation by organizations and movements of the different regions of the world;
2 how to maximize the effectiveness of such participation – that is to say, how to make such participation a factor of internal democratization.

The answers given to these questions illustrate the WSF's strong will and capacity for self-reform, as I am arguing in this chapter. The questions may be arranged under the following topics: evaluation of the 2003 WSF designated by the IS as 'systematization of past experience'; new organizational models of WSF Mumbai and of the 2005 WSF. I will discuss the first topic in this section.

After the second WSF, and having in mind the third, Cândido Grzybowski, director of IBASE and one of the founders of the WSF, took the initiative of setting up a methodology and systematization team, which he himself coordinated. This team's task was to produce a systematic survey of the activities of the 2003 WSF. The aim was to create a database of the themes discussed at the forum; their distribution throughout lectures, panels, seminars, workshops, testimonies and round tables of dialogue and controversy ('*mesas de diálogo e controvérsia*'); activities organized by the OC and self-managed activities; the profile of guest speakers and participants, and so on and so forth. The issue was to organize the collective memory of the WSF and create the conditions to allow for a systematic assessment of its performance, identifying possible problems and proposing solutions. The technical production of such systematization was charged to IBASE.

The results are extremely revealing as regards the performance of the WSF. The survey was divided into four parts, three of which correspond to the three kinds of activities of the Forum: conferences, panels, and self-managed activities. Part four dealt with the survey of the profile of participants. I next present the main results of the three first parts. Part four will be analysed in Chapter 5 as it mainly refers to questions of representation.

Conferences The conferences took place at the Gigantinho Stadium and gathered close to 12,000 people in one single day. In accordance with WSF methodology, the aim of the conferences was to allow for personalities engaged in civic causes, campaigns or struggles to share their views and analyses with the public at large. The WSF invited people whose reports and opinions would contribute to strengthening a broad public-opinion movement geared to the need, possibility and urgency of building 'other worlds'. Thirty-six people gave talks at the third WSF, taking up ten themes. Although the WSF IS sought a balance of gender, only 27.8 per cent of the speakers were women – ten women and twenty-six men. The best-represented socio-political region was Latin America, with eleven speakers (30.6 per cent). If the count is made according to the country of origin, however, the USA led in representation: the USA had four representatives (one more than Brazil). Seven speakers came from Europe, six from North America (including the four from the USA), six from Asia, five from the Middle East, and only one from Africa.

This led to criticisms of sexual discrimination in the organization of the Forum made by the women's movements. Even though the women constituted the majority of the participants, their intervention, especially in the more visible activities, by no means matched such a proportion. On the other hand, the imbalances as regards regional representation were obvious. Half of the conference speakers came from the North and, among those that came from the South, only one came from the continent that has been most affected by neo-liberal globalization: Africa.

The conferences had been questioned all along for their individualistic and monological character. In the seminar on the evaluation of the systematization of the WSF 2003, which took place in Rio de Janeiro, by IBASE's initiative, on 21–23 May 2003, Virginia Vargas concluded that 'the conferences, however important, did not allow for an exchange of ideas and conceptions among the speakers. There was more narcissistic disputing among them than real collective dialogue' (Vargas 2003).

Panels The panels were introduced in the third WSF to offer an alternative of great visibility vis-à-vis the conferences. Whereas conferences based their visibility on the high profile of the conference speakers, panels had a wider range of participants, giving priority to activists, and depending for their visibility on the quality of the debates – spelling out the differences being highly recommended by the OC/IS – and on the proposals of collective action presented. I reproduce below in

some detail the methodology proposed for the panels to underline its innovative character and to show how difficult it was for a new methodology to be appropriated by such a vast and vastly diverse number of participants.

At the meetings of the IC preparatory to the third WSF (Bangkok, Barcelona and Florence), the five thematic axes and panel themes within each axis were decided:

Thematic axis 1 – Democratic and sustainable development
1 Recovering economic sovereignty through debt cancellation and capital control
2 Solidarity economy
3 WTO: the road to Cancun
4 Full employment and labour re-regulation
5 For the right to cities
6 For another economy: subsidiarity, localization, devolution and reproduction
7 Beyond Johannesburg: property, biodiversity control and management, water and energy

Thematic axis 2 – Principles and values, human rights, diversity and equality
1 Struggle for equality between men and women: how to implement real change
2 Fighting intolerance and promoting respect for diversity: solidarity as a transformational force in the struggle against the 'single way of thinking'
3 For the full implementation of rights
4 Beyond national borders: migrants and refugees
5 For full access to water, food and land
6 For full access to the rights to education, health, housing and social security

Thematic axis 3 – Media, culture and alternatives to commercialization and homogenization
1 Globalization, information and communication
2 How to ensure cultural and linguistic diversity
3 Strategies for democratizing the media
4 New technologies and strategies for digital inclusion
5 Culture and political practice
6 Symbolic production and peoples' identity

Thematic axis 4 – Political power, civil society and democracy

1 Democratizing democracy by building new paradigms
2 New and old social movements: the current spaces of confluence and tension among multiple local and global actors
3 Citizens' insurgence against established order
4 New dimensions of the democratic state
5 Strategies for citizens' oversight
6 Future perspectives for the movements: new concepts and pathways in organizing social movements

Thematic axis 5 – Democratic world order, struggle against militarization and for peace

1 Empire, war and unilateralism
2 Resistance to militarization
3 Governance, global economy and international institutions
4 World order: sovereignty, role of governments and the United Nations
5 Democratic strategies for resolving international conflicts
6 Democratic cooperation: integration, multilateralism and peace

According to Jorge Romano (2003), a member of the task force on 'systematization' (called the 'systematization group'), the panels would be held during the Forum's first three days. A final panel on each thematic axis would be held on the fourth day. The IC appointed two coordinators by axis and one facilitator for each panel. The IS appointed a team from the systematization group to do the work of record-keeping and minute-taking (in Portuguese, '*memória*', i.e. the Forum's memory). During the first three days, the panels were to be a space for presentation and defence of proposals by networks, campaigns and coalitions. The idea was to visualize, confront and consolidate proposals for the sub-theme, in terms of alternatives and strategies. Each panel would appoint one person to sit on the final panel. This person could be the facilitator or anyone else appointed by its members. It was expected that each panel would not present a full discussion but limit itself to present the diversity of views and paradigms, issues discussed, diversity of proposals and strategies, with consensuses, disagreements and emerging themes. The idea was to focus the debate on convergences and divergences, pointing out perspectives in terms of emerging themes and issues to work on. Panels would require a preparatory stage, including the presentation of written documents. Based on those documents, which should be broadly disseminated, delegates

(always representing a diversified set of civil society actors) would be better qualified to participate actively on each panel.

