BC Regional Expansion Committee

Canada-Quebec-Indigenous People's Forum

Initial Thoughts On Concept, Structure, Processes…

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OBJECTIVES

The objective of this document is, primarily, to serve as an input into the planning process for the BC Expansion Committee as it develops its own infrastructure and processes in support of the Canada-Quebec-Indigenous Peoples' Social Forum. In formulating this discussion document I have closely reviewed the text edited by Jai Sen and Peter Waterman entitled World Social Forum: challenging empires. In addition to a review of the material in this text, I've also referenced other more recent sources.

The rationale for this document is to identify specific issues, challenges and opportunities that have presented themselves in the context of the organization of the World Social Forum which has a decade long history that can serve as inputs to the BC and Canadian planning process.

The impetus for commencing this research has also been my own experience as an active grassroots organizer with Occupy Vancouver and the Quebec Student Solidarity movement. Most recently I have been involved with coalition work involving a number of different ENGO's.

It became apparent to me as I reviewed the material that the challenges of movement building (of bringing a number of different funded organizations (ENGO's) and grassroots groups together into the same space), are the same regardless of scale. As a result there is much that we can learn from the lessons of those that precede us.

In addition to this, I also realized that the WSF process has not fully embraced the Internet driven dynamics of recent social movements. Whether it be the Arab Spring, the Indiginados, Occupy or the Quebec Student Movement, the Internet had a huge role to play in both the genesis, the perpetuation and the structure of these movements. As a result, there exists an opportunity as we plan our activity in British Columbia to develop a strategy that is integrated and aligned with the larger global movement building activity of the WSF, but also contributes new ideas and strategies that are based on more recent activity.

In charting the way forward we will be confronted with questions… some conceptual, others strategic and yet others contextual. We must confront them all if we are to develop the most effective plan. If we are diligent we can provide leadership in the evolution of the structures and strategies that are employed moving forward.

In reviewing this document you will note the extensive use of direct quotes. The rationale for this is that the objective of this piece is to both stimulate dialogue as to provide historical context. It is not a 'paper; in the traditional sense. I thought it best to, as clearly as possible, present arguments in their own voices.

THE TIMING IS RIGHT FOR REVOLUTION!

The Global Context: We are at an inflection point in human history that makes the possibility of global revolution a possibility. There are three unique features of our historical context that suggest that things are different now:

The Illegitimacy of the Neo-Liberal Agenda: The cracks in the armour are becoming increasingly more visible. No longer is it presumed that the dogma perpetrated on the rest of the world has a sustainable foothold. From the financial crises in the US and Europe to the continued imperialist behaviour of the US to the recent UN resolution to grant Palestine a limited form of statehood, the signs are in the air.[1]

The current technological context: Due to the proliferation of the Internet and the power that is now in peoples' hands in the form of SmartPhones and other devices, we are now connected in real time as never before. The power of this phenomena was in evidence in Tahrir Square, the Occupy movement as well as the Quebec student movement. Not only do we have the ability to respond in real time and organize like never before. We also have much greater visibility across the entire movement as pictures and videos circulate virally. This phenomena is not to be underestimated as it serves to build solidarity as well as to communicate best practices and so on.

Revolutionary Activity Spans the Globe: no longer are those that take to the streets and challenge authority situated only in the Southern hemisphere. People are taking to the streets in numbers all over the Western hemisphere!

The Timing Is Right For Canada: Due to the activity in the last year with the Occupy movement, the Quebec student movement and the growing grassroots discontent with the activity of the Harper government as well as the activity that is coalescing around pipeline, tanker and Tar Sands expansion, the seeds of discontent have been sown. The timing is right to start building the infrastructure and processes that are necessary to connect the various movements across BC and the rest of the country.

WHAT IS THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM?

The genesis of the WSF was the participatory budgeting process, an experiment in civic governance that is in place in Porto Allegre, Brazil. This, in turn, was inspired by the Real Utopias conference in 2001 in Madison, Wisconsin. In its essence, the genesis of the WSF was the realization of the need to put power back in the hands of the people.[2] We can also understand it as the first time that to global streams; the movement against neoliberalism and the movement against imperialism converged.[3] This included mobilizations against the World Economic Forum.[4]

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[1] It is beyond the scope of this document to extend further arguments. We trust that people's intuitions will confirm this assertion.
[2] (James, 2009, p. 205)
[3] (Vanaik, 2009, p. 247)
[4] (Brunelle, 2009, p. 259)

It has now become an annual gathering, the inception of which was in Porto Allegre, Brazil. It has since also spawned a number of different regional gatherings. Details can easily be found on the Internet.[5]

WHY ORGANIZE THE CANADA-QUEBEC-INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' SOCIAL FORUM?

The organization of the Canada-Quebec-Indigenous Peoples' Social Forum (CSF) has to be understood from both a Canadian and global perspective that provides a context for all associated regional organizing. The following are excerpts from various arguments in support of the WSF. These arguments provide the rationale for national and regional processes as well.

