The World Social Forum and global democratisation: learning from Porto Alegre

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ABSTRACT  Being anti-something can be politically useful, but only up to a point. The search for alternative globalisation projects has been central to the World Social Forum process. The first two forums, held in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre in 2001 and 2002, provided a wide variety of approaches towards global democratisation. This article analyses the contradictions and prospects of various approaches towards global democratisation that could be found in the meetings, including the organisational aspects of the World Social Forum itself. It simultaneously argues for the political importance of learning from the innovative experiences in the so-called developing countries, such as the participatory budget planning of the Porto Alegre municipality. Without such learning that transgresses the idea of developed/adult/teacher vs developing/child/pupil, global democratisation cannot advance very far.

On the one hand, democracy has become a widely accepted norm in our world today. More governments than ever before are eager to define themselves as democratic. On the other hand, the prevalent forms of democratic governance leave many important decision-making sites outside the reach of popularly elected bodies. Public and private economic institutions offer various examples of significant sites of power not governed by democratic rules. Many of these institutions transgress the boundaries of individual nation-states.¹

The concentration of power in transnational and global institutions was one of the most significant social processes of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, democratic theory and practice have remained very nation-state centred. Although there were some examples of cosmopolitan democratic thinking and transnational democratic practice throughout the century, most analysts and politicians simply ignored them. An example of a reasonably moderate attempt to democratisé global power relations, especially as regards the North–South dimension, was the 1970s project of the New International Economic Order (NIEO). It did not, however, lead to any significant redistribution of power and was considered a failure by most commentators of the 1980s and 1990s.

At the very end of the century the public perception of the issues at stake seemed to be changing. While, for example, designating the undemocratic nature
of the International Monetary Fund as a significant political problem was generally not taken seriously in the early 1990s, in the past two years we have seen substantial crowds of people marching on the streets pointing out this problem. Global capitalism may have entered one of its most serious legitimacy crises.

While the solidarity movements related to many of the earlier attempts to democratise global power, such as the NIEO project, tended to see the problem more in terms of inter-state relations, many of the early twenty-first century movements are perceiving the world in a less state-centric manner. Instead of asking that a particular Third World state be given more decision-making power in global affairs, today’s activists may ask for more power for the civil society groups that confront both governmental and corporate power all over the world. This trend has many promising aspects. In order to imagine and construct institutional features of alternative futures, however, we may need political structures that ‘civil society’, as it is generally conceived, is unlikely to deliver.

The ‘Battle in Seattle’ during the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in 1999 boosted the local, transnational and global organisations and movements protesting against undemocratic sites of global power. In recent years we have observed the emergence of an increasing number of arenas that attract civil society organisations and active citizens to express concern about capitalist globalisation. The arenas are varied, in terms of both political orientation and organisational design. The spectacular demonstrations from Okinawa to Gothenburg and Genoa have received ample media coverage and become prominent models of critical civil society organising. In most of them the main focus has been on defensive measures, being against something. While reactive protests may play an important role in democratic transformations, the concrete initiatives for the transformations are more likely to emerge from proactive meetings.

Many of the most visible civil society gatherings have been explicitly, and often antagonistically, related to events of the global elite. The principal meetings of the intergovernmental economic institutions such as the World Bank, IMF and WTO, including its predecessor GATT, have been facing counter-events quite regularly since the late 1980s, including the anti-Bretton Woods riots of Berlin in 1988 and the protests against the GATT meeting of 1990 in Brussels. The lack of democracy in these institutions has been an increasingly important motivation of the counter-events.

