

To WSF or not to WSF? Strategies for Change in the Global Justice Movement and the World Social Forum.

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Introduction

The present piece follows a previous report submitted to the IC before the Casablanca meeting in December 2013. That paper focused on the larger areas of convergence observed in a series of interviews that I conducted in the period October to December of 2013 with 28 members and participants of the WSF IC¹. Although the interviews were meant to elicit comments and reflections on the current state of the International Council and its possible evolution, all interviewees concentrated their considerations on larger, deeper, more compelling issues. These issues did not refer so much to the fate of an organisational body whose task was, when all was said and done, just to facilitate the work of the movements and organisations convening in the WSF. Instead, the WSF itself (and its development and changes), a much larger and meaningful process than the IC's, was the one that truly carried the aspirations and visions of its organisers and participants.

In fact, the concerns reflected in the interviews refer to even larger issues of global justice and the dynamics of the network of planetary struggles variously indicated as the alter-globalisation movement or the global justice movement. What was at the centre of the interviews was a series of detailed considerations on the history, development and possible future strategies of a more or less intentional convergence of the movements engaged the world over on bringing about radical social change. In fact, what seemed to be missed the most by the respondents was a space where to meet activists from the other movements that have recently shaken many a regional and national stages. An extensive programme of direct engagement with those movements is the first urgent interest expressed in the interviews and following on from this, reflecting together on where the alterglobalisation/global justice movement is going, what is its pace, what are its newest features and modes of organisation and action.

The premise of this paper therefore comes from such generalised observations, framed for instance as follows INT-1:

"the question of the IC as reform of the IC, change of the IC, cannot be diverse from the questions facing the forum itself. To do that separately makes no sense. (...) because if you hold it in isolation you end up holding a seminar committee which is totally diverse from the reality of the forum."

Or in other words INT-18:

"I think that the IC should ask itself the following questions: what is happening in the world? What is the state of the anti-systemic struggles? Is there anything that our network and ourselves can do to help and strengthen an anti-systemic dynamic? And what would that be? Once that is decided, then it could be decided what the forum

1 I conducted 28 (twenty-eight) interviews in the period between the 18th of October and the 9th of December. The length of the interviews varies between 52 (fifty-two) and 152 (hundred and fifty-two) minutes. For the current paper the same caveat as for the previous applies that the amount of the material collected prevents a thorough analysis given the time allowed. Moreover, although a great degree of nuance and diversity is inevitably lost in this short report, it is nonetheless possible to call attention to the following areas of convergence as highlighted in the interviews. While most of the material has been transcribed and systematised a large part of it is still in its digital format. The interviews are progressive numbered from INT-1 to INT-28.

should be and its form of facilitation could be thought of. Because I think that the IC must be a form of facilitation of the dynamic but if we have no idea what the dynamic is it becomes very difficult to decide what form of facilitation it needs and therefore we lose ourselves in fights like those about the Liaison Group. The problem is neither the design, nor the methodology."

In order to reflect on the IC within a larger and more realistic framework, one that involves itself with the current dynamics of social change occurring the world over as opposed to focus merely on its own internal workings, this paper collects views and opinions on the larger WSF process and how this intersects (or misses important meeting points with) the various instances of social activism across the planet. Such instances are not only the much discussed and written about Occupy, Indignados, Greek anti-austerity and Idle no More movements, or the Chilean student movement and the Indian anti-corruption movement, or even the more recent Turkish, Brazilian and Ukrainian protests but also the innumerable and less media glamorous instances of community based activism taking place daily and in a sustained fashion at the four corners of the globe. In fact, it has been noted that while protests constitute perhaps the tip of the iceberg the millions of social change actors struggling daily in their communities constitute the core and the ideal referent of the WSF. However, these courageous and indefatigable actors have been often forgotten in the organisational frenzy of the global WSF events. Sometimes this has been due to the lack of creative ways to engage actors who often prefer to invest their limited resources in local activities rather than to travel far and wide for world activist congresses (however useful and uplifting those may be). But resources are not the only reason why this encounter has often not happened, cultural, social and political reasons have contributed to create a growing hiatus that is challenging the foundations and the legitimacy of the WSF project as a whole.

These ideas have been formulated, for instance, in the following way by INT-16: "some of these things are true about the forum and the IC therefore, that it's got to be configured consciously to my mind in ways so that the forum or the forums themselves and the IC is as geared as possible towards those grassroots community based movements including the new movements that represent both citizens voices, popular voices, pushing a radical agenda but who are at the same time engaged in, as those community-based groups tend to be, in day-to-day real struggles for improvements of their communities. So they are doing two things at once, they are trying to improve people's lives in a very direct sense today while also pushing for this deeper systemic change and so I think the forum to the extent that the forum became (...) an NGO space for the NGOs, and didn't have the vibrancy of those voices and that's why for me Belem was so important because it had these different sectors coming in and really shifting the agenda and (...) shaking people up and help people rethink things... everybody including people working on trade and people working on various issues after Belem they (...) started taking into account the whole indigenous multiple ways of knowing, multiple wisdoms... just a whole different approach to things."

Whereas to me statements like the previous (recurring in the interviews and framed in these terms but also adding often further and different layers of complexity and analysis) point at a model example on which to reformulate the forum process (the Belem model it could perhaps be called, or even something more cumbersome and less inspiring perhaps but more descriptive like the community based model of global social change), they also indicate a deeper, a more fundamental reconsideration of the forum's culture. At the same time, and very importantly, they do this precisely from within the terms of the WSF's initial promise to re-imagine a new political culture for the radical politics of the XXI Century. In this sense, highlighting the day-to-day struggle for survival of individuals and groups and the multiple wisdoms of those communities (in this sense not only indigenous communities like it was highlighted in Belem, but all communities that struggle, often for their very survival, outside of the political and social main streams) is both inclusive and revolutionary thinking. It is so to such a radical extent that it is understood that it should deeply

inform the political culture of the WSF. In fact, that it was, in the first place, the reason for the WSF to come together around a promise to highlight difference in a climate of respect and generous mutual learning. Only by doing this the WSF can remain true to its original cultural-political vision and to its mission; a mission that was to help movements formulate shared activities by meeting in a safe space and experimenting with each other and with realities that often don't make the first pages of the global mainstream media and of which they may have never heard about or met otherwise. On these themes I shall return later in the paper. But before I proceed let me outline the structure of the discussion that follows. The paper is divided into three sections.

The **first** discusses the history of the WSF focusing on its dazzling beginnings. The interviewees often referred to those first years and to the premises that gave birth to the WSF in order to highlight how it successfully brought together decades-long experiences from movements across the globe and, at the same time, provided movements with a space that was current, useful and responded to the needs of the alter-globalisation activists. To those principles and the features of that history the interviews returned again and again to highlight that, in those instances in which the forum has lost its close touch with the world that surrounds it, it has also sometimes, perhaps, lost touch with its own history and its own values and set goals.

