

Cartographies of the future: Alternatives ways for another world

This text is part of a discussion process that began in May 2012, during an informal meeting at the seminar to conclude the systematization of the Thematic Groups of the Social Forum Capitalist Crisis, Social and Environmental Justice, held in Porto Alegre last January. By that time, members of the Group of Reflection and Support to the WSF Process (GRAP) presented some suggestions with a view to contribute for the speeding up of a mobilizing imaginary for the World Social Forum framework and beyond. Since the inputs raised during the discussion based on the first version of this document we enhanced our thoughts to finally come up, during GRAP's meeting in September 4th 2012, with the present text. We invite you, who received this document, to a meeting aiming to discuss the ideas and proposals here expressed, in November 2012.

1. The combination of the economic and environmental crisis has been growing in seriousness. The galloping escalation in the system contradictions occurs in a historical framework of unseen acceleration of social changes in all spheres of the human existence. Deep structural changes have been occurring, without us having the means to measure its consequences. Inequality has not, in a global scale, reduced and in most regions has increased, but humanity is now much more connected than in any other time in history, with bonds that difficult nationalistic features much more than in the past, and tends to impose a greater comprehension about our common fate. Processes of regional integration are encouraged in many continents. The possibilities of access to communication and knowledge become wider than what was previous thought. The seriousness of the crisis in the old imperial centers (Europe, USA and Japan) makes room for a more multipolar world, and the rising of “emerging” powers helps to break with many elements of the Eurocentrism. But the world governance crisis leaves no room for superficial optimism: the corporation's power grows, special the finances, and the national States give up on some of their attributions, so that only the planetary citizenship movements can raise as holders of a progressive alternative. In 2011, wide horizontal movements for democracy and social justice have emerged in many parts of the world, creating a multiplicity of new paths.

2. There is an enormous lag between the depth of the challenges and the emergence of progressive alternatives. The dominants classes – the 1% coordinated by the international financial system – have answered the crisis with the uncompromising defense of their privileges, the increasing of the inequalities and the deepening of the recipe that created this situation, further aggravating the problem. On the other hand, the social and environmental movements and the progressive streams have proved unable to unify their fights, enhance their political actions and articulate their local and national struggles with global initiatives. The centrifugal trends have been broadened because of

the crisis aggravation. The quick societal shifts from the last decades have been understood with certain delay by many historical movements involved in the social struggles. On the other hand, new horizontal movements (Indignad@s, Occupy, etc) have questioned the austerity policies, but with no link with the political movements previously existent. The political dialectic that integrates the burden and the experience of the past, the new demands and creative energy of the present and the building of projects for the future does not become effective.

3. The World Social Forum process has been, for more than a decade, an essential dimension for the reconstruction of the left perspective in the world. It is a privileged space for meeting and articulation of anti-systemic forces searching for another world; it was decisive to break the neoliberal consensus in the turning of the century (the “single mindset”); it was decisive to launch initiatives such as the campaign against ALCA and the mobilizations against the Iraq invasion, one of the greatest in history. The Forum’s gains in acknowledgment and affirmation of plurality, diversity and interculturality, when fighting the provincialism of part of the left and in connecting different political cultures are undeniable. The WSF has helped to build a new political culture and has been useful to mobilize, organize activities and connect a great variety of positions. Its fundamental principles should be valued and developed.

4. WSF process moves towards insofar as it is fed, oxygenated and boosted by the experiences of struggles, movements and their participants’ organization, especially those that host the Forum. In this sense, the WSF in Tunis, in March 2013, can be very rich for all of those that fight for another possible world. It is a forum that has the enormous challenge of voicing not only the wide movements that fight for democracy, participation and rights in the Maghreb and Masrek, but also to dialogue with new anti-neoliberal movements of the youth and unemployed in Europe and Americas, with the indigenous and environmental movements from Latin America and with the more institutionalized and statist left of all the continents.

5. The WSF is not the only space for restoration of initiatives that propound alternatives to the current system; other conferences and summits have also played relevant roles in the national, regional and global ground – we could emphasize, for example, the Peoples Summit against Climate Change and in Defense of Mother Earth, held in Cochabamba, in 2010. The Forum does not aim to be an actor or dispute a protagonist role, but to be a hatchery of initiatives. We have to work towards strengthening the knot of continuity and processes of central events, also using the digital technological tools. All of this allows us to think in ways to embody millions of people in the Forums.