More significantly but with less media attention, organised protests around these issues have been taking place in the more peripheral parts of our world. Some Third World observers, such as Camilo Guevara, characterise Seattle and other similar media events in the USA and Europe as somewhat irrelevant to the great majorities of the world. While I cannot fully agree with his observation, it is undoubtedly true that in the poorer regions of the world there has been a lot going on before and besides Seattle. Middle-class youth protesting in a European or North American city have been much more attractive to the global media networks than impoverished peasants campaigning against structural adjustment programmes in the South.
The meetings of the formally private elite organisations such as the Bilderberg Society, Trilateral Commission and Mont Pellerin Society have also tended to attract less public attention than those of the Bretton Woods institutions and other semi-public multilateral organs. Nevertheless, they constitute a highly influential network of transnational co-ordination in matters of global governance. One of the most influential and controversial of them is the World Economic Forum (WEF). The first informal business gathering in Davos, a Swiss mountain town, took place in January 1971 under the name of the European Management Forum. Since 1982 the Davos meeting has focused on bringing world economic leaders to its annual meetings, and in 1987 it got its present name, the World Economic Forum. 4

In January 1999, after several years of preparation, various organisations started preparing a counter-event in Switzerland under the banners of ‘another Davos’ and ‘anti-Davos’. Apart from the World Forum of Alternatives, the groups included the French journal Le Monde Diplomatique and Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens (ATTAC), founded in France in June 1998. 5 In the first anti-Davos event, organised simultaneously with the WEF 2000, various groups ranging from the World Women’s March to the Brazilian Landless Rural Workers first had a seminar in Zurich, and then marched to Davos to hold a press conference and, for some 150 of them, to face cold weather and Robocop-like police in a demonstration. 6 The difficult geographical conditions and heavy police presence convinced some of the key organisers that it would be difficult to organise a huge anti-Davos gathering in Davos itself. 7

In Brazil the concrete initiative for a worldwide civil society event emerged in early 2000. The first formulations of the idea are generally attributed to Oded Grajew, co-ordinator of Brazilian Entrepreneur’s Association for Citizenship (Associação Brasileira de Empresários pela Cidadania (CIVES), a progressive entrepreneurial organisation. In February 2000 Bernard Cassen, chair of ATTAC and director of Le Monde Diplomatique, met Grajew and Francisco Whitaker in Paris to discuss the possibility of organising such a forum. Their discussion produced three central ideas for the forum. First of all, it should be held in the South, and more concretely in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre. Second, the name should be World Social Forum (WSF), changing only one key word from the adversary’s name. And third, it should be organised over the same dates as the WEF, partially because this symbolism was considered attractive for the media. 8

Soon after it was clear that ATTAC, Le Monde Diplomatique and other organisations influential within transnational activist networks would support the initiative, eight Brazilian city society organisations decided to form the Organizing Committee of the forum. 9 In March 2000 they formally secured the support of the municipal government of Porto Alegre and the state government of Rio Grande do Sul, both controlled by the Workers Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT)). 10 Initially it was the mayor of Porto Alegre, Raul Pont, in particular who received the idea with great enthusiasm, but soon the state government, led by governor Olívio Dutra, also decided to dedicate plenty of time and effort to

From anti-Davos to Porto Alegre

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the WSF process.\textsuperscript{11} The idea was presented internationally by Miguel Rossetto, vice-governor of Rio Grande do Sul, in June 2000 during an alternative UN meeting in Geneva.

Porto Alegre, the capital of the Rio Grande do Sul state in southern Brazil, is in many ways the most important stronghold of the PT. Founded in 1980, the party has deep roots in trade unions, Catholic organisations, women’s movements and many other parts of the vibrant Brazilian civil society.\textsuperscript{12} Apart from its symbolic political value Porto Alegre was a smart choice for hosting the World Social Forum because both municipal and state governments were willing to allocate significant material and human resources to the event. The possibilities of autonomous state and municipal policies had been enhanced by the 1988 Federal Constitution, which increased resource transfer to and taxation powers of the local authorities.\textsuperscript{13} In 2002 the municipality provided approximately US$300 000 and the state $1 million for the event.