The **second part** of the paper reflects on how and why did the WSF lose its edge, so to say. That that may be the case doesn't often seem to be a matter of any contention. How and why did the WSF turn inwards and lost touch with the rapidly evolving world activist scene?² This seems to be the focal point and indeed the point of origin of most of the interviews. Historical periodizations and theoretical reflections on WSF's evolution are reported in passing though the wealth of material collected on this issues deserves much more attention than I can grant it in this paper.

The following and closely related question discussed in the **third part** of this paper is formulated in the following terms: How can the current political landscape and the current protest events and movements be understood? And, further, how could a global activist network be brought together intentionally to strengthen the alter-globalisation movement? Many more faces to this rough diamond of questions are added in the interviews, sometimes in tentative and exploratory manners, developing suggestive approaches to the relationship between intentional organising and horizontal organising often at the centre of heated debates in the WSF. These reflections bring together some of the core organisational and theoretical formulations developed by social movements for decades over issues of centralised versus dispersed organisation and recently brought back again to centre stage in the debates around the latest expression of contentious politics around the world. Activists and analysts reflect on the extent to which intentional organisation or facilitation (as the preferred expression among WSF activists) can or should replace current innumerable node to node interactions allowed by new Information and Communication technologies. These technologies are widely used by activists from around the world to connect with each other, learn from each other and inspire each other and are also often seen as faster and more direct (in-mediate) and therefore they best represent the demands of democracy, transparency, accountability and autonomy increasingly made by activists and central not only to their ambitions for emancipation but also to their sense of being together in their groups, in society, in the world.

In the concluding remarks of this paper some radical suggestions on the role and kind of organisation, on facilitation and leadership and on the most creative and transformative actors of change currently at work the world over will be brought to bear on reflections on what the WSF could become if it radically embraced a process of change revolving around its core values as enshrined among other things in its Charter of Principles and directly engaging the suggestions

² I did try to make sense of the mechanisms that induce and conduce large groups, given certain circumstances, to fall upon themselves when certain anxieties and insecurities build around the normally successfully engaged uncertainties of existence. I used the psychoanalytically informed theory developed by David Tuckett in his book on large groups and financial markets.

developed by current activists and movements around the world. I anticipate here that while a degree of convergence exists when it comes to local, regional and thematic forums which could and do still exploit successfully the WSF “brand”, the jury is very much out when it comes to decide if a global WSF as it used to be is still possible or at all needed by current activism for global justice.

1. The creative and transformative beginnings of the WSF

The most often quoted reason for the success of the WSF refers to three of its main features. It was a) not an abstract construction given birth to by the speculative brain of its initiators, b) its initiators brought to bear on their ideas knowledge and direct practices of movements from previous decades, from the workers movement to the independence and anti-dictatorship movements, from the anti-Vietnam war to the civil rights movement and to the wave of movements sometimes referred to as the global '68 and c) the WSF directly responded to the more recent oceanic demonstrations of the alter-globalisation movement culminating in Seattle, to the anti-debt campaign of Jubilee 2000, to the struggles against the structural adjustment programmes imposed by the International Financial Institutions and perceived as forms of a new colonialism, and to the alternative conferences to the UN summits of the 90s. This just to mention the most significant streams that converged in the WSF but if looked at in more details a much larger number of regional and local rivulets joined the WSF from a myriads of sources across the globe and across time. But given the space at my disposal here this suggestive list should suffice.

In the interviewees words, the ability shown by the WSF to create the conditions for such a wide convergence were referred for instance in the manner of the following quotes. For instance when asked if they found the WSF model radically new INT-25 responded as follows:

there is a yes and a no. No in terms of the fact that this is how the struggle for independence was... it was a collective, both men and women (...) see what I mean? So (...) when we were fighting for independence we were all in it but after independence, civil society backed off thinking there was a government who was going to act accordingly to our collective wish, so that's why I don't want to say yes. So, there is yes a bit because it is now activism not with the partisan politics (...) So that's new to start fighting within the same collective (...) you know we discovered that there are different interests also because before we all had one interest but now you see they are completely different, divergent interests which are not interacting with each other. So the social forum is providing for me that role where you are able to strategise and then keep the different interests but not at the expense of one another.

Later on the same INT-25 stresses again that the social forum process

rekindled that kind of way of looking at things, like following the same steps but this time with different interests. Before it was fighting the enemy outside but now is the enemy within and outside.

The examples of the Brazilian struggles against dictatorship, the experience with the articulation of different social forces and their convening under a unified goal while maintaining autonomy have been repeatedly in the interviews. According to INT-9:

In fact, the association in Brazil was built in the time of the resistance to fascism. And Ibase, Caritas, social justice and CUT and the MST and all these movements were in the battle against dictatorship. And then these movements were working together and they... as the PT wins the state of Rio Grande do Sul and the city of Porto Alegre and it was the first time, they said OK come to Porto Alegre and we discuss between us to know what to do. That's one of the stories of the beginning of the wsf.

These scant quotes on the history and the values that gave the forum its creative edge in the early years of the millennium will have to suffice as a mere taster, I am conscious of this, of the way in which the timeliness, the experience and the history of the WSF were perceived at its inception and how these responded to a demand that became increasingly confident in movements from the most diverse backgrounds. As I postpone to a later date a more accurate collection of stories, memories, and reflection of the years that prepared the WSF's inception, I highlight once more that the WSF's initiators' ability to listen to the demands of the alter-globalisation movement and their collective ability to join in a space of willing engagement and cumulative experience has constituted the recipe for the transformative energy that hundreds of thousands of participants from all over the world recognised in the WSF. After these scant suggestions about the character of the WSF and its historical positioning, let me turn to a rather more complex and often times deeply emotional conversation on the reasons why, at some point of the not very long yet journey, the WSF seems to have lost its original momentum and has turned inwards, quickly disappearing from the conversations of most activists and analysts.

2. When, how and why did the WSF lose its edge?

There are different opinions about when the loss of steam in the WSF process has started occurring. For some the polycentric forums of 2006 gave already a clear indication that interest in the forum was less exclusive than in previous years vis-a-vis other forms of organisation more intimately linked to locality perhaps or more traditional national political spheres. For others the controversial outcome of the Nairobi 2007 forum signalled the reaching of a climax in the contradictions the WSF had incurred in and struggled to negotiate. Others still argue that Belem 2009 showed that the WSF was not only alive but that it was still creatively proactive on a global scale. At the same time the majority of interviewees suggests that Belem might have been the last truly global in intent and scope WSF event. Dakar 2011 and Tunis 2013 (the latter even more than the former, it is claimed) would mark a new phase perhaps in the WSF process. In this, the current, phase, WSF events are more localised, decentralised, largely networked regionally but, to a certain extent, inward looking and less global in scope.