The **principled rationale** for moving forward with the WSF process both at a regional and a local level is summed up nicely as follows: *"The goal is radical transformation of the capitalist system. The destruction of the planet and of millions of human beings, the individualist and consumerist culture that accompanies and nourishes this system, along with its imposition by imperialist powers are no longer tolerable, since **what is at stake is the existence of humanity itself."** (World Forum for Alternatives, 2009, p. 343)

We also note that '*There are feminist movements, ecological movements and many more. These movements are **highly fragmented**, in the sense that they are mostly national-based, or, in many cases, local-based. Most deal with a single issue or with a single dimension of the problem, without articulating it into an overall political project.* (Sridhar, 2009, p. 3)'

Furthermore, *'The **crisis of legitimacy** refers to the increasing inability of the neoliberal ideology that underpins today's global capitalism to persuade people of its necessity and viability as a system of production, exchange and distribution... The institutions that serve as global capitalism's system of global economic governance – the IMF, World Bank and the WTO – have been the most negatively affected by this **crisis of legitimacy** and thus stand exposed as the weak link in the system*.' (Bello, 2009, p. 11)

If we are to get serious about actually winning this battle we need to realize that *'The key to addressing such problems lies **precisely in grassroots, internationally linked action** that goes beyond periodic meeting stalking.'* (Beecher, 2009, p. 15) *'Only by **building synergies and solidarity beyond geographical and regional borders** is it possible to find methods of action that can lead to real alternatives in this globalized world*.' (World Forum for Alternatives, 2009, p. 347)

The strategies that we develop also need to account for the current stage of capitalism; one that has shrunk the globe and concentrated capital flows in an unprecedented manner. Specifically *'**Capital has never managed to exert such absolute and limitless power across the planet.**.. Never before has there been such a dense network of international institutions – like the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO – destined to control, govern and administer the life of humanity according the strict rules of the capitalist free market...'* (Lowy, 2009, p. 21)

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[5] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Social_Forum

We must bring all of those working in various different movements together so as to be able to *'... go beyond episodic encounters among the movements, to construct a deeper political debate, to **establish horizontal structures that facilitate exchange and common actions**, and to extend the reach of the movements in all continents.'* (Escobar, Other Worlds Are (Already) Possible: Self-Organization, Complexity, And Post-Capitalist Cultures', 2009, p. 400)

In summary the reason to continue the WSF process is to find ways to bring different movements together such that areas of alignment can be explored and contexts can be created where areas of convergent action can germinate.

What is required, therefore, is the convergence of a number of different movements in the same physical space. This model gives rise to various tensions and the need to balance different priorities.

WHAT TENSIONS EXIST IN SPACES WHERE WE AIM TO BRING TOGETHER DIFFERENT MOVEMENTS?

The following are a summary of issues that, no doubt, we will need to contend with:

Forum as an Open Space versus Forum as a Movement

Within those that have been involved within the WSF from its inception, there is an ongoing debate as to whether the WSF should be thought of as an Open Space or as a movement. First we might consider...

What is an Open Space?: "*The World Social Forum is an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism...*" (Principles, 2009, p. 69)

Sen says: *'It's an open forum, and in that there's a commitment to its openness, to the participatory nature of it, to open democracy... This is a fundamental working assumption of participants at the Forum...'* (Sen, 2009, p. 169)

What is a Movement? '*A movement congregates people – its activists... who decide to organize themselves to collectively accomplish certain objectives. Its formation and existence entails the definition of strategies to reach these objectives, the formulation of actions programmes, and the distribution of responsibilities among its members.'* (Whitaker, 2009, p. 82) Teivanen suggests that 'Once *reasonably transparent and democratic mechanisms have been established, the WSF could more legitimately start expressing itself as a collective movement.'* (Teivainan, 2009, p. 99)

Once might ask: why is it important that the WSF remain an Open Space? Similarly, what is the impetus for it to be a movement? What is incontrovertible is that the participants in the WSF are movements, activists and others that are taking concrete action in the world. They are movement builders! If there is any rationale for the WSF remaining an Open Space it is because of the realization that the Open Space concept is what is most functional when bringing different movements together in the same place.

Why might an Open Space be the best context to bring different movements together? In short because the activity of bringing different movements together gives rise to different 'tensions' that arise due to the disparity in values, priorities, concepts of the change process, sensitivities to power dynamics, culture etc. Bringing together different movements gives rise to a particular set of problems that are not faced (at least to the same degree) in the formation of a 'single movement'.

Structural/Theoretical Challenges To Open Space Concept: Dowling says: *'It is precisely because the space is articulated as some sort of non-partisan space (whether it can or should be non-partisan is another question) that it is an opportunity for people with power and money to monopolise that process. In that moment, self-organisation backfires because those with more money are able to put on bigger events.'* (Emma Dowling, 2009, p. 214)

Hierarchical versus Bottom Up/Self Organizing Decision Processes

Whitaker also goes on to suggest that *'A space has no leaders.'* (Whitaker, 2009, p. 89) Irrespective of whether or not this statement is true, it does reveal the central challenge: how to create a space that can satisfy a wide range of movements with different priorities, each with strong leaders, representing different regions of the world etc? What is implied is that the best way to do this is to use non-hierarchical, 'leaderless' decision making processes.

In the specific case of the WSF, the primary organizing responsibility falls on the International Council. This is a small group (presumably largely consisting of founders of the WSF) that assumes responsibility for developing the program, identifying key speakers etc.

Of course those that favour a more decentralized approach do so because of a realization that *'... the WSF is bound to encounter (organizational problems) in its process of geographical and thematic expansion... too much control by the IC and the Secretariat is bound to limit... creativity...'* (Teivainan, 2009, p. 98)

In developing our decision making and organizational processes, we will need to balance the functional utility of more hierarchical command and control structures with the need to empower a wide range of participants and organizations; to create a culture of trust and cooperation.

Transparency of Information versus Closed Information Flow

Closely related to the question of hierarchy is the question of information flow. Since time immemorial, control of information has been used as a means to centralize power. In the world where we live in today, where capturing, representing and redistributing information has never been easier, there is no excuse for the absence of transparency.