Even though some, including Brazil’s federal president Fernando Henrique Cardoso, have criticised the local authorities for mis-spending taxpayers’ resources, according to most estimates the thousands of visitors filling local hotels, restaurants and other commercial establishments bring in much more money than what is spent by local authorities. Whereas in short-term commercial terms the WSF is considered a good deal by most locals, in ideological terms not everyone agrees. Various business organisations and right-wing groups of Rio Grande do Sul organise a Forum of Liberties, held two months after the WSF, with positions openly critical of the latter.\textsuperscript{14}

The first World Social Forum in January 2001 attracted some 5000 registered participants from 117 countries and thousands of Brazilian activists. For the second forum, the figures had grown significantly, rising to over 12 000 official delegates from 123 countries and tens of thousands of participants in total, mostly from Brazil.\textsuperscript{15} The global media impact of the second Forum was also significantly stronger than in the previous year. Even though the event was organised simultaneously with the World Economic Forum in both years, as it is supposed to be in the near future as well, there were fewer attempts in the second year to interact with the WEF. This reflected a growing self-confidence among the organisers, some of whom liked to reiterate that ‘from now onwards Davos will be the shadow event of Porto Alegre’.

The World Social Forum: arena or actor?

As regards global democratisation, the World Social Forum can be looked at from two angles. On the one hand, it can be analysed as an example of an emerging institution that may embody seeds of global democracy. For example, George Monbiot has suggested that it could form part of the process of building a ‘world parliament in exile’.\textsuperscript{16} From this perspective, it is particularly important to look at its organisational design and the way its decision-making structure functions. From another angle, it provides a space for actors who may construct democratic projects in different contexts, both local and global. Among its organisers and participants there have been different ways to emphasise these different identities of the WSF that are by no means incompatible.
Whereas the press has tended to look at the WSF as a (potential) political actor in itself, many of the organisers have wanted to downplay this role and argue that they simply provide a space for different groups to interact. These different conceptions of the event have clashed, for example when the press has asked for ‘final declarations’ and considered the lack of any such final document a proof of weakness in the organisation. From the perspective of most organisers the idea has been not to produce any official final document of the event that would pretend to represent the views of the thousands of other organisations that have participated in the meetings. The unwillingness to formulate political statements, beyond the Charter of Principles drafted in 2001, is occasionally questioned among some organisers and related actors who would like to see the WSF as an organisation expressing opinions on certain issues, such as the crises in Argentina, Palestine and Venezuela.

The formal decision-making power of the process has been mainly in the hands of the Organising Committee, consisting since its foundation of the Central Trade Union Confederation (Central Única dos Trabalhadores) (CUT), the Movement of Landless Rural Workers (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra) (MST) and six smaller Brazilian civil society organisations. In terms of affiliates and resources, there is a huge difference between the two big ones and the others. In the decision-making process within the Organizing Committee, the CUT and MST have generally acted ‘generously’ towards the smaller organisations. The disparity of resources has generally not translated into significant disparities in the decision-making power.

Even if the Brazilian media often portrays the events as directly organised by the PT, the party does not formally belong to the Organizing Committee. Its importance stems from the fact that many of the key civil society organisations involved in the process are somehow related to or sympathetic towards it, and that it controls the hosting city and state governments.

The other main organ of the WSF, the International Council, was founded in São Paulo in June 2001. It consists of various organisations from different parts of the world. The division of labour between the International Council and the Organizing Committee has been somewhat ambiguous. During the first WSF the former did not exist. When founded, the International Council was assigned an essentially advisory role, but since the meetings held in Dakar in October 2001, Porto Alegr in January 2002 and Barcelona in April 2002 its responsibilities have increased. A part of the ambiguity is a result of the principle that, according to the Organizing Committee, the International Council is not supposed to have mechanism for disputing representation, nor for voting. The only time there has been a vote was when, at its first meeting, it had to be decided whether the following meeting would take place somewhere in Europe or in Dakar. The overwhelming majority voted for Dakar.