The final panel was meant for sharing the discussed issues, mapping out the diversity of proposals put forward by delegates during previous panels. This would be an effort to organize the Forum's collective memory, and to record its contributions for building 'other possible worlds'. A methodological and political approach of valuing the inputs was recommended – avoiding their reduction to a single proposal. Otherwise the methodology would run counter to the basic commitment to respect and build on diversity, established in the Charter of Principles.

As one of the planned activities by the OC/IS/IC (the others were conferences, round tables of dialogue and controversy), the final panels were designed as a space for confrontation between activities planned by the IC and the IS, and activities proposed by delegates (workshops, seminars, etc.). Emphasis and the priorities of planned and self-managed activities would be compared. As much information as possible extracted by the Secretariat from self-managed activities at the 2003 WSF was to be used as input for final panels.

Each thematic axis would count on the support of a team from the systematization group throughout the panel process. Each team would be made up of three persons. The main objective of the teams was to gather the material for minutes and systematization work. The teams would also help to organize the final panels.[20] In addition to relying on the systematization group team, panels would also be visited by consultants, who would freely circulate throughout WSF activities. Consultants would be specialists from different areas to help the systematization process, producing documents and providing opinions on the work developed by the team more directly involved in the process.

Specific reports on how the different panels functioned would be prepared, highlighting panel composition, coordinating work, panel dynamics, audience and public participation.

I next present the statistical data on the distribution of panellists by thematic axes according to gender and regional origin. There were a total of 167 presentations by 66 women and 101 men. Panel gender distribution according to thematic area was as shown in Table 4.2. In terms of regional origin, there were more panellists from Latin America and the Caribbean (52) and Europe (48). It should be noted that there was no panellist from Oceania. The following table shows the distribution of panellists according to region (see Table 4.3).

The analysis of these data and of the systematized information on

TABLE 4.2 Members of panels by sex

Thematic axis	Total panellists	Women	Men
1	39	17	22
2	33	14	19
3	30	10	20
4	34	16	18
5	31	9	22
Total	167	66	101

TABLE 4.3 Members of panels by region

Thematic axis	North America	Latin America and the Caribbean	Europe	Asia	Africa	Oceania
1	5	11	10	7	6	–
2	3	9	10	7	4	–
3	5	13	7	4	1	–
4	3	12	11	6	2	–
5	7	7	10	4	3	–
Total	23	52	48	28	16	–

the content and dynamics of the debates permits one to draw the following conclusions:

1. The panels achieved a better general gender balance. Even so, there were were about half as many women as men on the panels of thematic axis 3 (media, culture and alternatives to commercialization and homogenization) and 5 (democratic world order, struggle against militarization and for peace).
2. The regional imbalances could still be observed, the Global North (Europe and North America) providing 42.5 per cent of the panellists.
3. The preparation of the panels was inadequate in general. The work of the coordinators of the axes and of the facilitators of the panels was often deficient, and the coordination between them even more deficient. The final panel seldom used the work of systematization, and the policy guideline concerning promoting the formulation and systematization of action proposals was not accomplished.

4. In most of the panels the discussion and divergences expected by the organizers did not occur. Quite the opposite; there was mainly consensus and repetitive, not at all audacious, analyses.
5. The logistic difficulties that the WSF had to face damaged attendance at the panels. Spaces that could hold 2,000 people never had more than 500.

Self-managed activities For the 2003 WSF it was decided to encourage self-managed activities, that is activities proposed by the networks, movements and organizations participating in the Forum – designated as *oficinas* (workshops) – and promote the fusion of activities about similar themes in order to avoid fragmentation. According to Cândido Grzybowski:

> The workshops are considered to be the factory of the Forum – a kind of global civil laboratory – they are meant to facilitate meetings, exchange of experiences, networking, planning and definition of the strategies of groups, coalitions, networks, movements and organizations, always directed towards present and future actions. Perhaps the main force of the WSF lies in the diversity characterized by this sort of activity. But we wonder: do we really know how to make proper use of all this potential? In this sense and above all else, what we are dealing with here is the Memory of the Forum. The living record of what NGOs, social movements, trade-union institutions, academic centres, religious groups, cooperation agencies, networks and other entities think, debate and propose. More than all this, however, the intention is to try to detect the eventual appearance of something new, all the transgression, irreverence, Utopia and re-enchantment that sometimes do not fit into the circumspect format of the thematic axes agreed upon. (Grzybowski 2003b)

It was estimated that of the 1,619 workshops planned, 1,300 took place. Of these, 288 were the object of systematization, that is to say of a systematic analysis of their content and of how well they fared.[21] From the discussion at the systematization seminar organized by IBASE (Rio de Janeiro) on 21–23 May 2003, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. As regards content, the workshops fulfilled what was expected of them. They revealed the great diversity of interests and struggles that circulate in the WSF. Above all, however, they revealed that there was a significant discrepancy between the activities organized by the IS

and the self-managed activities. Many of the topics that dominated the conferences didn't seem to be priorities for debate among the organizations and movements, for only seldom were they evident in the workshops.[22] Moreover, themes never debated in conferences or panels were dealt with in the workshops. The theme of spirituality, for example, featured in many of the workshops, even though many of them were proposed by the same network.[23] This means that the workshops rebelled objectively against the choice of the grand themes (the thematic axes) made by the OC/IS and the IC. While, on the one hand, this bears witness to the creativity of the base of the WSF, on the other it reveals some distance between the concerns and interests of the *top* of the WSF and those of its *base*. This had a direct impact on the methodology adopted in the fourth and fifth WSF (more on this below).