We can now benefit from the functional utility of hierarchical command and control decision mechanisms while at the same time mitigating against mistrust which evolves when information is unavailable. Simple practices like the practice of taking and posting detailed minutes in all meetings can go a long way to preventing problems.

Forum as Event versus Forum as Process

Burch says that *'... if it is to retain this essence, it cannot become reduced to the coordination of disconnected events, redesigned each time like a new experiment. It is time now to invest in the idea of forum as process....'* (Burch, 2009). This insight is related to the question as to whether the WSF should consider itself an Open Space or a Movement of Movements as it raises the question of continuity.

To date there the WSF has consisted of a series of large annual events that are complemented by a number of smaller regional events.

It seems appropriate to ask:

- What is the relationship between the various activities within an event*?*
- Are outputs from one event used as inputs for others?
- What is the connection between local, regional, national and global activity
- Are we building collective momentum in a manner that will enable us to develop sufficient power (either within or extrinsic to the existing political and institutional structures) to give us as sense as to how we can win the larger struggle?
- Is there continuity between and across events?

NGO Lead versus Grassroots Lead... the role of money and the abuse of power?

Representatives of the organizing committee of the US Social Forum said *that '... some key sectors of movements in the US were not represented strongly, particularly faith-based networks and the environmental conservation movement, and also the larger national and international non-governmental organizations* (Guererro, 2009, p. 316)*'.* This was because the organizers had prioritized *'... focusing on grassroots people of colour groups at the base as our key constituency to organize* (Guererro, 2009, p. 315)*'*

The issues and decisions that were involved in organizing the US Social Forum are not specific to that particular event. These tensions, I am sure, exist in all spaces that aim to bring together as wide a group of movement participants as follows. The issues break down, roughly, as follows:

1. We want as many 'movement' participants as possible so as to build as broad and diverse a space/movement as possible.
2. This is, in part, rationalized by the realization/claim that we need to harness as much people power as possible if we are to tackle the extraordinary power of the global capitalist machine.
3. In building this broad set of structures, we need to organize large events and processes like the WSF. This requires resources.
4. Hence, there are now two fundamental reasons to include NGO's; resources as well as the widening of the tent
5. The problem: the role that money plays in decision making and power structures can be problematic. Those with the money tend to be the ones that can organize the largest events, tend to have influence with respect to who speaks etc.
6. Due to the fact that the target is, ultimately, the negative influence of money, corporations etc... and the way that this set of institutions and related thought processes conspire to create a

valueless world; activists and revolutionaries are, naturally, hyper-sensitive to these influences. Influences that can be characterized as *abuses of power*.

The result of this is a deeper tension that is ideologically based and leads to very real difficulties for organizers.

Profiling Stars versus Local Organizers... the challenges are all interrelated

Osterweil says that *'Many people from various geographical and political backgrounds have criticized the Forum for a series of formal or organisational problems that they believe make it an undemocratic space. These problems include lack of transparency in decision making, hierarchical organization, as well as special treatment of celebrities and the creation of elitist tiers that privilege the more well known and consolidated components of the movement over many of the smaller and more grassroots and perhaps more radical organizations.'* (Osterweil, 2009, p. 146)

As we see, the issue of who gets the highest profile is not an issue that we can distinguish from the issue of the hierarchical nature of the decision making structures nor from the role of money. The navigation of these issues is extraordinarily complex and the best we can do at this stage is to identify them; to bring them to light as problems/tensions that we need to collectively navigate. Those that are in positions of power; that are in positions of privilege within our own revolutionary community need to recognize this privilege and learn to operate from articulated positions of principle.

Those in positions of power in our own organizing circles must be vigilant with respect to their own behaviour and must no abuse this power.

Centralized Messaging/Outcomes versus Decentralized Messaging/Outcomes... a Basis of Unity?

Teivanen says: *'I personally sense that there are increasing pressures to overcome the current reluctance to issue political statements.... Many in the governing bodies of the WSF, however, tend to conclude that the WSF should not plan to become a political actor since it does not have internal procedures or democratic collective will formation.'* (Teivainan, 2009, p. 99)

Another central issue that speaks directly to the initial questions as to whether the WSF should be a Space or a Movement is the question as to whether it should attempt to generate unified outcomes. Those who favour the Open Space approach reject the call for a unified message, preferring to see the WSF function more as an incubator and networking space.

Those that view the WSF more as a movement building space lean towards the formation of 'Bases of Unity'. In point of fact, the WSF does have guiding principles and the various regions do, from time to time, issue documents (such as the Bamako Appeal and the Call of Social Movements). There is a sense that the WSF is something unique and that it is both necessary and appropriate to have some documents that describe this uniqueness.

The question that remains to be answered is: to what extent should processes be implemented to attempt to align the activity and focus of existing movements? Do we see the 'harnessing of people power as requiring the collective development of specific strategies, events and so on? Does this give us a better chance of winning?

The Privileging of the 'Center' versus the 'Marginalization' of Periphery

Osterweil suggests that there is a tendency *'... to perpetuate the marginalisation of the peripheries and the privileging of the centre* (Osterweil, 2009, p. 99)*.* I raise this issue after introducing ideas around hierarchy and decentralization to identify the way that power expresses itself in the ways in which we organize. To the extent that information flows to the 'center'... To the extent to which it is at the 'center' that the action happens, we instinctively privilege this position. It is, therefore, incumbent upon those that are at the center to remain vigilant in respect to these patterns and to do whatever is necessary to mitigate against these effects.