The unique circumstances of the social upheaval that the Maghreb and Mashreq regions have seen since December 2010 made thorough analyses difficult but a general sense is shared by the interviewees that, given the vibrancy and the risks faced by the movements in the region a high degree of concentration on internal questions is not only legitimate but invites strong support from allies from other regions of the planet. In fact, the consensus decision that the next global event in 2015 be held in Tunis is confirmation of this sentiment among WSF activists. Whereas an accurate investigation of the periodization of the forum process is beyond the scope of the present conversation, I will record some reflections on the lulling phase that the forum has entered sometimes recently, as the forum activists and the global justice movements entered a phase that could be indicated as the forum's doldrums³. According to INT-1:

³ I can only hint at the importance of this reference here by recalling the work by Donald Winnicott (1961. *Adolescence: struggling through the doldrums*. In *The Family and Individual Development*. London and New York, Tavistock and Routledge) and its use in social movements studies made by Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor (1995. *Survival In The Doldrums: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s*. New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press). See also Bernice Barnett 1995 *Black Women's Collectivist Movement Organizations*:

by 2007, after the polycentric forum, somehow the energies had started slugging and I don't know (...) I don't have a very clear analysis of why that was that... I'm not saying this in a negative sense but more as a historical analysis. Polycentric forums were probably... marked the beginning of the third phase which was slugging interests, with the movements really starting to disengage from the forum. That was I think also the period when (...) in India the interest started slugging, the Brazilian movements also to an extent were not as active as they were before. And probably the polycentric forums didn't work. So the kind of solidarity with which the global forums were built, I don't think the polycentric forums were able to replicate that. I think one forum that actually worked was the one in Pakistan, but that was for a very very specific reason because it was almost like you had a liberated zone within a military regime which was something very very significant for Pakistan. And then you had Kenya, again it was really a disaster.

Something new seemed to happen during the polycentric forums, something unexpected even and rather confounding indeed. As the WSF faced a slugging interest as a global convergence towards the shared strategising of movements and civil society organisations around how to bring about the other world called for in the WSF slogan, a case of remarkable regional success was recorded at the same time in Karachi. This seems to have been the beginning of a process of regionalisation of the forum to which I will return shortly below, but first let me make a brief aside here to also report at least one case (but it was not an isolated case) that reflects on something remarkable about the WSF even in Kenya. INT-5 recalls how

a lot happened in Nairobi that... and also in the middle of the camp, you know, where the WSF was taking place there was a tent for gay and lesbianism in a country where it was completely illegal. and i thought my god this is fantastic, you know... so people.. this forum because it was within the forum the authorities didn't move against it and it was one of the success stories of Nairobi.

As Nairobi proved the most controversial forum, perhaps, this analysis warns about distinctly single-minded analyses that fail to see the multiple layers that describe a forum. Such loss of perspective may indeed have caused many more unbridgeable ridges between partners and allies (past, current and potential) than any real possibility to reflect and correct strategic and organisational misjudgements. Let me return now to the previous point with a further quote on the evolution of the forum towards a more regionalised and localised in scope and aim series of events, including the latest global events. Consider INT-17's words:

I think where we'd seen more success for forums recently have been more regional. I mean, even the WSF in Tunisia (...) was an important regional gathering. (...) the forum process had been very important there... and there is... obviously the Arab Spring, the revolutions that are happening there... (...) it's an important geopolitical space right now, and the forum process has been important and helpful there. I think it's lost momentum in different places, it certainly has lost momentum in the US (...) in Europe. And I think is partly because the landscape has shifted... and so much has changed.

This wide convergence of ideas and opinions on the regionalisation of the WSF nonetheless, and the analysis that sees the current broader political phase as one of more focused local and regional politics, a parallel consideration has been developed by the interviewees that wishes to reconsider

Their Struggles during the 'Doldrums' (In Myra Ferree and Patricia Martin 1995 *Feminist organizations: Harvest of the new women's movement*. Philadelphia, Temple University Press).

the WSF, as it was its original mandate, as a space of global convergence, as a tool for movements, as a location for political and cultural experimentation. This desire is not in contradiction or in open confrontation with the current development of the WSF process. Instead, it strongly wishes to support this trend while at the same time reflect also on the possibility to reconfigure intentional convergences on a global scale of activists willing to reflect to that other possible world that is WSF activists have at heart.

In order to extend an inclusive gaze towards the current global dynamics from within the trajectory of the WSF process the vast majority of interviewees deem necessary a closer look at the origin and causes of the fall in interests by social movements and global activists in the WSF, at least in its most ambitious global form. The basic question asked here is: is the WSF form that fails to attract global activists' interest, or is it rather the global scale itself that is not recognised as useful to read the current political conjuncture and its effects on individuals and groups in their own localities? Larger in scope considerations towards answering this question are contained in the following set of reflections that consider afresh the original, enthusiastic perhaps, emotions that welcomed the birth of the WSF. I refer to these views here to introduce the reflections developed on the current state of affairs in the WSF vis-a-vis its original and perceived almost as unstoppable growth and success. How and why has the WSF lost its initial energy? In these analyses, the origin and the present lack of creativity can be framed as follows in the words of INT-16:

if you think about what brought the forum into existence after Seattle (...) it was really some key movement people saying something very simple and straightforward... we need to go wherever... we need the eyes on Davos we need the IMF and World Bank protests, we need to be where they are we need to be there to protest and contest, but we also have to have our own space... it's important for the global justice movement (...) to have a space of our own to talk about our agenda of what we want. A very simple and pragmatic looking out of the landscape and deciding that this is what would be important in this instance and it was true and it was great and it gave a phase... it did a lot. It just seems that we are not... in spite of a lot of the studies and different things we are not really stepping back almost from a clean slate and saying in 2015 given the changes in our movements in technologies in political economy... we went through the economic crisis we are going through the ecological crisis... given all of this what is it that would be the most useful to push forward the people's agenda for another world? What is it today that makes more sense? And I don't know that we are really looking at it from that perspective. Again it is the inertia of where we need to have another forum... We need to bring in the new movements, but all right we'll try to bring them in, but we're not going to change our name or change our organising models to accommodate any of that.

Here a three-pronged analysis recurring in many interviews is presented. First a strong reference is made to recalling the origins of the WSF and the reasons from the immediate enthusiastic response it received (because it responded to a very precise need of the alter-globalisation movement for a space where collectively reflect, in between actions, and gain a global perspective on its larger project of social change). Second a recognition is suggested, that the WSF has been living of a fading momentum as the reality around it changed while it continued unchanged its original dynamics of organising large global events. Third, a cautious suggestion that something radical needs to occur to bring the WSF back to its original use. For this to happen maybe a change of name, structure and mission might be necessary as an adaptive movement to the vastly changed reality that now surrounds the WSF. Let's follow for a moment longer INT-16's considerations.