2. In spite of the wide space opened for the workshops, the truth is that there was unfair competition between them and the grand events (conferences and panels), since their timetables often coincided. The fact that the workshops and the conferences/panels were scheduled for locations very distant from one another made circulating among them impossible. In a way, parallel forums were created inside the Forum, all of them isolated from one another, with the result that the interaction between the 'big names' and the 'people' of the movements ended up being scarce. The tenacious hierarchies that prevail in contemporary societies seemed to penetrate the Forum insidiously.

3. The decision to give total freedom to the organizations and movements to propose workshops and choose their day, time and often location, increased enormously the fragmentation and atomization of the activities. The fragmentation and atomization were the consequence as well of the impossibility of merging workshops on similar topics, thereby resulting in much overlapping and repetition.

Round tables of dialogue and controversy The two great organizational innovations of the 2003 WSF were the panels and the controversy round tables. The latter also had a pragmatic objective, namely to respond to the pressure for the participation of political personalities and parties, as well as governments and multilateral organizations. According to Cândido Grzybowski:

The roundtables of dialogue and controversy constituted a methodological and political novelty among the various activities planned. As a

specific area within the WSF, their purpose was to confront the views and proposals of delegates with those of representatives of political parties, governments, organizations of the United Nations system and members of parliament. This activity was a formal invitation – as required by the Charter of Principles – that allowed political personalities to attend the main events in the WSF, thus broadening and enhancing the potential of the debate that interests us. (ibid.: 7)

In all, four round tables of dialogue and controversy were held, one each morning, in the Gigantinho Stadium, which has a capacity of 15,000 participants. Each table dealt with one 'hot' question in which dialogue and controversy, according to rules agreed upon beforehand among the participants, could be used to explain the proposals and strategies of civil society throughout the world. The themes of these tables and the profile of the participants were decided at the meeting of the IC held in Florence in November 2002, as proposed by the OC/IS. To prepare the discussion at each table a 'note of presentation' on the topic was drafted and sent beforehand to each member of the table; these notes served to delimit the question and facilitate the debate. Written in four languages, they were distributed at the door of the gymnasium on the day of the debate. On the eve of the debates, all the participants, together with the respective moderator, were invited to meet with the round table coordinator to set the debating rules and to get to know one another.

In all, twenty-nine persons participated in the round tables, twelve of them from civil society entities and movements, thirteen from parties, governments and the United Nations system, with four functioning as moderators. Of this total, ten were from Latin America and the Caribbean (four Brazilians), two from North America, ten from western Europe, four from Africa, one from the Middle East and two from Asia, thus reproducing the regional imbalances that plagued the Forum. In terms of gender the imbalances were equally shocking, in total contrast with the concerns voiced by the organizers: there were twenty men and nine women (four from movements and entities, four from organizations and one moderator journalist).

The following conclusions could be drawn:

1. The composition of the sessions reflected the regional and gender imbalances already observed in the other activities.
2. The sessions were viewed by some as a 'giving in to the enemy' or as a 'confusion with the enemy', but the truth is that they allowed for the confrontation of ideas, the public and well-argued

presentation of strong divergences, and the strengthening of ideo-logical identities.

3. The traditional monological exposition of panel or conference par-ticipants was avoided for the sake of a confrontation of points of view. As one might expect, while the participants coming from official political structures (parties, parliaments, governments, the United Nations) shared a common interest in doing whatever was possible within the limits of the current national and international status quo, the participants coming from movements and NGOs voiced broader and more radical perspectives, clearly guided by ethical values.

The systematization/evaluation was the expression of an internal impetus that I found very healthy and most necessary. As we will see below, one of the cleavages in the WSF relates to whether or not the WSF should become more outward-looking, more concerned with its status in global public opinion and with its specific contribution to bringing about concrete transformations in the most unfair societies in which we live today. An inward-looking moment was most important after three successful meetings of the WSF and the systematization was a useful contribution to that. Now, after six meetings of the WSF, there is a heritage to be shared and valued. It is not clear, however, in what such heritage consists. Without a detailed knowledge of the heritage, it is impossible to make it effective and forward-looking. Through the systematization, the WSF looked at itself, reflected upon its past and set itself to derive from such reflection guidelines and energies for the future.

This comprehensive systematization/evaluation established the model for the evaluation of the subsequent meetings of the WSF (see below), but above all it permitted contextualization of many of the debates launched after the 2003 WSF. Such debates represented the political side of the organizational evaluation conducted by the system-atization group. To such debates I turn now.

The debates after the WSF 2003 The third WSF sparked an unpre-cedented debate within its own ranks. Such debate started in the meeting of the IC held in Porto Alegre at the time of the Forum and continued throughout the year. For some, the debate had mainly to do with the success of the WSF. Having gathered more than 20,000 participants at the first meeting, around 60,000 at the second and more than 100,000 at the third, the question now facing it was how best to channel this tremendous energy. Which new and deeper or more

ambitious forms of collective action could be built upon the convening power generated by the WSF? For others, the debate should focus on the problems that were now too visible to be swept under the carpet. Here, very sketchily, I present some of the topics of debate:

GIGANTISM. The WSF grew so fast and so dramatically that it may have become unmanageable. The obvious organizational deficiencies were seen by some as evidence that this format had reached its limits and that something new and different should be proposed for the future. In the IC meeting it was decided that greater priority should be given to the national, regional and thematic forums. Some members even proposed that from now on the dynamics of the WSF should rest on these forums, smaller and closer to people, which would choose the delegates to the WSF. In this way, the WSF would become an emanation or expression of those forums, a much smaller event but none the less more rep-resentative. Others suggested that the organization of the WSF takes too much energy (both human and financial), draining the resources of the NGOs and social movements which should be applied to their specific objectives and agendas. Accordingly, it was proposed that the WSF take place every two years and that, in the years it does not take place, local and national forums should be organized around the world simultaneously, on the same days that the World Economic Forum of Davos meets. None of these proposals was approved by the IC. It was rather decided that the 2004 WSF would be held in Mumbai, and the 2005 Forum in Porto Alegre, leaving open the decision as to what to do in subsequent years.