Inclusive Participation versus Restricted Participation... the question of boundaries

Jai Sen notes that *'The WSF is showing distinct signs of behaving like a tightly controlled corporation, a movement, or an institutionalized religion. This is reflected by, among other things, a growing discourse of 'we' and 'they' in the WSF International Council and its counterpart bodies at national levels... The WSF is therefore gradually becoming a place only for gatherings of the committed and converted.* (Sen, 2009)*.*

Again, the deeper question is whether what we are trying to create is a space simply for dialogue amongst existing movements in order to explore areas if intersection or whether we see this as a larger movement building process that admits of grey areas and ambiguities and therefore is open to participation from potentially dissenting voices.

Of course, those that recently have had experience with the Occupy movement understand that even though it is, in principle, wonderful to have maximally open group boundaries, it becomes very difficult to work effectively without some constraints since, unfortunately, not everyone participates with a spirit of positive intention. Revolutionaries need to be able to contend with infiltrators and disruptors.

That said, victory will require developing converts. It will require engaging people and organizations that may have conflicting views in deeper dialogue with a view to winning them over. It is not sufficient to preach to the converted. Navigation of this tension is complex but necessary!

Local versus Regional versus Global

An essential element in the rationale and associated strategy involved in bringing different movements together is that *'... no single movement can "see the whole" (e.g for an Italian movement it is hard to see the complexity of a local movement in a Colombian rainforest, and for both, hard to see the complexity that their combined action might create)... But the fact that there are globally emergent forms of behaviour affects what particular movements think and do.'*[6]

The question remains as to how to do this. What processes can we create to increase the levels of awareness of the Intersectionality of movements? What can we do to increase levels of solidarity across movements?

What specific structures and processes can we develop to ensure that movements understand their global and historical contexts while, at the same time, not losing focus on their local struggle?

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[6] (Escobar, Other Worlds Are (Already) Possible: Self-Organization, Complexity, And Post-Capitalist Cultures', 2009)

WHAT ASSUMPTIONS/PREMISES ARE MADE IN DEVELOPING THE STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The assumptions describe the authour's most fundamental commitments. We might say that it describes ones 'theory of change'. Especially in this context where we are working on bringing diverse perspectives and interests together, identifying ones assumptions is essential. It would, in fact, behoove all movement builders to closely examine the basis for their own claims.

Harnessing 'People Power' (mass mobilization) Is A Necessary Condition for Victory

It is assumed that the primary source of our power is 'people power'; strength in numbers. It is further assumed that this power, if it is to be of the form that can give rise to effective change processes, needs to be harnessed/channeled in some way. We must be able to rally hundreds of thousands of people into the streets! We must be able to mobilize hundreds of thousands of people to vote for a particular political party! We must be able to call a National General Strike! We must be able to call a Global General Strike!

None of this is possible unless we can align our intentions in a manner that leads to coordinated activity which leads to the idea that...

Developing a Basis of Unity Strongly Supports the Harnessing of People Power

In short, movements do a very good job of identifying their own principles that underlie and give force to their particular struggle. What is missing, and is of central importance, in a space that aims to bring together different movements, is a discussion focused on areas of alignment and convergence.

Movements, by their very nature, need to articulate their own contrast position. They must define what they stand for and what they do not. This a necessary condition for the formation of internal solidarity. This, of course, leads to a well articulated 'discourse of difference'... or what one might call sectarianism. It is a natural outcome of the movement building process and not something we need to fear. It is, however, not the only discourse that needs to be perpetuated.

In conjunction with articulating our differences, we must also articulate our points of convergence!

The Basis of Unity is not merely a document, but a commitment to a process. The content of a Basis of Unity could contain ideological elements (to fight neoliberalism, for example), but if it is to have force, it must contain strategic and tactical content. It must, specifically, describe the actual actions that partner groups are willing to stand together on. It must, therefore, be grounded in practical applications of solidarity.

There Are Always Power Structures, Hierarchies, 'Leaders'

In contrast to Chico Whitaker's claim that *'A space has no leaders'* (Whitaker, 2009, p. 83). I believe that an idealized notion of a 'leaderless open space' is not pragmatically useful as there are always those that make certain decisions. Someone needs to book the space, arrange the tables, develop the program and so on. There are always those that assume this responsibility to act first. They may (and should) act

consultatively and transparently, but they still play a leadership role. In practice, therefore, certain decisions will be made without consultation; certain people will have more power than others.

In support of this idea, Darling says: *'I say 'open space' is a logical misnomer because to declare a space in which power doesn't exist is impossible. If we understand power as being a relation and as something that permeates our relations, then power never goes away. Power is not a commodity that you can leave at the door; it comes with you in your spaces. Through your interactions with other people.'* (Emma Dowling, 2009, p. 215).

The first step is to recognize the essential nature of hierarchy and leadership. This, in itself is not the problem. It is those that abuse this privilege that create problems.

Organizing Structure and Processes Are Intrinsically Political: institutionalize power structures

Osterweil says that *'... institutional structures, meeting process and daily elements of living are inherently political and constitute critical points for elaborating effective opposition practices.. Today many actors working to change the world have still not realized that if they truly hope to combat neolibberalism and oppression... They have to realize that how panels are formatted, decisions made, and inclusion/exclusion enacted are themselves powerful political acts'* (Osterweil, 2009, p. 149)

We must, therefore, be collectively vigilant about our own practices and the roles that we have within organizational contexts.

Transparency Is Good

Albert *says 'Another attribute of forums worldwide, more in evidence the more local they are, is accountability and transparency. Local organizers are generally well known to the people participating and attending.'* (Albert, 2009, p. 363) Implicit in this claim is that transparency is something that is positive. If so, there is no reason not to maximize it by developing process such as consistent minute taking, posting of minutes in centralized locations etc.