I don't have any solutions to any of this but if really another world is possible, if we

really want to put that forward we really have to be a lot more sophisticated both in conceptualising what that world looks like, and we can't just be decrying the old world, and we haven't been very good at describing that new world, and in organising ourself to kind of be discussing it (...) and I don't see the IC coming anywhere near close to being able to rise to the challenge.

Reading the material I collected, a thought becomes increasingly evident that the WSF, at least at some level, may have been victim of it's own success. At the beginning, the WSF was the place to be and people would want to be in it (as in the words of an interviewee I will report shortly), so some more practical and mundane issues referring to the modalities of participation, the inclusion in the open space and the methodologies of interaction (which have become increasingly central at the same time as the WSF global process started losing steam) were often overlooked. An image is given of almost a stampede, of a crowd of world activists caught in a frenzy of belonging, in an enthusiastic discovery of a quasi-magic solution to all the problems of world activism. What were the aspects most often overlooked or that the discussion of which was always dampened or turned into political confrontation I discuss shortly below, but first let me collect some of these images as described by the interviewees. Let me start by quoting INT-18's words that set the place and the nature of the WSF's current problems in a transparent way.

the question is not that the IC is the problem.. or that its form of organisations is. It is not because we had a Liaison Group or because we had Commissions or because we didn't have Commissions. The IC worked without Commissions or with Commissions when it was powerful in terms of participation. Between 2001 and 2004 we didn't have Commissions and we had a Brazilian Secretariat, but the IC was a powerful space of construction."

And then consider this, again from same respondent, which draws the consequences

If you have a powerful IC with strong representation of social movements from Italy... you came with five or six, strong people from France, five or six more, five or six more from Brazil and people from Cuba... not even the Cuban are there any more. And people from Argentina, people from Ecuador, the majority has left, there is basically nobody from Latin America.

From another point of view the same concept is expressed like this by INT-1:

[the IC] was conceived as a group of people who was going to organise an event. Now, so that's the baggage that the IC has always had to carry, that... having being conceived in this manner, it was after a point being asked to play a political role, which it was not designed to. Given the composition of the IC, given also that one is the political composition of the IC and the other is the huge challenges that exist for global bodies like the IC to be able to function in a meaningful way. (...) so the IC has always been out of synch with the forum itself. It has not really been representative of either the political nature of the forum... neither has it been able to provide a direction to the forum of any kind... it has tried to provide a direction to the forum, but not very effectively. Nor has it reflected the changing composition of the forum, the changing kinds of people who formed part of the forum."

One more analysis around this issues by INT-20:

between 2003 and 2007 I think there was no strategy debate within the IC, we were just

speaking about methodologies, how we want to organise and this is a moment where... you know the mix of co-optation of horizontality, consensus and compromise that defines the IC lead to a proceduralisation of discussions and we were creating new procedures and new procedures every meeting and no strategy debates so I think it was also the moment where everybody got a little bit fed up with this process.

These considerations beg the following question: what was the relation of causation (if any can be uniquely seen in action) between the external environment (the global political context to which the WSF is expected to respond), the internal context of movements which would use the WSF and the facilitation structure of the WSF, the IC? Where does the “problem” lay?

The social theory developed by the interviewees is grounded in their experience, it is embodied theory and deserves special attention. The social theory related to the environmental challenges to which the WSF and its movements are subject, focuses on two large areas of interest. On the one hand, there is the crisis of the global progressive movements as a consequence of a victorious advances of increasingly destructive forms of capitalism and, on the other, a larger phenomenon poignantly defined by one interviewee as a broad social regression. Let's see these phenomena in turn. Later, I will discuss a set of internal challenges that the WSF is expected to face up to (these challenges are indeed even more compelling for its IC, but more on this soon). Consider INT-18's words:

What happens is that dramatically capitalism has won the battle, and even though we managed to delegitimise somehow the neoliberal model, given to the crisis in Europe and given also the feeling of success from the part of the emerging countries, issues such like the WSF raises, poses and proposes to discuss are not in the public agenda. We have been defeated in this battle and on the other hand we live a situation that in Brazil is very paradigmatic, although I think that in other countries like in Italy for instance the Left finds itself in a process of evident disintegration, no? The drama of the Left is reflected also in the Forum and is reflected as well in the IC. (...) La Cumbre de los Pueblos in Rio +20 in 2012 was to my judgement the expression of how these spaces, these common spaces (...) today don't have the possibility to become real because people don't want to be together with others, people want to mark their differences. Therefore we are in a process of disintegration of the Left different from what took place in 2001 when NGOs said we are NGOs but we want to be with the peasant movements and the peasants said we are peasants but we want to be with the workers and the workers said we are workers but we want to be with the environmentalists. Today is the other way around.

To clarify the form that this dissolution of the Left, or rather as in the fragment below, the disempowerment of the organisations of the Left, consider the following, again from INT-18:

I remember a conversation with [two Italian activists] who said, look it's not as if this happens only in the IC, if you come to Italy, we keep having a Council for the Forum in Italy, we are perhaps even the same as we used to, but our organisations are completely disempowered.

I think it is useful here to follow INT-18's train of thoughts one step further as they develop their point moving from the relationship between the advance of (neoliberal) capitalism and the crisis of the global Left to the relationship between the global crisis of the Left and the crisis of the WSF.

the IC is very fragile today (...). The Council at the beginning was a Council made by networks, but if you look at some of those networks today they are very fragile, no? For instance in Latin America, the Continental Social Alliance (...) it doesn't exist any more. If you consider Jubilee, the networks against the debt (...) what is today Jubilee? What is today the network against the debt? Nothing. And we too! And therefore it's like a dance between fragile elderlies, and even their fights... they even have no wish to fight any more.

From another perspective INT-19 makes a very similar point.

they [trade unions] are not into very profound fights. I mean, ideological fights. I mean, trying to face what should be our life in 20 or 30 years is not a discussion that we can have today with trade unions. Because of the crisis they are mono-subject. It's just work work work. But what kind of work? Can we please discuss about that? Can we please discuss about the place of work in our life? can we just have those kinds of debates somewhere?

Among the original most influential members of the WSF and among its most determined contributors, the trade unions have made radically different choices from what many activists would wish them to make. Their reaction to the crisis has been, in the words of the previous interviewee and others, merely defensive and in so doing they have deprived the forum of a powerful support. And they were not the only ones. But the behaviour of one or the other sectors of the global civil society is not always seen as necessarily the most profound and useful way to look at the WSF's current predicaments. In fact, things may be rather more complicated. This is INT-2's opinion on this matter:

And talking about more political themes, of how you articulate... of what relationship civil society entertains with the economic power and with the power of the United Nations, with the imperial powers. Therefore, I don't know... making an historical analysis we should look also at whether and the extent to which the end of the cold war had an influence in the opening a space and then in its dissolution.