THE GLOBAL DEFICIT. The regional, gender and thematic imbalances were all too evident not to be the object of thorough reflection in the future. The overwhelming participation of Brazilians, NGOs and move-ments from Latin America and the North Atlantic region was almost unanimously viewed as a problem of credibility undermining the WSF's aspiration to be the embryo of a counter-hegemonic global civil society. Notwithstanding the resistance of some groups (in which the Cuban delegation was particularly vocal), the IC decided that the next meeting would be held in India, and that a special effort should be made to bring in more participants from Africa and also from eastern Europe and the Caribbean.

THE SOCIAL DEFICIT. In spite of its size the WSF was much less inclu-sive than it proclaimed. The really oppressed people, the unemployed,

undernourished, those living in shanty towns, dispossessed peasants, the victims of the worst kinds of new and old forms of exploitation and discrimination, were hardly present. As Peter Waterman (2004: 87) put it, the WSF risked being an expression of globalization from the middle rather than globalization from below. The evaluation of the social profile of the participants conducted by the 'systematisation group' confirmed these risks. This evaluation is presented in Chapter 5.

Related to this was the idea that the radical potential of the WSF was being hijacked by the NGOs that controlled it. Social movements, although present in great numbers, did not have the steering power to keep the WSF close to the grassroots movements. The NGOization of the WSF was seen as a disturbing evolution, likely to bring about its discredit in the near future. This problem was tackled in the multiple ways in which the question 'how open is the WSF?' was asked. The limits of inclusion were discussed both in terms of people and in terms of themes and political postures (radical action versus reasonable reformism).

A DISCRETE EVENT OR A PROCESS. What is left after the WSF ends? For some, not much or nothing compared to the effort put into organizing it and participating in it. For most, the question was how to maximize the tremendous potential of this huge and emotionally unforgettable meeting of peoples, ideas and emotions. How to keep alive the contacts made and inter-knowledge obtained. In a sense, the meetings of the networks and of the social movements – in particular, the assembly of the social movements being held in parallel with the WSF – were partial responses to this question, and indeed many links and collective actions have been forged in these meetings. The point of the debate was whether more and better could be accomplished.

Another aspect of this debate was the internal balkanization of the WSF, the danger that the scale of the event – a remarkable achievement in itself – could favour the emergence of ghettos inside the Forum. The discreteness would thus be double: in between Forums and inside each Forum. If, on one side, the big event created an atmosphere of anonymity that favoured the exercise of freedom to attend whatever meeting with whatever degree of engagement, on the other, it facilitated the formation of exclusive groups that held discussions in closed circles without much connection with the rest of the Forum. As Jai Sen put it, this self-insulation was all the more probable, given

> the tendencies of people belonging to particular streams of thought
> and action to stay within or close to 'their' streams. The tendency of

some (many? most?) streams of thought and action, especially those from old politics but not only those, to organize their events in what amounts to being an exclusive manner: With familiar and reliable speakers, and organized in such a manner that the events 'speak' primarily to those within the streams, in other words with an internal discourse – and so inevitably tending to keep things separate. Inter-cultural differences exist between participants from different countries and contexts, and that is likely to be all the more the case as the Forum matures as an idea and the dominance of people from the host country reduces, whether in Brazil or anywhere else. (Sen 2003b: 8)

COORDINATION AND LINKS. The third WSF raised most dramatically the question of the links between the different activities of the Forum, in particular between self-managed and centrally organized activities, as I mentioned above. The sense of being neglected or even marginalized by the organization was widespread among the organizers of self-managed activities, especially among those who organized multiple activities. Notwithstanding the excesses of those who saw conspiracy where there was only incompetence or organizational collapse due to lack of resources, the debate was an important starting point for the design of new solutions, some of them implemented in the 2004 and 2005 WSFs. The most radical innovation occurred in 2006 with the polycentric WSF meeting in three different continents (more on this below).

THE COMPOSITION AND TASKS OF THE IC AND IS. This topic will be dealt with in Chapter 5. Suffice it to say here that the debate focused on whether the composition of the IC – up until then dominated by Latin American and European organizations – should be discussed in strict terms of representativeness or rather in more general terms of reducing the arbitrariness of its composition. This is a topic that is very much alive in the current discussions in the IC and specifically in its expansion committee.

As for the IS, many resented its enormous executive power, which, they claimed, went far beyond that of a technical body, particularly in light of its exclusively Brazilian composition. Others, however, observed that the dominance of the IS was occurring less by design than by default, as the IC had not been able to improve its operational capacity. Moreover, the IS had accumulated some precious inside knowledge that in no way should be wasted. It was in this context that the IC took upon itself to reshuffle its internal functioning (see Chapter 5), and

decided that, after Mumbai, some members of the India Organizing Committee would join the IS.

THE WSF AS A SPACE OR AS A MOVEMENT. This has been the most controversial topic of discussion, as it touches the core issue of defining the political nature and role of the WSF. It became particularly heated after the third WSF, embedded in the evaluations of the WSF that followed, and was also due to some conflicts and tensions that occurred during the Forum between the OC and the assembly of the global network of social movements, as well as inside the IC.

The systematization/evaluation showed that the WSF is a power space. To claim the opposite and defend the idea that the WSF is a totally open space, with no centre and no hierarchies and potentially all-inclusive (within the limits set by the Charter of Principles), seems a bit far-fetched. It is true that many of the concrete limits of inclusion were not the responsibility of the organizers. Nevertheless, crucial organizational options were decided by the OC/IS and by the IC, and they conditioned the types of events that would take place, the high-profile participants that would attend, the themes that would be discussed and the ambit of the discussion. As an illustration, the links between organized activities and self-managed activities – and thus the idea of a centre and a periphery inside the WSF – became highly contentious after the 2003 WSF. The changes introduced in subsequent meetings in this regard bear witness to the WSF's capacity for self-reform.

It is therefore wise to recognize the existence of power relations and submit them to the same criteria as those the WSF wants to see applied in society at large: transparency in the operation of such relations and their submission to the mechanisms of participatory democracy.

The debate on whether the WSF is an open space, a power space or a movement reflects some of the most deep-seated tensions within the WSF. For this reason, I deal with it in Chapter 6, where I discuss the cleavages on strategy and political action.