A more common mechanism for making decisions in the meetings of the International Council is that the Organizing Committee, always present in the meetings, submits a proposal on an issue. Then the International Council debates the issue, the debate being presided over by the Organization Committee. In case no clear consensus emerges, the Organizing Committee will have a private meeting and reconsider its original proposal. In some cases it will then (typically...
on the second day of the two-day meeting) present a new proposal where the earlier discussion will have been taken into account. Normally, the new proposal will carry the day and most everyone agrees, more or less.

The underlying assumption in this working method is that the World Social Forum is not a deliberative body or actor that would take political stands and thereby need rigorous decision-making procedures. Until now the system has worked relatively well, making decisions through what some of the Brazilian organisers call *construção*, constructing them in a critical debate and sometimes laborious consensus building. The composition of the International Council and its working methods are likely to experience changes in the future. The selection of the founding members of the International Council, through a mixture of invitations by the Organizing Committee and partial self-selection, was reasonably easy when the overall process was still known to only relatively few networks. In the future, when there will be more groups interested in joining the International Council, more explicit selection procedures will have to be established.

At the moment, it seems that the International Council will have an increasing role and, correspondingly, its name may be changed to ‘International Committee’. According to the same plan, drafted by the Organizing Committee in April 2002, the Organizing Committee would be called the ‘Secretariat’. Since there are plans to organise the WSF 2004 in India and later possibly in other parts of the world, the Organizing Committee is thereby preparing the ground for the moment when new organising committees will have to take over many of the responsibilities held until now by the Brazilians.

**Politics of Social Forum**

Apart from the strictly organisational matters, the internal politics of the WSF have been played out in the way different groups have created or been given space during the event. Gender and especially racial tensions created some internal controversies, particularly in the first forum. Even though during the Carnival and Soccer World Cup Brazil may show an image of racial harmony, racism is present in most walks of life, and it would be naïve to claim that it does not exist within progressive intellectuals’ ranks. For many observers, both forums have been surprisingly ‘white’ events. The perceived whiteness is not only a result of the lack of large delegations from Africa, Asia and other parts of Latin America, but also because the average Brazilian participating in the forum is clearly ‘whiter’ than the average Brazilian.

The presence of representatives of the Cuban government and of the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (*FARC*) also raised mixed feelings in 2001. Open disapproval of Cuba’s presence came mostly from outside the meeting, particularly from the local press. In Rio Grande do Sul, the opposition has occasionally claimed that the PT state government wants to transform the state into ‘another Cuba’. The 2002 WSF took place in an electoral year in Brazil, and for the electoral strategy of the PT it was important to create an image that would not dissuade potential moderate voters. It was therefore not surprising that the Cuban representatives no longer had a prominent official role, even though
Cuba’s delegation was more numerous than the year before. The island’s political visibility was perhaps clearest in the surroundings of the venue, where one could observe plenty of Che Guevara paraphernalia displayed by many participating organisations.

During the first WSF, the FARC guerrillas received much sympathy from some participants. In Brazil, relatively strong anti-US sentiments are often reflected in solidarity attitudes towards Colombian rebels, and there were even extra-official recruitment efforts to create internationalist brigades to travel to Colombia. Not all the participants, however, were happy with the presence of a group accused of committing atrocities. The FARC representatives were not allowed to register as participants in the second World Social Forum in 2002. The WSF Charter of Principles, drafted between the first two forums and approved by the International Council in June 2001, excludes participation by armed organisations. The mistakenly approved registration of members of the Basque armed organisations was cancelled as soon as their identity was discovered.

Even if it is not clear whether the WSF will become a more active political entity with more explicit internal will-formation mechanisms, it is obvious that until now the most important impact of the forum on democratic projects has consisted of the myriad encounters between different groups and activists within its confines. Geographically, most participants have come from the Southern Cone of Latin America (especially Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina) and Southern Europe (especially Italy, France and Spain), but there has been a conscious effort to facilitate the participation of people from Asia, Africa and other parts of Latin America. Even though in numbers the Asian participation has been modest, the process has attracted increasing attention, especially in India, where the WSF 2004 will possibly take place after one more round in Porto Alegre in 2003.