Authenticity is Good

What we strive for is clear alignment between what WSF claims to be and what it actually is. Recognizing that this idealized end is not achievable, it is essential to:

- Clearly identify the Tensions and Challenges we face
- Develop Processes that are designed to identify and contend with issues that arise. In other words we need to ensure that *self critique is institutionalized*

KEY CONCEPTS, PRIORITIES AND PROCESSES

Given Our Current Technological Landscape….Reconstitute/Redefine Notion of Space… incorporate technology into the DNA of our organizational/institutional structures

The deeper intuitions that underlie modern movement building models has to be a realization that the Internet and associated communications technologies are changing the very nature of space. If we think about space as that within which we can see people, hear people and, therefore, communicate with people, it is clear that the world we live in is fundamentally different than any time in the past. Waterman says: *'The WSF uses the media, culture and cyberspace. But it does not think of itself in cultural/communicational terms, nor does it live fully this increasingly central and infinitely expanding universe.'* (Waterman, 2009, p. 118).

Stephanson *says 'What has been practically absent from debates about the WSF and the concept of the public sphere (which I have examined in more detail* here*) is a concern with the role of media and communication... The crucial point here is that shared communication activists – many of whom are organically linked to the movements they report on - see themselves as acting together with rather than simply disseminating information about the movements that participate in the WSF.* **In such a conception, communication and mobilisation for collective action are two sides of the same coin,** *forming a mutually reinforcing relationship captured eloquently by the motto "communicate to mobilise to communicate" '* (Stephanson, Oct. 3, 2012).

Communication is both intrinsic to the movement building process as to our current highly networked historical context (facebook, Twitter, Youtube...). We need to recognize that technology is intrinsically embedded in our communication and interaction patterns in a manner that serves to bridge geographic boundaries and therefore change the nature of how we stand in relation to each other.

Practically speaking, what this means is that *we integrate alternative media strategies into the core of our organizing structures and processes*. This provides a number of different possibilities:

Extend the Reach of Events: sessions can be livestreamed, content can be recorded and redistributed.

Decentralization: Due to online tools, there is no reason that we can't organize activity remotely with participants making contributions as and when they have the time.

More Planning Lead Time: The ability to stay connected at a distance provides more lead time for those planning activity.

Connecting the Regional To Global Events: we could, for example, organize solidarity activity in different regions and connect the activity to the global event via communications technologies.

 Continuity Between Events: Since we have the ability to create platforms that sustain dialogue, as well as capture photos and video, we can ensure that the activity at a particular Social Forum persists after the event has concluded.

Build Convergence Processes: In actual fact, the logistical complexity, in conjunction with the tensions previously identified make it very hard to have substantive conversations that involve lots of

stakeholders in a very short period of time. If, however, the dialogue can be sustained over months or even years, deeper areas of alignment can be developed.

A related notion is...

Visibility Into Entire Movement... explicit global consciousness

A central feature of modern movements, from the Arab Spring to the Indiginados to Occupy to the Quebec movements to the anti-austerity marches in Europe is the utilization of technology and rich media to document and represent the movement both back to itself as well as to the rest of the world.

Simply put, we live in an where iPhones and Facebook are ubiquitous. Furthermore, the utilization of Twitter to disseminate movement information is a story well told. It is time for modern movement builders to explicitly develop processes that are in tune with the tools available to us. These tools serve to reduce hierarchies and add enormous capability both to organize as well as to stay in tune with activity in other locations.

Solidarity

Solidarity is much talked about in movement building circles and is without question one of the most important principles for movement organizers. Some discussion about this concept is, however, warranted. What do we mean precisely? Here are a few possibilities:

Solidarity As A Contrast to Competition: The first principle of the Bamaako appeal says: *'Construct a world founded on the solidarity of human beings and peoples. Our epoch is dominated by the imposition of competition among workers, nations and peoples. However, historically the principle of solidarity has played a role much more conducive to the efficient organisation of intellectual and material production. We want to give to this principle of solidarity the place it deserves and diminish the role of competition.'* (World Forum for Alternatives, 2009, p. 344)

Unity in Difference: Osterweil says in respect to analyses of the forum: '*Instead of explaining the political trajectories and projects of these alternative actors, writing positively about them, their histories, and their ideas – in other words, rather than making them visible on their own terms – we have tended to write as if the Forum, and the movement of which it is a part, has a more important central part, and it is a single unified entity.'* (Osterweil, 2009, p. 150)

The key idea is that we must find ways to recognize and honour the diversity of perspectives and approaches and still recognize that we are a part of a larger singular struggle. This might, at times, involve standing with those that you have significant ideological differences with.

Dowling underscores this perspective when she says: *'... I feel there is a tendency to universalize the subjectivity of people involved with the WSF movement. We tend to say that we see ourselves as all being a part of the same movement or having the same enemy... and within that there seems to be very little space to understand how we as individuals with our different locations, struggles, and subjectivities come together or conflict; and how to work through that if we're going to get anywhere beyond fictional solidarities, statements of intent or lowest common denominator politics... On the one hand we*

celebrate our diversity and multiplicity and we see that as our strength (and sometimes our problem): but on the other, what permeates that is actually a denial of difference...' (Emma Dowling, 2009, p. 217)

Solidarity Requires Dialogue: True solidarity cannot be developed without specific processes in support of its development. It requires deep dialogue that is rooted in empathy. To that end Rebick suggests that *'A break with the sectarian bickering of the past is no doubt desperately needed but there is also a need to learn how to constructively debate and discuss difference.'* (Rebick, 2009, p. 310)

Dialogue Requires A Process of Translation: De Sousa Santos advances a Theory of Translation suggesting *that 'Translation is the procedure that allows for mutual intelligibility among experiences of the world.'* (Santos, 2009, p. 384). I have suggested that deeper dialogue is necessary, but what exactly does that mean? Of course there needs to be deeper discussion, but this discussion must be entered into with a view to truly understanding the perspective of others. One must, so to speak, be willing to 'walk in another person's shoes'. This will require translation, quite literally since differences can reside in the understanding of various terms that are a part of our discourse. Terms such as 'environmental justice', 'climate justice' and, even, 'solidarity' require deeper examination.