These are some of the demands made towards a thorough assessment of the historical process of which the WSF has been part since its inception. A larger picture of the current deployment of social forces on a global scale is attempted by INT-9 with reference to the advance of neoliberalism from the late 70s and the constant retrenchment of progressive movements from positions of strength gained starting from the end of the WWII. This analysis reflects on these combined effects in terms of social regression.

there are many differences between the regions and even between the countries, in fact the evolution is more regional than national, but anyhow. We are in a general social regression and this general social regression is the question of (...) inequalities, corruption and precarity, these are the three main questions (...) which are really in all the world. If you take the question of inequality, if you take all the countries of Latin America where you had a real progress against poverty, but you have later inequality and it is the same in India and in China and in all the world. (...) Why? Because the question as they say in Occupy, the question of the oligarchy, the difference between the 1% and the 99%, is the world question. (...) The question of corruption is not only the question of people who take some money from some part or another. The question of corruption today is the question of the fusion between financial classes and political classes, this means that you have no more autonomy of policy, of politics. So people don't think that there is some political progress possible because they think that all the

political class is... well, this is one of the big points. (...) The welfare state made gains (...) against capital, so the battle against welfare state and social protection from the capital, from the financial capital, (...) is an offensive against decolonization (...). So we have an offensive against decolonization, we have an offensive against stable worker classes and we have an offensive against (...) the middle classes... because the question of what we call the unemployed graduates is a question of class alliance, between the sons of the working class and the son of the middle class. This is more or less the question of social regression and I think that this is what was the major trend (...) from the seventies to now.

But this and others examples of social theory don't stop to the analytical aspect of the global conjuncture; they attempt to imagine possible countermeasures from the part of progressive activists and indicate possible areas of struggle on which to mount not only a strong resistance to the advance of capitalism into all spheres of social and personal life but to propose alternative lifestyles altogether. More from INT-9 on this:

The real question is how to be able to stop the offensives and to take a movement offensive on these questions. (...) in the world the question of precarity is the main question because we have now not only the question of the working class but of the precarious class. (...) I think that for the WSF this is one of the main questions. And I have to say that the classical social movements and the new movements are not really ready to take this into account, (...) I know many difficulties to build a united social movement in Europe because the trade unions and the classical social movements are not really taking on the question of unemployment and precarity and the problem of migrants. (...) I think that the new movements also they are linked to the question of the unemployed graduates but not of the precarity. and that's why we have the rightist evolution in all the world... and this is one of the questions that the WSF has to face. I don't say the IC, I say the WSF. Because the WSF is more or less the social movements which are linked to the stabilised workers to the formal classes and not to the informal classes.”

Whatever the analyses focus on, internal or external factors (and there are, as shown, several dimensions in which these dynamics are at work) or, more often, both (and sometimes both at the same time), a word of warning that recurs refers to reality and against painful romanticisation of the conjuncture and the state of progressive movements. According to INT-14

I guess from a more romanticised idea we had of another world that is possible, dealing with reality and being inside a large organisation like [name] you see things more realistically.

This is INT-18:

those who used to be able to arrange things they now have no power any more so it is this the context that we need to face, but not in a romantic way, not in a nostalgic way.

Let me turn now to the more internal reasons that made often impossible for the WSF (and its IC) to respond to the many challenges facing it (them) in a way that satisfied its (their) activists. The WSF activists, by and large, wish to answer the challenges against which they struggle, in a way that is firmly rooted in reality rather than through nostalgic, romanticised, projections. Sometimes, however, the emotional sequences from emotional excitement (boom) to depression (bust) have

affected them as well⁴.

As far as the general crisis of the Left is concerned I have written already above. Those were neither extensive nor conclusive remarks on a subject on which for years WSF activists have trained their minds, but hopefully those few points were able to give a sense of what some of the areas of analysis are. In the next few paragraphs I will consider issues more genuinely related to the IC and its seemingly unstoppable crisis. Whereas the vicissitudes of the IC cannot be conflated with the state of the WSF or even less of the global Left, many interviewees referred to its shortcomings to illustrate larger and more compelling issues of global activism past, present and, perhaps, future too.

Let me stress once more, before proceeding further, that the internal arrangements discussed below are surely enough organisational in nature but by no means only related to the modes of organisation embraced by the WSF or, in particular, by its IC. They refer indeed, more broadly and more importantly, to the creative and transformative culture of politics that the WSF meant to help movements and activists develop. Some of these issues have been discussed in the previous report. I will treat those issues previously mentioned with the support of direct quotes from the interviews in order to give new depth to the considerations I previously summarised.

In particular, in the previous report I singled out some areas of concern recurrently highlighted in the conversations with IC members. I gathered them under the admittedly generic headings of democracy, decision-making practices and trust. The nature of the work conducted by the IC and the way in which it is accomplished, or perceived to be accomplished, were discussed at length in the interviews. The conversations, in particular pointed at the relationship between vision, values and practices. It was widely acknowledged that the tension between aspirations and achievements has often generated disappointment and sometimes frustration. At the same time, these issues of democracy and decision-making practices were often indicated as central to the debate about the tension between aspirations and achievements and about the perception by outsiders of the IC's internal practices (or, in other words, its ability to be true to itself and, therefore, trustworthy). Consider INT-7's words on their expectations on the Casablanca meeting of the IC for which my previous report has been prepared.

I'm afraid they (...) don't want to have a lot of time for the discussion on the future of the IC because at any rate, I think, most of the decisions.. let's say most of the discussions already have taken place. They may discuss now half a day of the place of the next forum but the real discussions are among the people who are directly involved and these are the Indians, the Canadians and the Tunisians. And they will have to decide among themselves and the IC might help but I think the main discussions already have taken place. The same people I refer are holding a mini IC and the IC is not seen at this moment I'm afraid as the main locus of decisions. It has also to do with the lack of trust.

Issues of democracy and decision-making were spelled out, among others, in terms of membership, transparency, accountability. INT-15 reflects on the IC's membership:

the IC was different because you had the same folks from the very beginning that were still there and so for somebody who was relatively new like [us] it seemed a really entrenched process and not even an entrenched process, it was an entrenched group of people who were really pulling the strings or who really had the final say.. or maybe in another more generous assessment, who really had invested their vision in the forum and it was hard for them to change and so that's why it was difficult for a new

4 See my article on crisis and emotional sequences in the WSF here:
<http://giuseppecaruso.wordpress.com/2013/10/22/emotional-sequences-in-a-transnational-social-movement-organisation-the-case-of-the-world-social-forum/>

organisation like ours to come in and start to talk about change and talk about ideas because people did not have that vision.