In sum, the World Social Forum is one of the most promising civil society processes that may both contribute significantly to global democracy initiatives and constitute possibly such an initiative in itself. The enthusiasm it has generated around the world will also bring it various dilemmas. Conceived as a civil society initiative, the WSF will probably have international organisations, governments and even business organisations proposing different forms of cooperation with it. Some organisers may emphasise the importance of clinging to strictly defined civil society partners, others are likely to have more pragmatic positions on obtaining material and political support. The planned organisation of the WSF 2004 in India will be a crucial moment. On the one hand it will provide a concrete possibility to give the process a better geographical balance. On the other hand, it may be difficult to find hosting local governments willing to dedicate as much energy to the process as the municipality of Porto Alegre and the state of Rio Grande do Sul.

**From Anti to Alternative**

Being anti-something can be politically useful, but only up to a point. The protesters of Seattle and similar events have been effective in pointing out authoritarian aspects of the capitalist world-system. Even if various groups that have participated in these events do have programmatic statements for alternative
futures, the way these events have been staged has not been conducive to showing these futures to the world. The criticism of not being able to show a credible alternative, or any alternative at all, has become a problem for the legitimacy of the protest movements.

In most of the post-Seattle events, the protesters have often been labelled ‘anti-globalisation’, and some of them have used the expression themselves.\textsuperscript{25} It would, however, be analytically faulty and politically unwise simply to define the movements as being \textit{against} globalisation, if the term is understood as the increasing transgression of nation-state borders on a worldwide level. Many of them are, I would claim, looking for a \textit{different kind} of globalisation, although some may prefer to use the older term ‘internationalism’. From a democratic perspective, the problem in some anti-globalisation rhetoric is that one easily ends up with rather strange bedfellows. Professing anti-globalisation pure and simple is not very helpful in terms of making a distinction between regulating the cross-border movements of speculative capital and those of black immigrants.

\textit{Outra globalização} (another globalisation) is an expression that has been emphasised by some of the key organisers of the Porto Alegre meetings.\textsuperscript{26} Despite their insistence, the mass media in many parts of Latin America often talk of anti-globalisation activists when referring to both Porto Alegre and some of the events inspired by it. The February 2001 protests related to a World Economic Forum regional meeting in Mexico and the March 2001 marches around the Inter-American Development Bank meeting in Santiago de Chile were the first big globalisation-related protest events in Latin America after the first World Social Forum, and the media coverage of them often referred to the Porto Alegre event as an important moment in the anti-globalisation struggles.\textsuperscript{27}

For those who want to argue for the possibility of a different kind of globalisation, the risk of ending up with strange bedfellows is by no means absent. It is not always easy to see the difference, if any, of the ‘alternative’ globalisation proposals from the idea of many business leaders that some democratisation is necessary in order to make the global expansion of capitalism acceptable.\textsuperscript{28} Those who cling to anti-globalisation discourse are often right when they claim that the alternative globalisation strategies would lead to only moderate changes. Often, but not always.

It is frequently assumed that in the anti/alternative divide of globalisation debates, being ‘anti’ represents more radical and revolutionary options, whereas the ‘alternatives’ are on the side of more superficial reforms. In terms of thinking about how to democratisethe world, this assumption is not helpful. Within the alternative globalisation spectre, it is not difficult to find and even easier to imagine such political projects that strive for a globalisation which radically transforms the world. While anti-globalisation people can be pro-capitalist, pro-globalisation people may be anti-capitalist.