The new organizational models: the Mumbai demonstration and the 2005 WSF

The Mumbai demonstration The idea of holding the WSF in India emerged very early on – indeed, in 2001. Concerned with the further globalization of the WSF, the Brazilian OC and some members of the IC thought that India – a large country with a great tradition of civil society progressive activism – would be the ideal alternative to Brazil. A first visit to India occurred at the end of 2001. After a first national

consultation held in New Delhi in early January 2002, it was decided that India could organize the WSF in 2004, not in 2003. Given the fact that general elections would be held in India in 2004, the WSF would be a precious platform from which to advance the progressive and secular political agenda. As a kind of preparation, it was also decided to organize a regional Forum in 2003, the Asian Social Forum, which was held in January 2003, and whose organization was seen as a great success.

The 2004 WSF took place in a social and political context that was very different from the previous ones, a difference that translated itself into important organizational innovations. The adopted organizational structure itself reflected the need to formalize balances among political forces with divergences that were deeply marked and defined according to party loyalties. Four committees were created, corresponding to four levels of organization: 1) the India General Council, comprising about 140 organizations, to define the broad lines of the 2004 WSF; 2) the India Working Committee, comprising about sixty organizations, to supervise the preparatory activities all over India for organizing the Forum, and to formulate the policy guidelines that form the basis for the functioning of the WSF India process; 3) the India Organizing Committee (IOC), of forty-five members, divided into eight working groups, which was the executive body of the 2004 WSF, ultimately responsible for organizing the event; 4) and the local organizing committee, the Mumbai Committee.

One of the policy guidelines, implying a criticism of the previous WSFs, was to democratize the organization of and participation in the WSF as much as possible, so as to render more visible the social inequalities that characterize India. With this is mind, five national consultations were held with the objective of bringing into the process more organizations representing critical sections of society and the economy from across the political spectrum; thus, in the words of the IOC, 'putting in place a democratic transparent and accountable decision-making mechanism in the WSF India process'. On the other hand, it was decided to strengthen the presence in the event of the self-managed activities of participant organizations, highlighting them on the programme and seeing to it that their schedules would not clash with the activities put together by the organizing committee.[24] Finally, there was an attempt to make the social profile of the participants reflect the significance of the 'social groups that remain less visible, marginalized, unrecognized, and oppressed'. In this respect, particularly significant was the participation of more than 30,000 Dalits,

members of the lowest caste (previously called 'the untouchables'), who made up about one-third of all the participants. With the same objective in mind, thirteen languages were considered official, as opposed to the four Indo-European languages adopted in the previous Forums: Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Bengali, Korean, Malayan, Bahasa, Indonesian, Thai, Japanese, English, French and Spanish.

In spite of the careful preparation and the policy of grounding the design of the Forum in several full national consultations, the organization of the Mumbai WSF met with several criticisms, some constructive and engaging, others radical and confrontational. Among the more constructive criticisms, Sen's stood out. In May 2003, Sen drew attention to the fact that the preparation of the event was a less than open and transparent process, strongly dominated by parties within the organized left and unwelcoming to non-invited people or organizations, a process in which the novelty of the WSF was forced to coexist with the old left political culture still prevailing in India (2003b: 25). Sen ended his analysis with some thoughtful recommendations.[25]

Among the radical criticisms, I will mention the report on 'The Economics and Politics of the World Social Forum' prepared by the Research Unit for Political Economy, based in Mumbai and published in September 2003 (RUPE 2003). It reflects the old rivalries among the old left, and, as such, it confirms, from an opposite perspective, Sen's comment above on the political culture prevailing in the organized left in India. The report starts with a general critique of the WSF:

> The WSF slogan, 'Another world is possible', while vague, taps the widespread, inarticulate yearning for another social system. However, the very principles and structure of the WSF ensure that it will not evolve into a platform of people's action and power against imperialism. Its claims to being a 'horizontal' (not a hierarchical) 'process' (not a body) are belied by the fact that decisions are controlled by a handful of organizations, many of them with considerable financial resources and ties to the very countries that control the existing world order. As the WSF disavows arriving at any decisions as a body, it is incapable of collective expression of will and action. Its gatherings are structured to give prominence to celebrities of the NGO world, who propagate the NGO worldview. Thus, in all the talk on 'alternatives', the spotlight remains on alternative policies within the existing system, rather than a change of the very system itself. (ibid.: 1)

This opening statement – with which many of those involved in the WSF might agree, with some qualifications – is followed by a vicious

denunciation of the WSF as an agent of imperialism, of the NGOs in India as a counter-revolutionary force and of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) – CPI (Marxist) – for having betrayed the revolution while becoming the driving force behind the WSF in Mumbai. These criticisms echo the rivalries, within the old communist left, between the Marxist and Marxist-Leninist (Maoist) parties. Indeed, the alternative WSF – Mumbai Resistance – held in Mumbai across the street from where the WSF was meeting was organized by some Marxist-Leninist (Maoist) tendencies (while others actively participated in the organization of the WSF).

In spite of the criticisms and the many deficiencies – exiguous space for so many people, activities organized as large events but drawing little participation, translation problems, impossibility of dialogue in spaces that were much too large – the 2004 WSF was considered an organizational success, thereby setting a higher level of expectancy for the organizers of the 2005 WSF.[26] Here are some of the reasons accounting for the success:

1. In retrospect, one can say that the choice of Mumbai as the venue for the 2004 WSF could not have been wiser. With its population of almost 15 million, Mumbai is the living symbol of the contradictions of capitalism in our time. An important financial and technological centre and the site of India's thriving film industry – Bollywood, producing more than two hundred movies a year for an increasingly global audience – Mumbai is a city whose extreme poverty easily shocks Western eyes. More than half of the population live in slums (roughly 2 million on the streets), whereas 73 per cent of families, usually large, live in one-room tenements. The recent spread of the informal economy has turned 2 per cent of the population into street vendors.
2. Moreover, the Mumbai WSF succeeded in demonstrating that the spirit of Porto Alegre, while being a universal aspiration, would acquire specific tonalities in different regions of the globe. In India, the struggle against inequality gains specific nuances that leave their mark on the Forum. First, on top of economic, sexual and ethnic inequalities there are caste inequalities, which, though abolished by the constitution, continue to be a decisive factor of discrimination. The Dalits made a very strong appearance at the Forum, as I mentioned above. They saw in the Forum a unique opportunity to denounce the discrimination that victimizes them. Second, there is the religion factor. As I said earlier, religion was absent from the

large events in the previous Forums. Seen from the perspective of the organizers – which, as we saw, did not coincide with that of many participants, as revealed through their social profile – this was due to the fact that in Western culture, which underpinned the first three meetings of the WSF, religion tends to carry less weight in view of the secularization of power. Be that as it may, the Mumbai WSF showed that, in the East, religion is a crucial social and political factor. Religious fundamentalism – a plague all over Asia, including India itself with the increasing politicization of Hinduism – was a major topic for debate, as was the role of spirituality in the social struggles for a better world.