Consider this complex yet paradoxical reference to a long-drawn debate over the need to improve transparency in the IC made by INT-27:

One dimension where it's... kind of most obvious where the IC has failed is in creating a closed... not being able to create transparency about the meetings themselves. It's been really frustrating. I've been many times in many meetings saying that we should... and now the situation is better but for long time when arguing that we should use the very inexpensive and easy mechanisms we have to broadcast at least plenary discussions live and very basic things, then to that proposal sometimes people have responded that... accepting... doing that would mean that we consider ourselves important and since we want to be not a locus of power but simply a humble horizontal space without leaders then broadcasting our debates would sort of mean that we consider ourselves important. And I've felt that at least with some participants that has been a kind of to me very curious mechanism... saying... not wanting to be transparent. (...) because it's not like there would be huge crowds listening to our boring speeches in our plenary meetings. No, probably not, but the fact of not having it means that you expose yourself to very justified criticisms of being a closed non-transparent club which has been eroding the legitimacy of the IC for many years and for good reasons.

Increased democracy in the IC would, at least, entail that open, inclusive and transformative guidelines for practice would have to be collectively devised and mechanisms of accountability thought through and implemented. This could help engage the lack of transparency and accountability caused by the impossibility to trace responsibility. Parallel decision-making processes, closed membership and non-transparent and non-accountable decisions could be considered responsible for the increasing lack of trust among IC members and the consequent disruptions to their ability to work together. The assumption of responsibility is, as a consequence, very feeble. So is too the commitment generated by such rather avoidant attachment to the project and to one's partners in it. Again on this INT-7:

if we do not trust each other there is no future. I mean, some people may know and then maybe try to get power... there's always this. But if we do not trust each other then we have no future. because that is the basis of cooperation, well, of working together.⁵

And INT-19:

I think that we do not trust ourselves enough, so everybody wants to be around the table in case it's not going exactly in the direction he or she would like.

And INT-11:

It seems to me that the way in which people relate to each other is so important, so strong, that many many times (...) some discussions are so surreal because the two, three or four opinions are so so so similar but still the work doesn't make any progress

⁵ On trust as a premise or rather an outcome of cooperative work it is interesting to look at the facilitation work conducted in the context of the peace negotiation among warring opponents in Northern Ireland and the decade long process to build trust between them. See for instance John Alderdice 2010. 'Off the couch and round the conference table'. In Alessandra Lemma and Matthew Patrick Off the Couch. Contemporary psychoanalytic Approaches. London and New York, Routledge.

because people have very complicated personal relationships with each other.

Consider also the INT-19's views on a possible reason for these complications in the personal relationships invoked by the previous fragment.

the thing I see in those three of four last years is that we had very... ego fights... it's like certain people were having fights between... together... which should not summarise a political fight (laugh) and in a way this is not the case today in the IC because some of them have left. Maybe the issue they were fighting on has not been solved probably (laugh).

A glaring example of the mixture of personal and political contention in the IC is provided by the experiment to create a Liaison Group with the task to facilitate and convene the meetings of the IC itself. In INT-8's words that experience showed many dark sides of the decision-making process in the IC but also a fundamental misunderstanding on the political rule of representation to which many remain attached though often, or at least so it seems, preserving a rather transactional idea of the concept:

The Liaison Group had the fundamental limitation that was understood as a representative group. And therefore the discussions... and then the trade unions get in those but not only. I remember that one who was not elected as main member but a secondary member (because we couldn't have everybody as a main member) simply stopped assisting, and on top of that he got offended. Some of us wished another member to be a replacement member for a year... but no absolutely not, because [their] organisation was too important... And it is for this that from eight or nine people it became a stupid thing with 16 or something like that. And the trade unions were very upsetting because they insisted so much to be in... there were four unions that were there in that moment "represented" in the group and that didn't even reflect the reality of the forum itself.

The recognition of the importance of the mechanism of negative escalation observed in many contexts in the WSF and in its IC, consequence perhaps of unsatisfactory personal and institutional engagements, seems to be an area of broad convergence among the interviewees. The claimed lack of trust, possibly caused by an unclear structuring of the IC, eventually extends to the members of such real or perceived informal subgroups. This process is recursive and expansive in a manner eventually implicating all the work produced by the IC and all the people involved in it. This mechanism, therefore, does not only undermine and de-legitimise the IC's work but it also drains the energy of its members. Consider, for instance, the consequences of, on the one hand, the disappointment created by the mismatch between stated group and individual values and, on the other, the need to account for (justify at times, to one's constituencies or more generally to the "outside") the nature of the practices to which they participate in the IC (shame and anger are emotions often associated by the interviewees to these mechanisms). This point is congruent with what noticed above already. In fact, democratic practices and emotional (dis)engagements are tightly linked and this understanding constitutes a possible analytical convergence in the IC. The observed consequence, a further level perhaps of the escalation I indicated, is that the image projected by the IC attaches itself to the WSF as a whole which in turn comes to be considered an "old" (or worse decaying) space marred by internal disputes and an opaque and undemocratic playground for NGOs or, at best, very localised movements. When, on the other hand all the glamour and attention is projected on alternative protests sweeping from one corner to the other of the planet anyone clearly sees why the WSF does not even figure among the matters of concern of many engaged citizens and activists.

The shortcomings reported above, democratic deficit, personal mistrust and egos overextension, rusty and unreliable decision-making mechanisms, some member's opaque leadership, and others that could not be considered here affect greatly the activists' sense of reality and their self-perception (and perhaps their self-esteem and their commitment to such a demanding and frustrating process). Such challenges to the sense of reality (as seen in the nostalgic projections and romanticisation mentioned above) are, at the same time, a crucial challenge to learning. Although there is no space here to go into this in great detail, it is perhaps useful to make a reference in passing to the pedagogical role that the WSF aimed at performing within the alter-globalisation movement and how the critical pedagogy informing, or assumed to inform, the work of the WSF was aimed at facilitating a more adaptive relationship between movements and the world they wished to change centred on sophisticated emancipatory learning. Among the consequences of challenging learning opportunities there is of course, perhaps the most obvious of them, the inability to learn from movements' experience and so repeat non-adaptive choices and behaviours. Some of the challenges to learning are framed as follows. Consider impatience, for instance, though the words of INT-19:

it does take time to really understand what the other is trying to tell you which is really not the way you see things and it takes a little bit more time to figure out what you can do together. So all those political forces that are represented or that were represented in the IC... mainly this consensus method was the only one that could be adopted (...). And then what is difficult is that within the IC both you have movements that haven't changed and learnt from this method and that have even stopped attending the ICs so then saying that they didn't believe in the capacity of change that the process can really bring... others because it doesn't go quick enough and others because they don't want to change.

And these are the consequence when it comes to learning according to the same INT-19:

some movements, they really have not learnt from the process. That's life, anyway, and in 12 years you cannot... it's not a miracle, this process is not a miracle, this process is work, it's discussion, it's debate so... ok we did a little bit more of that (laugh)."