When we consider that the WSF process is transnational, and we have to incorporate differences in cultural perspective, language etc, the issue of translation can be understood literally.

Dialogue

Sen says that *'The real "success" of the Forum is that it is making possible a scale of talking across boundaries that has rarely been dreamt of before, and contributing to building a culture of open debate across conventional walls.'*[7]

Persistent Dialogue: Without question nothing happens if we don't talk to each other. Notwithstanding Sen's comments, the limited scope and timeframe of a WSF event limits the possibilities for longer term, more sustained dialogue. Fortunately, modern communications tools make it possible for us to create platforms that enable dialogue to be sustained over time and across geographic boundaries. The 2012 Thematic Social Forum is an example of what is possible.[8] We, collectively, need to place dialogue at the heart of the enterprise and explore ways that conversations can be started and maintained.

Commence Dialogue On the Basis of Unity: Beaudet says *that 'The idea of social movements coming together, strategising together (without a pre-established blueprint), avoiding unnecessary sectarian strife, and above all resisting subordination to narrow political platforms, was somehow natural.' (Beaudet, 2009, p. 335).* Notwithstanding the challenges of building Solidarity just discussed, I want to suggest that developing processes where participants deeply engage in developing a Basis of Unity is essential to building a broader, more inclusive, movement.

Commence Dialogue on Solidarity: As outlined above, the principle of solidarity is central for movement builders. As a consequence, commencing a dialogue on the topic of solidarity is essential.

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[7] (Sen, 2009), p. 164
[8] http://rio20.net/en/iniciativas/thematic-social-forum-capitalist-crisis-social-and-environmental-justice

Transparency, Trust and Cultural Formation

A little talked about phenomena in movement building is the fact that, regardless of the context in which one is operating; whether one aims to bring together those with environmental concerns or social justice concerns; whether we are building a coalition of organizations or trying to bring organizations together with grassroots groups, ultimately the interaction can be reduced to interpersonal exchanges between people that need to develop trust with each other.

One simple way to accelerate the development of trust within a group is to maximize transparency. This is accomplished by ensuring minutes are posted, decisions are made in meetings and not behind closed doors etc.

Another way to make this point is to remind ourselves that we need to balance operational efficiency and the adherence to rules with a commitment to developing the right culture within our organizing circles.

Convergence

The WSF, whether it likes it or not, is a movement building space that utilizes the principle of convergence. It does so by inviting large numbers of disparate groups to a singular location. There might be differences of opinion as to how this single location should be structured and what it should focus on, but that it is convergence process is not in question.

Since this is so, it needs to more deeply examine what, more broadly, should converge as well as what can be done in between convergences to ensure the success of a particular convergence event. Here are a few questions for consideration:

1. Should we create a Basis of Unity?
2. Should we attempt to create unified policy positions?
3. Should we create a centralized location for information?
4. Should we create a centralized platform such dialogue generated during the event can persist?
5. Should we generate outputs from one event and use them as inputs to another event?
6. Should we aim to create a centralized brand that is then actively represented?

Of course, the question that will need to be navigated is how, precisely, can messages be unified while, at the same time recognizing the absolute necessity for different groups to maintain their autonomy of messaging. This is the practical question that we must answer?

Being Open To Renewal is essential – the creation of new models that recognize our historical context

Waterman says that *'In Florence, young libertarians were grumbling and mumbling 'Another Forum Is Possible.' This possibility is not only a matter of information and communication technology. It may be the combination, precisely, of this with youth-given that at least urban kids are growing up with cellular phones, playing arcade computer games, and therefore with an affinity for other computer technology...'*
(Waterman, 2009, p. 124)

We need to be willing to discard existing models and embrace completely innovative approaches including the technology driven initiatives that have proven very successful in recent modern movements.

Process and Structure, not Ideology, Mitigates Against Hierarchies

One approach to thinking about what the priorities should be for the event/process we are developing is to *'... operate on the assumption that no one could, or probably should, ever convert another person completely to one's own point of view, that decision-making structures are ways of managing diversity, and therefore, that one should concentrate instead on maintaining egalitarian processes and considering immediate questions of action in the present.'* (Graeber, 2009, p. 370)' On a related note...

We can make grandiose statements that are encoded in various Statements of Principle, but the devil is in the details... true change will only take place if we pay very close attention to how we do things!