3. Having taken place in Asia, the Forum could not help but pay special attention to the struggle for peace, not only because it is in western Asia, from Iraq to Afghanistan, that the USA's war aggression is strongest, but also because today South Asia (India and Pakistan) is a region full of nuclear weapons.

4. At the Mumbai WSF the Western conception of ecological struggles gave way to broader conceptions, so as to include the struggle for food sovereignty, land and water, as well as the preservation of bio-diversity and natural resources, and the defence of forests against agro-business and lumber industry.

By its very success, the Mumbai WSF created new challenges for the WSF process. I single out three main challenges. The first was the Forum's expansion, an issue already touched upon. It was not just a question of geographic expansion, but the expansion of themes and perspectives as well. Meeting in Mumbai, the IC decided to encourage the organization of local, national, regional and thematic forums, in order to deepen the syntony of the 'Porto Alegre Consensus' with the concrete struggles that mobilize such a diversity of social groups across the globe. The second challenge related to memory. The WSF had been collecting an impressive amount of knowledge concerning its organizations and movements, the world we live in and the proposals that go on being presented and implemented to change it. Such knowledge should be carefully evaluated in order to be adequately used and render the Forum more transparent to itself, thus allowing for self-learning for all the activists and movements involved in the WSF process.[27] Finally, as knowledge accumulated and the large areas of convergence were identified, the need for developing plans of collective action was likely to increase, giving rise to new problems and tensions. The issue was not so much to augment the WSF's efficaciousness as a global actor

– efficaciousness is probably not gauged by global as much as by local and national actions – but mainly to prepare responses to the attempts of the World Bank, the IMF and the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos to co-opt the agendas of the WSF and sanitize them in favour of solutions that will leave the ongoing economic disorder intact. This challenge echoed the debate on the political role of the WSF already mentioned. The Mumbai WSF showed that, even if the WSF was to keep its character as an open space – not presenting proposals in its own name – it would have to come up with the institutional changes that facilitate the links between the networks that constitute it, in order to strengthen plans of collective action and put them into practice.

The twofold need to evaluate and spread the accumulated knowledge and prepare plans of collective action with a sound political and technical basis led to more discussion than ever before in previous Forums of the relationship between expert and grassroots knowledge, and, more specifically, between social scientists and popular struggles.[28]

The WSF 2005 On the initiative of the content and methodology committees a new methodology for the 2005 WSF started being discussed from the second semester of 2003 onwards. The idea was to pursue in more intense forms the democratization of the WSF, attuning the themes and methodology of the WSF in a more systematic way to the expectations and interests of the participant organizations and movements, and maximizing the possibility of common links and actions. The new methodology was first formulated at the meeting of the content and methodology committees in Perugia, in November 2003, and was finally approved in the April 2004 meeting of the IC held in Passignano sul Trasimeno, Italy.

The new methodology – called 'Thematic Consultation and Cohesion of Activities' – aimed at two main objectives: 1) to build the whole WSF programme from the bottom up, in such a way that all the activities would be in a strong sense self-managed; 2) to maximize the possibility of links and common action among organizations, by inviting them to engage in a sustained dialogue leading to the cohesion of proposed activities for the Forum. The first practical step was a thematic consultation with all the people of Porto Alegre. A questionnaire was sent to all the movements and organizations involved in the WSF process with the objective of identifying a) the themes, struggles, questions, problems, proposals and challenges that they would like to see discussed at WSF 2005 and in which format; and b) which activities they intended to organize at the Forum. The questionnaire was sent out in May and the

last responses were received at the beginning of August; 1,863 organizations responded to the questionnaire. The results were subsequently analysed in several meetings of the IC commissions on methodology and contents. Eleven thematic terrains were identified, which were to organize all the proposed activities for WSF 2005 (see Chapter 3).

The eleven thematic terrains would be the privileged terrain for the expression of the diversity and plurality within the WSF. Each terrain would be subdivided into sub-terrains. In order to provide focus for the debates, three transversal axes were identified: social emancipation and the political dimensions of struggles; struggle against patriarchal capitalism; struggle against racism.

The great methodological innovation of WSF 2005 was that all activities were self-managed. When proposing an activity, each organization would link it to one of the eleven thematic spaces. In doing so it would be immediately in contact with all the other organizations proposing activities within the same space. The process of aggregating activities would then start – with the help of facilitators, whenever necessary – seeking to avoid the fragmentation that plagued the Forum in previous meetings (different activities on the same topic being held separately and without any communication among them). As the aggregation proceeded activities would be merged and changed and, as a result, the organizations would be free to re-register their activities, taking into account the new format emerging from the aggregation process. It was expected that this linkage and the mutual knowledge it made possible, which started before the Forum and would continue thereafter, would induce and facilitate the planning of common collective actions and campaigns. Moreover, with the same objective, the OC reserved a daily slot of time (5–8 p.m.) for informal meetings among the organizations active in the same thematic space, in which aggregations might be evaluated and revised and plans for future common collective action might be agreed upon.

This new methodology was much more democratic and participatory. It required a higher degree of engagement on the part of the organizations for a longer period of time.

