

*The Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation*

**Dealing with the challenges of a World Citizens  
Assembly**

*As simple as it may have seemed, the holding of the World Citizens  
Assembly required dealing with seemingly insurmountable challenges*

*Pierre Calame*

"They didn't realise it was impossible and so they did it". It is, in retrospect, this adage that summarises the World Assembly and helps understand how close we sometimes came to disaster. It is thus important to keep in mind the various challenges that we sought to overcome and that constituted the three or four perilous hurdles that we had to deal with successively through 2000 and 2001. These obstacles couldn't have been surmounted if it hadn't have been for the personal involvement of those who participated in the adventure and the feeling of mutual esteem that made it possible to deal with tensions that, in other contexts, would have resulted in the implosion of the Assembly itself.

The challenges	The responses found
<p>1) Managing to represent the world's immense diversity through 400 participants.</p>	<p>1) Fixing in advance the matrix of distribution by world region and college.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sticking to the rule whereby the number of participants per region is determined by the region's population ;</li> <li>- Involving all of the Alliance workshops and several dozen networks in the identification of participants ;</li> <li>- In certain specific cases (China, ex-USSR, etc.) giving someone a mandate to look for networks that could be of potential help to us ;</li> <li>- Managing to obtain and get visas to people in 125 countries.</li> </ul>
<p>2) Enlarging the collegial representation of the Alliance so that it will include all social and professional milieus.</p>	<p>2) Launching fifteen colleges in 2000 and 2001 and adopting a pragmatic approach that, in each case, allows for the identification of a nucleus of individuals that are capable of working together ;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creating homogeneous workplaces for these new colleges and designing different methodological guides (carto, forum, web, DPH files, etc.) ;</li> <li>- Enlisting two individuals devoted to accompanying these new colleges ;</li> <li>- Making the whole team aware of the importance of this enlargement.</li> </ul>
<p>3) Giving a new, unequalled dimension to the Alliance's work in 2000 and 2001.</p>	<p>3) Fixing and following a global calendar that served as a guide for our work over the last two years:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A Council vote on an extraordinary budget and the establishing of a control mechanism for this budget ;</li> <li>- Designing a reinforced team bringing</li> </ul>

<p>4) Finding common working methods for a team that hadn't working collectively in the past.</p> <p>5) Avoiding cutting the allies off of the preparation process of an Assembly in which they will be a minority.</p> <p>6) Involving the future participants of the Lille Assembly, most of whom initially knew nothing about the Alliance, in a collective dynamic.</p> <p>7) Creating an assembly format radically different from what you find in typical international conferences and convincing participants of the necessity of being present throughout the entire duration of the Assembly.</p> <p>8) Building the conditions of a dialogue between 400 people that didn't know one another in advance and that spoke</p>	<p>together human means belonging to different institutions (in particular the outstanding role of the Cedidelp)</p> <p>4) Regular reunions and the introduction of a minimal amount of shared methods of information circulation.</p> <p>5) Introducing, as of March 2002, the concept of "person-resource".:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Setting the Lille Assembly as the final date for the publication of proposal booklets;</li> <li>- Homogenising the presentation of the proposal booklets ;</li> <li>- Extending the International Facilitation Team to 100 members and using the EIFE forum as a central information location.</li> </ul> <p>6) Constructing as of June 2001 a strategy for distributing information to the participants so that they are already familiar with the Alliance's aim when they arrive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nominating referees that are the personal correspondents of each participant ;</li> <li>- Structuring a maximum amount of information on the web site.</li> </ul> <p>7) Being from the start very clear about the objectives and the sequence of events of the Assembly and distributing the detailed program of the Assembly from September 2001 :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rather than abandoning the continuity of participants' presence abandoning the idea of bringing well-known participants to the Assembly that would have helped give its work greater media impact;</li> <li>- Considering the Assembly as an itinerary crossing three dimensions of diversity.</li> </ul> <p>8) Fixing a workshop format for the week of work, plenary sessions being limited to the opening and closing ceremonies :</p>
---	--

<p>different languages.</p> <p>9) Bringing forth within the Nord Pas de Calais region the necessary human resources to allow for the personalised accompaniment of each participant.</p> <p>10) Rooting the methods of preparation of the Assembly in the regional context so as to link the local to the global.</p> <p>11) Involving regional public institutions in what will be for them a radically new ambition and process.</p> <p>12) Designing methods that, despite the language barrier, make it possible for the Assembly's schedule and strategic elements to emerge without imposing nor ignoring the Alliance's work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bringing to the Assembly more than two hundred trainee interpreters to allow for the daily functioning of twenty multilingual workshops.</li> </ul> <p>9) Supervising and bringing to the assembly 350 young people through pre-established personal contacts (technical college of Valenciennes) or by attracting the translation schools professorial corps' interest in the objectives and methods of the Alliance,.</p> <p>10) Applying at Lille World 2001 the same methodologies perfected within the Alliance colleges so as to involve, following the same process, thirteen social and professional milieus of the region :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creating the conditions for dialogue between these milieus.</li> </ul> <p>11) With varying success (a successful contact established with the Regional Council, unsuccessful attempts to establish contacts with the City and Urban Community of Lille, with the Conseil Général:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Using pre-existing relations of trust to help make the Assembly's ambition understood and shared (unfortunately, the municipal elections of March 2001 created a fracture that was difficult to manage).</li> </ul> <p>12) Perfecting progressively improved cartographic software :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Developing an initial core of human resources for the use of the cartographic software, for the presentation of the proposal notebooks of the workshops and colleges;</li> <li>- Creating the first trainings in the transversal analysis of the proposals coming from different milieus at the moment that the strategic axes of the Alliance are being elaborated ;</li> </ul>
--	--

<p>13) Getting all those who worked hard to create the proposal notebooks to understand that these won't be the point of departure of the Assembly's work.</p>	<p>- Putting into operation interactive methods of collecting and contrasting proposals of the different participants within the framework of each workshop.</p> <p><i>Note: the late choice of methods and the absence of the human resources needed to bring them to a collective level was one of the main obstacles to emerge during the course of the Assembly .</i></p> <p>13) A difficult grieving process for part of the resource persons of the Assembly. Nevertheless the physical presence of the proposal notebooks constituted an important factor of credibility. The physical presence of their authors allowed certain parts of their contents to be highlighted. The preparation of the World Social Forum of Porto Alegre was, one and a half months after the Assembly, a first collective event in which the notebooks could be distributed.</p>