6. If, looking back, we see how much we have moved forward, looking ahead we see how much we still have to grow to build an alternative with credibility when faced with the global capitalism, to effectively compete and build another hegemony against neoliberalism. According to the formula of the Occupy Wall Street, if we are 99% and want to defeat the 1%, we need to surpass the dichotomy between the left pragmatism that works essentially within the system (and ends up being co-opted by its logic) and

the auto-announcement of the left that are not able to speak with more than 1% of the society. We need to dialogue with the broad majority of society and assist them to become the protagonist of the political action and defend what they set as priority. But we will only be up to this challenge if mobilizing movements emerge with planetary dimensions, valuing the diversity of identities, voices and plurality of views, shaping overwhelming and irresistible waves: outrances and insurgencies of all kinds that shows this latent planetary democracy, they should be bond from a bottom up approach and collectively build news paradigms. That is why we think that an important dimension to be reinforced within the framework of the WSF process is that one that can contribute to distill alternatives civilization paradigms: highlighting struggles and exemplary alternatives already in course, improve the plural and collective systematization, theories, projects, views and horizons towards transformative practices and further the discussion about political strategies to build another civilization.

7. There are a great number of initiatives that want to rebuild the mental infrastructure of those who stand as progressive or from the left. There are millions of social movements, on one side, and hundreds of institutes, think tanks, observatories and groups of research on the other side, which have dedicated time to systematize knowledge, theories and experiences from an anti-systemic point of view. International organizations and universities are also contributing with inputs that might be useful. They work basically with concrete experiences and real alternatives – from agro ecology to the social networks for free knowledge and culture, generation of renewable energy in a decentralized way, sustainable consumption practices, practices of self governance at the community level, the establishment of legal rules acknowledging the rights of nature. There are countless examples and they are present everywhere on the planet.

8. But the current frame is of great fragmentation of diagnoses, analysis models, proposals and initiatives; there is a weakness in the dialogue between reflection's centers in all the continents. We can contribute in this endeavor by launching an initiative that helps to articulate and better organize the alternative ideas. What is at issue is the dispute of hegemony in order to gather the ideas that mobilize hearts and minds, ideas that settle a core of strategic thoughts towards transforming actions. We believe that the Forum is one of the spaces capable of give collective meaning to these experiences, in the same way that these initiatives helps to enhance the WSF process.

9. Organize the battle around which ideas? We start from the altermundialist agenda that presided the WSF birth in 2001 (commerce, multilateral institutions, rights, inequalities, gender, race...), an agenda that strongly dialogued with the classic agenda of the left in the late XX century (labor, imperialism, national emancipation and social themes...) and that soon would be enriched by the mobilizations against wars unleashed by the Bush government. We deal with these and other issues in a pluralistic way, valuing the diversity of actors, experiences and formulations, handling with the Forum spirit, looking for the creation of a new political culture. But we were also consolidating, especially after 2009, a view that the alternatives we are seeking must have a socio-

environmental feature, and have to be built based on real democratic process regarding to the economic sphere (breaking up with finances' dictatorship and the affirmation of a common management), and politics (which means wide popular participation, social control of the governments, independence of the market forces and new institutional forms to organize the political participation), it is also necessary to question the relationship established between society and nature in the modern world, a core dimension of the current crisis of civilization (this means question the productivism and the developmentalism still dominant and recover the contribution of the indigenous people). The deepening of this agenda highlights the cultural, civilization and ideological dimension intrinsic to the changes we want to promote.

10. There are different aspects, potentially anti-systemic, in the battle of ideas:

a. The cartography of anti-systemic fights, finding new actors, movements and processes essential for the resistance, mobilization and innovation, indentify its practical experiences and strategic proposals, a cartography that assess the struggles from an emerging planetary citizenship perspective, which overcomes the boundaries established by States and national interests. We have experience when dealing with the different, initiatives of good governance, projects and cultural actions, process of radical democratization and a number of other issues that are not confined to what is discussed within the current politics framework. This cartography is empirically produced in the WSF process, but with little tracking and systematization done to be further socialized. That is why this initiative is about doing a map with a global view, highlighting the contradictions, the emerging elements that can contribute for the social change, in dialogue with the widest variety of movements, performing a plural political construction, taking peace and democracy as strategic values, strengthening the planetary citizenship, valuing human relations as well as the relation with nature, promoting the full respect to current and future life, the caring, sharing and coexistence, widening the defense of the "commons", socio and environmental justice, as well as equality in the diversity and everything that the WSF helped us to discover.