Some of the debate and divide between the ‘anti’ and the ‘alternative’ results from confused semantics or distorted categorisations. In order to democratisefundamentally the world, people who have chosen to regard globalisation as a term that has been too polluted by its dominant usage and those who think it can still be given more progressive meanings can often work together. In principle, the World Social Forum offers many opportunities for this to happen.
Despite various references to the necessity of imagining and constructing a different world, the issue of a democratic global order has not had a high priority on the agenda of the World Social Forum. There have been claims by intellectuals and groups working on issues of global democracy that the WSF process has been too dominated by nationalists whose discourse abounds with anti-globalisation themes. As noted by Michael Hardt, those who ‘advocate strengthening national sovereignty as a solution to the ills of contemporary globalisation’ have dominated the representations of the Forum. More polemically, he also claims that while the ‘non-sovereign, alternative globalization position’ has not obtained a prominent place in the Forum, it may well have been the position of the majority of the participants. Be that as it may, one of the intellectual problems of the World Social Forum has been the lack of open debate between different visions of how the world should be concretely reorganised if, as the main slogan of the WSF says, another world is to be possible.

Learning from Porto Alegre

Already before the World Social Forum, Porto Alegre was known for its system of participatory budget planning that many regarded as one of the most concrete real-world examples of participatory democracy. The municipality of Porto Alegre explicitly offers the participatory budget model, Orçamento Participativo, as a ‘role model for the whole world’. Since 1989, when the Popular Front administration led by the PT came into power, citizen participation has been an important aspect of budget making in the city. Over 15,000 citizens participate every year to discuss the city expenditure budget, most of them from poor neighbourhoods.

The participatory budget project has been a practical school of democracy and, according to some observers, has implied the emergence of a new ethical-political principle. In terms of democratic representation, the project has not been without its contradictions. If one considers the legislature to be an important organ of democratic institutionality, it may seem problematic that the local legislature tends to have its powers diminished by the participatory budget planning. Also, it has to be remembered that the participatory planning covers only a small part of the budget and people’s participation is limited to making relatively simple choices to pick priorities. In any case it is fair to say that it is one of the most impressive real-world experiments with participatory democracy on a municipal level. Porto Alegre has become one of the most cited real-world models of participatory democracy. Even the World Bank has praised the model of Porto Alegre, asserting it has ‘stood out for demonstrating an efficient practice of democratic resource management’.

Learning from the Porto Alegre participatory democracy can be helpful for cosmopolitan democratic progress in two ways. One is symbolised by the banner some local activists were carrying in the opening ceremony of the first World Social Forum. The banner asked for global participatory budget planning, and at least in my mind it meant democratising global economic institutions. It referred to the potentially global use of a local initiative, where elected government has initiated a remarkable process of popular participation.
Learning from Porto Alegre can, at the same time, help break the Eurocentric and neocolonial structures of knowledge production that are dominant in our world. In traditional and even most branches of critical development thinking, areas like Europe are considered more developed than areas like South America. In other words, European countries can show countries like Brazil glimpses of possible futures. ‘Developed’ countries are therefore more adult, whereas countries like Brazil are still developing, more child-like. If we think of the world as a school, the former are the teachers and the latter are the students.

There have been many different kinds of criticism of this idea, some of them based on cultural relativism. Less often has it been noted that ‘developing’ countries like Brazil can show the ‘developed’ countries glimpses of their possible futures. We can look at the informal sector and expressions of ‘multiculturalism’ and note that these phenomena, seen as relatively recent in, eg Finland, have been present in Brazil for a long time. To the extent that these processes develop in Finland, we can talk of the ‘Brazilianisation’ of Finland. The role of credit-rating financial institutions, visibly present in Finnish economic-policy making since the early 1990s, is another social phenomenon that has been taking place in Brazil earlier than in Finland.