Prioritize Process Over Outcomes

Graeber says that *'... ones means must be consonant with ones ends; one cannot create freedom through authoritarian means; that as much as possible, one must embody the society one wishes to create.'* (Graeber, 2009, p. 373). James says *'... we actually need to think not only how to confront global capitalism but also how to organise our every-day lives differently.'* (James, 2009, p. 225)

This is a restatement of the previous suggestion. Of course we must recognize that we have collective objectives; we must engage in dialogue; we must work towards the formation of a Basis of Unity. All of this is necessary, but none of it will take shape in the way we envision if we are not vigilant about how we do things and the ways that power is encoded in our structures and processes.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Demonstrate the World We Want To Create

This might be the single most important strategic focus. Here are what a few authours have had to say on the matter:

'But the three essentials running through all manifestations of anarchist ideology are definitely there. These are anti-statism, anti-capitalism and pre-figurative politics (in other words modes of organisation that deliberately demonstrate the world you want to create; or..."an effort to think of not only the ideas but the facts of the future itself"' (Grubacic, 2009, p. 41) *'... after all, the kind of world we want to create can only arise out of organisational structures that mimic and set a blueprint for future society.'* (Farrer, 2009, p. 139)

New models try to conceive *'... new institutions and new political forms for activism and for a new society, including new ways of meeting, new ways of decision making, new ways of coordinating...'* (Grubacic, 2009, p. 42)

'*For example, at a Saturday morning workshop in the Laborotorio, Masco, a member of the Argentinian Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados (MTD) emphasized the importance of such micro-politics. He recounted how becoming unemployed, and thereby experiencing a total rejection by the capitalist system, radically shifted the political outlook and praxis of his group. It forced them to realize that in order to be truly and "radically opposed to capitalism" they needed to think beyond traditional organizational forms like unions and political parties, they needed to promote "another way of living". This meant producing "new practices, and new social relations" that worked against the pursuit of power and against inclusion into the capitalist system.*' (Osterweil, 2009, p. 148)

'*The Left, the socialist movement (including the Marxists) have learned a great deal from women's movements in our countries and all over the world. They now tend to combine social activities with political, economic, religious, historical, and other activities.*' (Saadawi, 2009, p. 106)

It cannot be emphasized enough that this is a cultural battle as much as anything else; a battle against a culture where power is abused and where the conditions for the abuse of power are institutionalized through our legal system, the political process and most organizational models. We need to, therefore, as a part of our change processes, be vigilant about our own conduct. We need to recognize when we, as individuals and organizations, are perpetrating the very sorts of injustices we are fighting.

Focus On Mobilizing Around Anti-Harper/Anti-Austerity Agenda

One obvious possibility that could motivate a large number of organizations to participate would be to organize a national campaign targeted at the Harper government. Of course this strategy is partisan, which is, in theory, in conflict with the stated Principles of the WSF. That said, I don't think that it follows from this strategy that we need allow the participation of political parties.

Explore Direct Democracy Models in Conjunction With CLASSE

If the larger objective is to envision 'Another World', it is clear that one important aspect of what we need to envision are alternatives to Representative Democracy in its current form. Since the grassroots direct democracy models of CLASSE have proven effective in massively mobilizing, it is only natural that we explore the practical possibilities for Direct Democracy as well as its limits.

For what sorts of decisions are directly democratic models most appropriate?

What infrastructure (technology and otherwise) is necessary to make this models are realistic possibility?

Centralize Information Flow

As outlined in the Tensions section of this document there are a nexus of concerns relating to the centralization of decision making, control of information flow and openness of participation. Many movement builders embrace principles of horizontal decision making, maximizing the participation of many groups, hearing many different voices and so on.

The problem lies in the facts of what the WSF is... a logistically complex convergence of a myriad of different people, organizations, cultures, movements, priorities etc. This logistical complexity requires decision making processes and models that are efficient. The reality is that, from a decision making

standpoint, hierarchical models work well. Decisions are made quickly and can be implemented in a timely fashion.

Modern communications technologies make it possible to centralize information flow, and thereby mitigate against some of the non-transparency concerns. It also makes it possible for people to participate in decisions, at least to a limited extent, at a distance.

Decentralize Decision Making

To whatever degree possible, decentralize decision making authority. This could be to Working Groups that are formed to solve specific problems of organize particular aspects of a larger initiative. To the extent to which Working Groups operate transparently (by reporting minutes to a centralized website, for example), transparency and accountability to the larger group is maintained.

The decentralization of decision making power also obviously mitigates against the issues of centralization of power within the organizing group.

Embrace Technology[9]

A few additional considerations...

- Centralize WSF Communication from Regions
- Connect Regions to Global 'Core
- Make Events 'Persist in Time'

Recognize the Need for the Development of New Institutional and Governance Models

It's important to note that a significant contributor to the problem (if not the problem itself) are the current institutional models that are in place. Simplistically, we can point to the *corporation*, for example, as a structure that is structured in such a way that important human values (respect for the planet etc) are outside of its purview. *NGO's* also, in many instances, don't operate from a movement building perspective which requires a recognition of a larger context; the subordination, in some cases, of internal missions to the collective good.

Similarly, *representative democracy*, is failing us in many ways, with politicians substantially overstepping their bounds with little concern for accountability to their base.

As Grubacic says: The new world *'... tries to conceive new institutions and new political forms for activism and a new society, including new ways of meeting, new ways of decision making, new ways of coordinating and so on...'* (Grubacic, 2009, p. 42)

Movement builders who focus on front line resistance need to incorporate those that are thinking about new institutional models into their conversations... after all, the goal is to build *'another world!'*

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[9] As outlined in the Priorities and Processes section of this document

Develop Strategies That Engages Both NGO's and Grassroots Groups

The role of money in the functioning of NGO's creates a significant tension in structures that are explicitly anti-capitalist. That said, the reality is that substantial resources are required if we are going to be able to organize large convergence events like the WSF. This makes the participation of NGO's if not necessary, at least highly desirable.

Furthermore, as Furrer says *'... it was the grassroots that were forcing the leadership into more radical positions as it saw itself superseded by a growndswell of radicalism*.' (Farrer, 2009, p. 141) As identified previously, the best course of action is to be transparent about this tension and the potential issues that might arise.