b. The systemic and periodic balance of the state of the world established from an anti-systemic perspective, which means focus on the contradictions that show the limits and possibilities of the emergence of a paradigm to overcome the capitalism. With the permanence of the neoliberal politics, the worsening of the ecological crisis and the entrance of the capitalism in a new and long depressive cycle, the social and environmental conditions tend to diminish. If we enter in a period of backwards in terms of the rights, forms of sociability and ecological frames in which our modern civilization has developed, becomes utterly important to keep a critical eye on the decadence of our civilization. To monitor the state of the planet and humankind with this look means not only to support the complaints, but also to construct tools for fighting degradation. There are countless initiatives in this regard, but partials and with long distances putting the social apart from the ecological. There is a need to reshape new benchmarks and standardize indicators to guide these assessments.

c. Debating, questioning, systematizing and disseminating the alternatives and strategies proposed. What we intended to promote with the Thematic Social Forum was a first step in this regard, but it is still very incipient. This challenge becomes particularly sharp in transversal themes, such as economy, world order, democracy, relationship with nature, consumption and all the ethical and ideological discussion about values. We have to catalyze the common agendas, without replacing or looking for a protagonist role, but contributing for an endeavor created together, plural and worldwide.

11. These issues are in the “spirit of this age”, a real example for the planetary citizenship. It is necessary to leverage the initiatives that help to catalyze the movements moving in this direction. But they only make sense if shared with the anti-systemic fights, dialoguing with their experiences and dilemmas. It is also necessary to embody the intellectuals and collective processes that create the anti-systemic fights looking for emancipation, shielding their structural plurality and embracing a range of partners involved in this task. An initiative like this one can equally dialogue with a great number of observatories and social, economic and environmental entities from several continents. The experience accumulated in the WSF process recommends us to keep certain procedures and political basis we already acquired, such as the open method and autonomy from the governments and parties. Our challenge is to strength the different collective subjects and the struggles towards the civilizational paradigm shift, for the full rising of potentialities so far restrained like and embryo in their own practices and experiences.

12. A process such this one must be open for everyone who is interested, with an intended facilitation that shares the objectives and purposes previously described. It can be designed as a great atelier for political action towards the shift of the current state, with thematic groups and periodic meetings that are not restricted to the Forums. It can be a gathering place to deal with emerging issues, with a continuous work and joining the Forums as an opportunity to disseminate ideas and receive feedbacks. Its nature demands permanent and systemic processes of knowledge accumulation, with seminars for those who follow the process and have contributions for the discussion. It is about organizing a process, a virtual work and face-to-face meetings that produce outputs, with a structured scheme of dissemination to be shared with a relevant number of actors. We are in a planetary dispute for hegemony and our initiative has to be the contribution to create irreversible citizenship movements, with projects and ideas endowed with a mobilizing strength.

13. This initiative comes from our choice based on openness and respect for diversity, characterized by horizontal processes; taking into account the clash of ideas and projects, valuing the difference as a constructive force for shaping the future. It is a self-organized proposal that vindicate the WSF as an open space, proposing to enhance the Forum, assisting debates and initiatives of action that share the same goals. But at the same time autonomy must be kept in relation to the Forum – it is a self-organized activity that should not be confused with the Forum, its structures, initiatives and

institution. It should be equally thought under a strategic ambition, as a cumulative process that follows the WSF process throughout the years.

14. Within this specific juncture any initiative of this kind should be geared to assist the success of World Social Forum 2013, to be held in Tunis, from March 24 to 29. We are in condition to organize a seminar in Porto Alegre, in January, where we can detail more and agree upon this proposal, we can also prepare a concrete initiative to be effective two months later, in Tunis. This initiative must be carefully designed so it can be embedded in a proper and constructive way within the dynamic set by the WSF 2013 organizers. A subject that might be relevant for the debates in Tunis and we could work as a pilot experience is about “Crisis and democracy” – anyhow this is one more issue that we did not deal with the systematicity it deserves yet, and we should discuss it more during our meeting in November.