If we take seriously the fact that ‘developed’ countries in the North should not be considered teachers of the ‘still developing’ countries in the South, we should start a process of learning together. The Porto Alegre participatory budget policy is an example of democratic mechanisms that European governments, local and national and perhaps also regional, can learn from.37 Without denying the usefulness of some forms of traditional development co-operation, a more democratic co-operation would be based on the idea that both partners can learn from each other. Experts from Porto Alegre could, for example, visit Finnish municipalities and share the know-how they have on participatory budgets.

I suggest that thinking of Brazil as offering possible futures for Europe can have transformative implications for the cultural legitimacy of global power relations. I would claim that, in order to analyse and struggle against the cultural and material inequalities between the North and the South, we need to deconstruct the developing–developed dichotomy. We need to take seriously the idea that countries like Brazil can teach important lessons about the future of countries like Finland. Once we achieve this change in attitudes, we have better possibilities to advance global democratic transformations.

Notes


3 In my September 2000 conversation in Helsinki with Camilo Guevara, whose status as the son of Che Guevara makes him some kind of politico-cultural ambassador of the Cuban government, he argued that the Battle of Seattle expressed the illusions of an alienated Western youth.

4 For an official historical overview of the WEF, see http://www.weforum.org/site/homepublic.nsf/Content/Our+History (13 April 2002).


6 Personal communication with Susan George, 15 April 2002.
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7 Personal communication with Bernard Cassen, 16 April 2002.
8 Personal communication with Bernard Cassen, 16 April 2002. See also B Cassen, ‘Comment est né le Forum social mondial’, unpublished manuscript, 2002.
9 Associação Brasileira de Organizações Não Governamentais (ABONG); Ação pela Tributação das Transações financeiras em Apoio aos Cidadãos (ATTAC); Comissão Brasileira Justiça e Paz (CBJP); Associação Brasileira de Empresários pela Cidadania (CIVES); Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT); Instituto Brasileiro de Análises Sociais e Econômicas (IBASE); Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST); and Rede Social de Justiça e Direitos Humanos.

On the origins of the WSF, see F Whitaker, ‘Fórum Social Mundial: origins e objetivos’, at http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/por/qorigem.asp (13 April 2002).

10 Personal communication with Jeferson Miola, 20 April 2002.
14 These are the official 2002 figures, available at http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/eng/noticias_numeros_FSM2002 eng.asp. Many commentators give higher figures.
17 The fact that in April 2002 representatives of groups related to the WSF International Council and Organizing Committee arranged an international observer mission to Israel and Palestine is an indication of the tendencies to increase the political protagonism of the WSF.
18 No wonder Naomi Klein, for instance, has characterised the WSF organisational structure as ‘so opaque that it was nearly impossible to figure out how decisions were made’. N Klein, ‘Farewell to “end of history”: organization and vision in anti-corporate movements’, in L Panitch & C Leys (eds), Socialist Register 2002: A World of Contradictions, London: Merlin Press, 2001, pp 1–14.
19 In the June 2001 founding meeting of the council in São Paulo, the Organizing Committee had drafted its name as ‘International Advisory Council’. During the meeting, it was decided that the term ‘Advisory’ be deleted from the name.
23 It has to be remembered as well that Rio Grande do Sul is one of the rare parts of Brazil, Latin America and the whole Third World where many locals are light-skinned people of European, including Germanic, origin.
28 Hardt, ‘Porto Alegre’; and Klein, ‘Farewell to “end of history”’.
30 Abers, ‘Overcoming the dilemmas of participatory democracy’.


In order to avoid simplistic interpretations of anti-eurocentrism, one needs to remember that many of the ‘local’ and ‘indigenous’ habits in the non-European parts of the world have been influenced and inspired by Europe. For example, the emergence of participatory budget planning ideas in Porto Alegre during the municipal electoral campaign of 1988 was inspired by the Paris Commune and the original Soviet councils of Russia. See T Genro & U de Souza, Orçamento Participativo: A experiência de Porto Alegre, São Paulo: Editora Fundação Perseu Abramo, 1999.