It was also decided to abandon the site where the first three meetings of the WSF had taken place (the headquarters of the Catholic University) and to build what was called the World Social Territory alongside the Guaiba river bank. Even though the appropriation of the methodology did not always succeed in measuring up to expectations, the 2005 WSF was considered by most a successful event. Along the right bank of the Guaiba river, more than 155,000 people circulated and some 250

tents were set up, where more than 2,500 sessions took place, often in torrid temperatures. The large distances along the river bank and the absence of a central venue where large gatherings could take place and the chances of meeting people would be enhanced gave an impression of fragmentation, a sense that one could easily get lost. The eleven thematic terrains were physically distributed in different tents along several kilometres, which made it difficult to move from one terrain to another, even more so considering the weather conditions. This fragmentation was seen by many as retrogression in relation to the Mumbai meeting.[29] But participants more interested in having in-depth discussions on their particular topics and terrain and in setting up partnerships for future action found the physical separation specifically congenial to their purposes. Significant progress in some areas, such as water, debt and FTAA, was reported. At the end of the Forum, 352 agreed proposals for action were posted on the Wall of Proposals.

Building on the experience of the Mumbai WSF, the innovative methodology adopted in the 2005 WSF, with its emphasis on self-organization, made the event more democratic.[30] It was, however, recognized that more fragile groups and non-central themes could not benefit on equal terms from the new format. In the IC meeting of April in Utrecht, the methodology was critically assessed and some members suggested that self-organization had gone too far, allowing for the political manipulation of the event, for instance through the highly visible interventions of both President Lula and President Hugo Chavez. Some also thought that large gatherings like the conferences created a sense of common belonging that was lost in the new format. Moreover, the transversal axes, which were supposed to inform the work of all the thematic terrains, didn't work, not only because they were too vague and confusing but also because there were no mechanisms to make them effective. It should also be mentioned that the process of cohesion – which was aimed at creating interfaces and interconnections among themes, campaigns and movements, and organizations – didn't work according to expectations, because of either the incompetence of the facilitators or the sheer difficulty of coordinating across so much diversity.

· For very different reasons two incidents during the Forum became polemical and should be mentioned. One was the Manifesto of Porto Alegre subscribed to by nineteen highly visible participants. Because of its relevance in the discussion of the political cleavages inside the WSF, it will be dealt with in Chapter 6. The other consisted of around ninety cases of violence against women in the Youth Camp, the *Acampamento*,

where 35,000 young people camped. The seriousness of the crimes committed against women led the campers to organize security units inside the camp, the Brigadas Lilás, and a rally to call the attention of the WSF to this type of violence. Feminist groups saw in this violence further evidence of the absence of feminist concerns and perspectives at the core of the WSF, in both political and organizational terms. According to Ana Elena Obando, of the Women's Human Rights net,

> the common denominator amongst the resistance movements [...] was their general opposition to neoliberal capitalism, militarization, war and the destruction of the environment, and their lack of opposition to one of the expressions of patriarchy that is intertwined with those above: fundamentalisms, particularly religious fundamentalisms. Even though we the feminists have conquered our space in the WSF [...] the fact remains that we go on travelling among ourselves and with ourselves incorporating to a certain extent the agendas and concerns of other movements without seeing the latter reciprocating. (Obando 2005)

The 2006 polycentric WSF

It is consensually acknowledged that the organizational experimentation undertaken in the 2005 WSF showed the enormous capacity of the WSF to transform itself. This capacity was further demonstrated in the preparation of the 2006 WSF.

Throughout 2004, there was some discussion in the IC and IS about the possibility of experimenting with a new format for the WSF, particularly in light of the persistent difficulty in improving the global scope of the WSF. In 2005, and after the planned WSF for Africa was scheduled for 2007 (Nairobi), it was finally decided that the 2006 WSF would be decentralized, 'polycentric', according to the designation adopted. It would take place simultaneously in three continents and the date should as usual and whenever possible coincide with the meeting of the World Economic Forum. Caracas, Bamako and Karachi were chosen as the venues. Throughout 2005 there were several meetings in which the organizers of the polycentric forums met with members of the IC and the IS to discuss common organizational problems and to articulate the diversity that each WSF would express in light of its geopolitical context, with the commonality derived from their being partial realizations of the same WSF. The WSF of Caracas and Bamako took place according to the original schedule. WSF Karachi was postponed until March 2006, owing to the disruption caused by the earthquake that devastated the country in the autumn of 2005.[31]

The analysis of the profound organizational transformations during the years of the WSF's existence seems to provide sufficient evidence for my argument that the WSF has shown an enormous capacity to reinvent itself, to identify problems and seek imaginative solutions for them. Reading the minutes of the many meetings of the IC, one gets an eloquent impression of an immense amount of confrontational dialogue and soul-searching, through which tensions and compromises, arguments and counter-arguments, proposals and alternative proposals are played out with the common purpose of improving the capacity of the WSF to transform our unjust societies into another possible world. It becomes evident that such capacity is premised upon the capacity of the WSF to transform itself, learning from past experience without self-indulgence and looking ahead to the new challenges with open-mindedness. It seems that if and when this capacity for self-transformation is exhausted the WSF will be doomed.

Notes

1 ATTAC was formerly the Association for a Tobin Tax for the Aid of Citizens; later on it became the Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens.

2 As I will show in the following, in spite of changes in name and composition this group is still the organizing core of the WSF today.

3 Basically for operational reasons the core of the IS continued to be the original Brazilian Organizing Committee. Meanwhile, whenever the WSF convenes in Brazil, the Brazilian members of the IS will integrate the local organizing committee with consultation functions. In the case of the 2005 WSF, the local organizing committee was composed of twenty-four members representing as many organizations and movements.

4 In Portuguese, 'Partido dos Trabalhadores' (PT).

5 The PT was in power in the municipality of Porto Alegre from 1989 until 2004 and in the Rio Grande do Sul state from 1999 until 2002.

6 This much was recognized by the IC, which, in a note circulated after its meeting in Porto Alegre in January 2003, stated, after generally praising the performance of the IS: 'Notwithstanding this, clear limits can be pointed out in the performance of the Secretariat. The fast expansion of the internationalization process has meant that many times we were surpassed by the events; the Brazilian electoral process affected the organizations included in the Secretariat; the event in Porto Alegre has grown dramatically this year and demanded political investments that had to be organized with lesser local resources; information was not always passed to the IC with the necessary agility. These and other limitations must be overcome.'