That this tension exists is something we need to confront. If we are to forge a way forward collectively, we need to identify ways of bridging this divide.

Make Visible Tensions/Contradictions/Challenges: host discussions on these particular topics

Movement building is enough of a challenge. Those that attempt to build even wider bridges by creating spaces that connect movements have to deal with another layer of challenges. The best course of action is to be explicit about the myriad of tensions; to respect the work that has preceded our current activity; to absorb the lessons of those that have preceded us.

Dowling says: '*What I find lacking is bringing it back to ourselves and who we are in that space. It becomes about something that exists outside of that space, and not something that we bring with us into that space.*' (Emma Dowling, 2009, p. 217) The point is that power relations exist within the WSF itself and that these hierarchies and potential abuses of power need to be a central feature of the process itself.

Link Local Struggles to Global Struggles Using the Internet, Video, Social Media...

Rebick says that *'The genius of the organisers of the USSF was to bring together all these local and grassroots groups in one place using the social forum open space process as a way to do it.' She also says that 'Another important feature of the forum was to link corporate globalization and war to a wide variety of local struggles.* (Rebick, 2009, p. 305)'

The larger point is that it is important to connect the dots; to connect local activity to the larger context. This becomes an increasingly important and appropriate context in the highly networked world that we live in where we are bombarded by images on facebook and Twitter, for example, with details of activity in other parts of the world.

The recent experience of Occupy which, in a very real sense, found its footing through the distribution of Youtube videos that made apparent consensus models; provided visibility into the occupations and so on shows us the power of social media to shape memes and to build global solidarity.

The power of these tools cannot be underestimated and are a unique feature of this historical context that changes the dynamics for revolutionaries.

Organize a National Day of Action Leading to Global Day of Action

Leon and Burch suggest that '*One of the greatest achievements of the World Social Forum to date has been the global day of action against the invasion of war against Iraq...*' (Burch, The World Social Forum, 2009, p. 295) More generally, setting an ambitious global target that requires the participation of large numbers of groups all over the world is, likely, the best context within which to develop the movement building structures and processes that will actually bridge the divide between movements.

Use General Assembly/Council Model To Determine High Level Strategic Decisions

The Quebec '*...programme was conceived and elaborated by three large general assemblies prior to the forum, in all comprising over 100 organisations. In the Forum itself around 5,000 participants took part. The inspiration for the decentralized format was the WSF Charter of Principles*.' (Beaudet, 2009, p. 338)

The more general principle is to create decision making models (whether they be general assemblies or not), that leave the highest level decisions (those that impact the most organizations) in the hands of the largest and most inclusive body.

KEY PROCESSES

Institutionalize Reflexivity and Self Critique

As I've mentioned a few times, the most central aspect of our struggle is against abuse of power. As a consequence, it is incumbent upon us as organizers to be vigilant about our activity; to be aware of the embedded nature of hierarchy in our organizing structures as well as the abuses of power that might result. Dowling says: 'I think it's a false dichotomy to talk about *critique and deconstruction as things that are different from reconstruction. Part of changing the world or reconfiguring social and power relations is about critique and deconstruction. It has to be an ongoing process.*' (Emma Dowling, 2009, p. 226)

We need, therefore, to be highly aware of our own conduct. In fact, we need to institutionalize Reflexivity; patterns of self awareness that are revelatory; that shed light on ways in which we oppress, marginalize, silence and judge each other.

It is especially incumbent on those that operate from positions of privilege (financial and otherwise) to place principles at the heart of their behaviour and to not be complicit in reinventing a system that we are struggling against.

This process of reflexivity is the most difficult of all challenges. As it causes us to look deeply at ourselves and our own behaviour; to understand our own motivations, weaknesses and failings and to bring them to light.

Ensure Representation/Composition of Organizing Committee is 'Balanced'

We need to ensure that in the structuring of our committees that there is proper balance; amongst movement constituents, gender, race, age etc... It is only with a properly representative group that we can ensure that all voices are heard.

Ensure Session Organization Independent of Funding Capability... centralize funding

Leon and Burch noted that *'Many of the events that got reasonable participation seemed to gain their attendance from among the faithful who were sponsored to be there – or the equivalent, those who were beneficiaries of projects. In addition, the criterion established in Nairobi that self-organised events should pay a fee based on the size of each event, without consideration of ability to pay, nor of social representation or ability to draw participation, generated a disconcerted skew in the programme.'* (Burch, The World Social Forum, 2009, p. 294)

The best way to mitigate against the influence of money in decision making is to follow a two step process:

1. Convince funders to support the larger concept
2. Leave decisions within the hands of a well defined decision making body that operates independent of funding sources

Co-organize events[10]

Another possibility is to develop a model that sits somewhere between the model of a completely open space and that of a completely hierarchically organized event is to suggest that all activities be co-organized. This forces groups to work together and to explore areas of alignment.

Ensure Regional Activity Connected to National/Global Activity

'It became clear to us that we would first have to create awareness and understanding among grassroots organisations. As we began to speak with organisations from around the country, several asked why the USSF would be different from any other national process.' (Guererro, 2009, p. 318)

If we are to motivate people to engage in yet another movement building process, it will be necessary to create context; to make people realize that the WSF is a global movement building process and that there are also national and regional processes. It is the intersection of the various processes that makes the WSF unique.

Ensure Global Processes Are Represented

A corollary to the above suggestion is to ensure that *'... there are spaces in the Forum's plenaries and other activities to acknowledge our international obligations to movement building... '* (Guererro, 2009, p. 316)

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[10] (Burch, The World Social Forum, 2009, p. 302)

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