As announced already above, the inability to learn has several consequences. Flight is the counter-measure adopted by many who have stopped attending IC meetings, fight has been adopted at different stages by many of those who subsequently left and by some who belligerently oppose change. Other non-adaptive and non-reality informed behaviours have been noticed as recurring in the IC and signalling some of its involution or, indeed, organisational regression. Although these are very much perceived as painful, frustrating or upsetting issues, some interviewees wished to stress some of the most glaring consequence of the organisational failures in the IC at a larger scale than the IC itself. Because, and this is a recurring refrain in all interviews, the relevance of the IC is non-existent when compared to the activists' real desire to influence global social change. But the issues observed in the IC are often an illustration of broader issues in the global Left. The lack of ability to communicate, analyse and make decisions, across the global Left, for instance, has prevented the WSF from designing, for its global chapter, a credible long term strategy as detailed by INT-1 with the following words:

I don't see the same kind of an interest in India, I don't see it in Europe for sure. I don't see it in Brazil either. I saw it for example in Bangladesh, again for specific context and these are all... what is similar to Bangladesh and the Middle East? I think what is similar is that these are both regions where the Left has been suppressed systematically and or has fragmented across into different fractions and the forum provides a way – provided

a way – in which they could come together. So it was playing a political role for the Left to come together in both these situations. So for me that's what I see the future of the forum really as, in the long term at the moment. Not long term in the 20, 30 years but long term at least in the next few years, that probably this is what the future of the forum really is.

Consider also INT-20's words:

we don't have a two or three years strategy, we should even have a ten year strategy... we should say OK in ten years ideally the forum would be organised in this region and we should build the process between now and this forum in ten years.

The imagination of possible collective reflection on the state of the planet, on the state of global progressive movements and how these latter ones could influence the former, is object of much debate and is at the centre of all interviews as announced already above. To confront the repeated victory of increasingly exploitative forms of capitalism and to imagine a shared and collectively designed form of global development that may prevent the worst effects of climate change, it is universally claimed, a global strategy is necessary. What this strategy may look like and, especially, the form that the conversations on these issues and many more too would take is instead much more open to debate and indeed creative brainstorming. The form these debates will take will determine the form that the WSF, or whatever else that may play its role, will take in the future.

3. Future of the forum and new foci of creativity today for social justice activists

Given the thoughtful analyses reported, some of which have been developed over several decades of engaged study and activism across the world, the solutions proposed to the crisis of the WSF are various, nuanced and often tentative, thoroughly acknowledging regional and local differences, wondering about the impact of macro and micro social dynamics and referring cautiously to previous experience as well as to hard theories. They are illustration of creative thinking and voice often courageous proposals as I will illustrate in what follows. A premise which summarises the cautious and thoughtful approach I referred to can be illustrated by the following INT-17's words:

the political landscape is shifting so quickly these days, there are so many new developments that happen so fast and trying to keep up with that is very difficult. So allowing more space and time for those developments to merge and more time for the organising process to happen... we won't be reactive so much... let's be more thoughtful about how we put the process together at the global level. so I still think there is a need because the institutions that we were struggling with at the very beginning and the challenges that we're dealing with are still at a global level and we still need that space where movements around the world can come together.

A more proactive and a less reactive approach was what the WSF stood for from the very beginning as it aimed at being a space in which movements could, in between their actions against the International Financial Institutions or their local adversaries, convene to step back from the dust, as it were, and reflect on more long-term objectives and on future existential outlines of the other world they endeavoured to usher in.

It is through this premise that the current analyses of the newest movements taking the global scene are conducted. In a moment when the WSF seems to be a thing of the past and movements like the Turkish protests or the various Occupy and Indignadas seemed to be the new citizens' answers to their demands of emancipation, some activists in the WSF suggest that thorough and transformative

analyses require more time than that often afforded by the very fast shifts in the global political landscape. At the same time activists are aware, as shown above, that feelings of urgency and inadequacy need to be fought back and reality confronted in a less knee-jerk-like kind of way, but rather in a thoughtful and reflexive way. What follows is a series of considerations on the mentioned newest movements as a way to frame social change strategies, activists' and organisations' behaviour and movement cycles. Let's consider first INT-3's words that introduce the tentative (here rather euphemistic to be sure) suggestion that before any decision about what the WSF can and should be, a consideration of the WSF project has any legitimacy and usefulness is necessary:

My concern is on the one hand this thing of not bureaucratise, to make sure that it is a living organism truly dedicated to see that the process continues, but then there is the question: for what is this process? In fact we must make a small revision of what the forum is.

On the other hand, there is the, implicit to be sure, pressure coming for the activists the world over as echoed in INT-18's words:

The anti-systemic movements that emerged in these moments, after 2005 or 2006 but mostly after the Arab Spring, these anti-systemic movements include a very large part of the principles on which we work, no? The horizontality... but at the same time they don't even see us as their friends.

The question, whereas the WSF has something to contribute to global change seemed, in this sense, been answered by the recognition that most current struggles carry in them the cores of a shared language. A shared language that is also the language of the WSF. However, at the same time, while these processes seem to take place in many different areas of the planet and share several traits including organisational and aspirational claims towards emancipation, dignity, democracy and work (among recurring others), they also have a very different feature when compared to the WSF.

INT-18's words again:

the anti-systemic struggles to my mind take place a lot more in national spaces and this is a difference rather profound of the moment in which we are now. In 2001 the struggles needed an international expression much stronger.

And something more on the nature of the current movements according to INT-9:

the third one is the question of what kind of junction between the new movements, that means the movements of the, after 2011... Tunis, Cairo, Occupy, Indignados, Chilean students, Carre Rouge in Montreal, Istanbul... these new movements of course are a challenge for the alter-globalism and... they are interested in the alter-globalism... there are links, there are many links in the claims, in the questions that are raised and links between the political culture, but there are also differences. So there is an evolution, a very interesting evolution... you have seen that Inter-occupy asked to organise in Montreal the next WSF? And also I read (...) that in Tunis there was a love declaration (laugh)... well, there is many... we see there is many junctions, but it's not exactly the same.

Such relations at a distance seem to be unsatisfactory and the WSF, it is felt, should engage these movements to truly fulfil its mission of being of use for social movements and global activists. But any attempt to engage the newest wave of protests needs to be done in a truly open and honest

manner as stressed by INT-16:

it's got to be done in real way it can't be reaching out to those groups and give them a place at the IC table if the IC table is still being organised with a lot of the same kind semi-behind the scenes forces.

And when it comes to imagine ways in which the current movements could articulate their struggles, the call against nostalgic and romantic approaches grants ambitious images. Consider for instance the radical call to accept the end of the IC, to mourn it and to consider something new to replace it made by INT-18:

I have already experienced situations in which you have to conclude something that you have started. I have been a militant in organisations of the Left that at a certain point we have said enough, now this is over. And this is a very tragic moment because... in the most profound meaning of tragedy the IC today is too fragile to take some of the decisions that might be useful.