7 The meetings of the IC in Miami in June 2003 and in Perugia in November 2003 helped to create a climate of mutual trust between the 'Westerners' and the 'Easterners'. In Perugia, the Indian delegates showed unconditional

willingness to give out information and a great capacity for appeasing the more sceptical about the possibility of a successful WSF in Mumbai.

8 The co-presence required by some of the tasks allotted to the IS makes it impossible for the Indian group to share the executive work on an equal basis.

9 In Chapter 5 I describe some of these measures briefly.

10 These commissions are described in chapter 5.

11 Michael Albert, coordinator of the alternative media network ZNET, who organized a wide group of sessions under the general title of 'Life after Capitalism', considered himself discriminated against by the IS. According to him the sessions did not appear on the programme, room assignment was chaotic (successive room changes, lack of simultaneous translation, etc.), and participation became very difficult as a consequence (personal communication).

12 In the first three meetings of the WSF criticism was also expressed concerning the presence of controversial figures, such as leaders of guerrilla groups.

13 See below, Chapter 6.

14 Grzybowski (2002); on the 2003 WSF, see the *Declaration of the 2003 World Social Forum: Perspective of Women of the World March of Women*, at <www.ffq.qc.ca/marche2000/en/fsm2003.html>; accessed on 19 March 2003, and Lagunas (2003).

15 By way of example, I mention three proposals made by myself with a view to increasing internal democracy and transparency during the 2003 WSF: posting the decisions taken by the OC or IC in designated places; saving some space in the evening for an open debate about organization or other issues; taking advantage of the technologies of electronic democracy to carry out referendums on organizational or strategic decisions during the Forum. The two first proposals would have been easy to put in place, had it not been for an administrative breakdown. Suffice it to say that during this Forum the full programme, including all activities, was never published.

16 The 2001 WSF was attended by some 1,800 journalists, the 2003 WSF by more than 4,000, the 2004 WSF by 3,200 and the 2005 WSF by 5,421.

17 As I will discuss in Chapter 9, it is also a major issue in the broader topic of the emergence of a global left politics.

18 The Charter of Principles was agreed upon by the International Council of the WSF in 2001. Later on, during the preparation of the 2004 WSF, it was discussed in various meetings in India. At one of these meetings (Bhopal, April 2002) a policy document was adopted which modified some of the clauses of the Charter and added new ones with the purpose of adapting it to the specific conditions that prevail in India today. The tale of this policy statement will be analysed in Chapter 6. Here, suffice it to mention the clause that, in contrast with the original Charter of Principles, states that 'in India the WSF Charter has been extended to include social and political realities as they exist in the country today ... This entails the opening of a dialogue within and between the broad spectrum of political parties and groups, social movements and other organizations.'

19 On this subject, see for example, Bertinoti (2002).

20 Proposals and strategies would be transformed into charts based on notes sent in by panel members. These charts could be used by facilitators. During the process, the charts would be reworked and a new version made available to the final panel. Panellists would decide on the use of these charts and notes from the systematization team.

21 According to the systematization group the sample was representative.

22 For instance, the term 'globalization', pervasive in the conference presentations, was hardly mentioned in the topics of the workshops.

23 One of the best-attended events at the Forum was entitled 'Mystics and Revolution'.

24 Already, in the WSF 2002, more space had been given to the self-managed activities.

25 '1 – be concerned and informed about larger political and social developments in India;

2 – for people in other parts of the world, try and visit India during this year for a substantial period of time, and build close working relations with like-minded people and organizations there; encourage others you know to also do this;

3 – encourage people you know in India to fully participate in the Forum – to go into the space; this is the only way to truly democratize and defend open space; equally, encourage people you know in all parts of the world to fully participate in the Forum;

4 – globalize the Forum! Insist on open, internationalist planning of the World Social Forum – which as it happens is taking place this next year in India but where this should be embedded in WSF practice, as a matter of principle and permanent practice; and on the introduction of easy, online participation in planning and policy formation;

5 – resist the likely tendency of the Forum in India itself becoming a platform for building unity, however necessary this might be for some social actors within India; insist that the role of the Forum is only to provide space for this to happen;

6 – insist on the public articulation of a larger, more strategic internationalist perspective for the holding of the Forum in India – for if this articulation is not there, and clear to all, then what is the purpose of not continuing to hold the world meeting in Porto Alegre?

7 – insist on open, inclusive, democratic, and friendly communication both from the WSF secretariat in India and from the International Secretariat in Brazil' (Sen 2003b: 31).

26 For a balanced view of the Mumbai WSF, see Vivas (2004).

27 The project of systematization analysed above was a manifestation of the need to respond to this challenge.

28 I myself organized, through the Centre for Social Studies (CES) of the University of Coimbra, where I work, a workshop entitled 'New Partnerships for New Knowledges'. The participants were social scientists and activists. Immanuel Wallerstein (USA), Aníbal Quijano (Peru), D. L. Sheth (India), Goran Therborn (Sweden), Hilary Wainwright (UK) and myself were among the social

scientists; Jai Sen (India), Irene Leon (Ecuador) and Moema Miranda (Brazil) were among the activists. The discussion concentrated on themes that are at the core of the idea of public sociology: the relationship between expertise and engagement; from critique to plans for action; the reliability of the knowledge underlying social struggles and its critique; the impact on social scientists of their engagement with lay or popular knowledges; activists as producers of knowledge. A proposal for a Popular University of Social Movements was also presented at the workshop. See below, Chapter 8.

29 In an evaluation of the 2005 WSF posted on ZNET on 8 February 2005 Alex Calinicos and Chris Nineham saw in the fragmentation a 'potentially disastrous development', commenting that 'one of the great beauties of our movement ... 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'.

30 While in the 2004 WSF there were still a small number of centrally organized sessions (thirteen), in the 2005 WSF all the sessions were self-organized with the exception of the opening cultural event.

31 At the time of writing (early March 2006) it is still too early to evaluate the WSFs of Caracas and Bamako. Indeed, full evaluation of the 2006 WSF will have to wait until after the event takes place in Karachi.