In the sense suggested by these words, the IC has depleted its own energies to the point that it cannot even advance the few steps that might help it recover. Tragic as this may be, a recognition of this state of affair could initiate the necessary mourning and therefore open towards something new and creative. Let me quote more on this from the same respondent. But the call to accept whatever reality may be, beyond the veil of delusion and the pain caused by the separation from a project to which so much activists have invested in, may not refer to the IC only. In fact, in tentative ways, in allegoric, metaphoric and suggestive images, even more painful assessments are introduced as shown below. First let me quote more from INT-18 about two methodological warnings, so to say, that experiments be done without too much emotional investment and that the WSF has relevance to the extent that it relates to contemporary movements:

we should experiment but with a certain detachment. We cannot be attached to an idea of something that used to be very good but that it's not any more so. This attempt to update the forum, to give it currency is essential. The forum has a meaning if it is current with the anti-systemic struggles that are in the world today.

A following fragment, by INT-17, while considering the importance to relate to the contemporary forms of struggles, brings some further reflection on their nature and the challenges this poses to a possible engagement with the WSF.

I know we struggled with the fact that the forum process had a hard time keeping up with the political changes in the movements. So I thought when we met in Monastir it was a very inspiring moment because now we had these new movements participating, the Y'en a Marre, Occupy... the problem is some of those movements are difficult to sustain just because of the nature of those movements... Occupy is one which is practically non-existing at the moment in the US at this point... right? These new movements have a very different concept of organisations and in some cases are very anti-organisation. It's very challenging for them to participate in a process like the forum because who represents them and how do you select leadership... how do you appoint and elect leadership in a process like that. I think that's one challenges (...) we haven't figured out a way to really capture and give leadership to those new movements and at the same time all the other movements haven't gone away either and they are doing important work like Via Campesina, the World March of Women all of those big networks are still pretty important. So I disagree with the notion that they are irrelevant that (...) even though it is important to integrate new leadership in the process all the

time... that the forum basically we have to wipe the slate clean every time.. because I think those that have been involved from the beginning provide a lot of historical memory which is important for the process. (...) if the forum is going to continue in the current form that's going to be the big challenge... how to balance all of those things.

It is widely recognised that there are exciting movements in many parts of the world. Spontaneous, horizontal, autonomous, but also fleeting, short-lived and uncommitted, say some interviewees. In fact, it is acknowledged widely that the touch of reality has reshaped and give a much more reduced dimension to the great hopes invested by many in the Arab Spring; the realisation has become impossible to deny any more that the process of change in the region will be much longer than what was expected or hoped for. The same became very quickly apparent of the Occupy Wall Street movement and many others who faded, demobilised or turned, in much more reduced numbers, to representative politics like in the case of very large movements in Chile, Turkey, India, Spain and Italy to mention a few. And while their nature is uncertain, their political strategy shifting and the hopes they raised often rather unjustified, when it comes to imagine possible collaborative work with some, at least, of the activists who animated these movements then the differences mentioned above become often impossible to negotiate due according to INT-3 to some rather big misunderstanding between possible partners with comparable goals and perhaps similar cultures of activism and political principles:

the discovery of the interest, of the utility of this horizontality in other movements, in these that we call the new social movements, but there is still this very big misunderstanding because, obviously, when horizontality reaches its apex, they say that we want to control them. I mean, it's not... they think that the forum is an organisation of a traditional kind and they are against every kind of top down control and they say no! Therefore, there is there an important dialogue but one that is in a perspective of expansion of the methodology of expansion of the proposal. Now, making properly called [global] events... there the thing leaves me with many doubts.

Another approach to understand the WSF's loss of global relevance and its increased relevance at national and regional levels as noted by the majority of the interviewees, suggests to look at the extreme ends of the local-global dynamic. A trans-local articulation that highlighted the importance of the experience of sustained daily community-based activism and their global interdependence of such small-scale laboratories of change, could be a way to go as proposed by INT-20:

we should find also other ways and also more than we've done in the past highlight local processes and regional processes, this is... you know, people in the US grassroots movement sometime say there is a shift from transnational solidarity to trans-local solidarity and I think this is very interesting at least heuristically because it kind of shows that yes the movements that have popped out after 2011 they are clearly... or were leading to an occupation in a very specific context, and that is also the case of grassroots or community based organisations and that the WSF still as a form is one of the most powerful tool that we can have but you should maybe... you know, not de-globalise it but de-transnationalise it and try to find a way to have trans-local forums.

The suggestion that a different sense of scale could be considered when imagining forms of articulation of the new movements brings up crucial matter of concerns to activists since time immemorial, one would say. Issues or representation and organisation for instance, some of which have been raised above and with which it is useful, perhaps, to leave this paper to its readers. Whereas issues around the democratic practices in the WSF and in the IC are raised they are also often framed in terms of representation and legitimacy as seen above with reference to the former

power of the IC and its current disempowerment as a consequence of the loss of relevance (representation, indeed, according to some) of many of the original actors that formed it. At the same time, as seen, a call towards a more realistic and outward attitude towards the current movements is made in the sense of considering, openly, the newest forms of social engagement. The convergence of these combined issues generates complicate problems that require creative and ambitious solutions as already mentioned in several places. Consider, for instance, INT-9's way to problematise the convergence between the concerns related to relevance, representation and legitimacy on the one hand and the concerns related to currency and the ability to negotiate the new language, the new forms of communication and the new forms of organisations performed by the new activists:

in the last forum [Tunis 2013] we had five thousand movements form 90 countries. So how can you build a representation of this. they are so different, so multiple. So the first question is how to build an IC which could be representative. So the idea is that the IC cannot be representative, it can be a stimulus, it can be a facilitator, but it cannot be representative, because including the new movements... we haven't spoken about the new movements and the questions that the new movements ask to the WSF, they reject including the idea of representation. So this is one of the questions of the IC, a very important one.

In the same breath it is therefore the case to consider that contemporary movements are not organisationally connected and centrally articulated, not even coordinated as if by a central nervous system provided perhaps by a possible evolution of a global social movement organisation (something the WSF, according to some, may wish to be or provide) but through un-mediated relationships through information and communication technologies, the ubiquitous and very famed social media. In that sense protests would constitute occasional convergence points of otherwise virtually swarming but very locally engaged actors. The local, the global and the virtual seem to articulate themselves in ways that are not fully understood but that suggest possibility, creativity, learning, transformation and eventually, perhaps, emancipation. These are in sum the values and the objectives of the WSF activists and its facilitators gathered in the IC. They, or at least many of them, are starting to grapple with these new forms of organisations. As they wonder what these new forms could be, what they mean and what they imply, they reflect that thinking these questions through with old friends and new allies might indeed be a very useful and inspiring exercise. This might indeed be at least one last, or just the next, use for the WSF open space. And it is not impossible, if things as presented by the newest movements are not so radically and absolutely new in the sense that a change in paradigm makes the knowledge built by a previous generation of activist completely useless, than maybe perhaps it is not deluded to suggest that the current moment might resemble the pre-WSF moment of global effervescence in search of a joint space to meet and build collectively the next steps of a who knows perhaps trans-local social forum, or something else to that extent or, perhaps more likely, something else altogether.