The Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation

THE LILLE WORLD CITIZENS ASSEMBLY (2-10 DECEMBER 2001)

Challenges, the course of events, results

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1) Preparing for unavoidable transformations in a democratic manner

From the issue of the control of scientific innovation to the organisation of trade and financial relations, from terrorism to climate change, from poverty to AIDS: more and more people, probably the majority of the world's population, have become conscious that the interdependencies between societies and with the biosphere won't be properly shaped by the continual expansion of markets and that current models for development are ineffective.

During the 21st century our thought systems and the regulation of economic, political and social relations will undergo deep transformations.

The world is not a piece of merchandise. Another globalisation than that of markets is necessary and possible. Transformations are urgent but the question of how to go about designing alternatives in a democratic fashion remains unanswered. The Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World, an international movement of citizens of different nations, is focused on addressing this challenge.

2) Reflecting all of global society's diversity

The major challenge consists in representing the three dimensions of global society's diversity: the diversity of the world's regions, the diversity of social and professional milieus and the diversity of issues at stake. The work of the Alliance was organised around each of these diversities so as to build networks of exchange and reflection and so as to define future prospects.

3) Prefiguring a planetary parliament

Through its participants and its methods, this World Assembly has prefigured a Planetary Parliament where all those of different socio-professional milieus and of different regions of the world, concerned about building the future in a peaceful manner, would be represented. It brought together 400 participants that, between them all, reflected the diversity of world society. Thus, Asia, and in particular China and India, represented the largest groups of participants, and all the regions of the world were represented in an equitable manner. Thus, twenty-five different socio-professional milieus, fishermen and farmers, union leaders and CEOs, scientists and academics, women and young people, local elected officials and international civil servants, army officials and legal professions were all represented.

The World Assembly showed that it was both technically and humanly possible to find people from each region of the world and from each milieu that were representative of their society, open to dialogue and conscious of their own responsibilities. Each participant carried with them a particular set of ideas, experiences and perspectives.

4) Designing an agenda for the Assembly based on the concerns of the participants

The World Assembly wasn't a typical international conference with themes and speakers fixed in advance. On the contrary, it was necessary to allow discussion between participants to occur without constraints so that the priorities for world change could freely emerge from within the confluence of individuals' shared concerns. This is why each participant committed him/herself to participating continually during the eight days of an assembly that unfolded in three phases: a first phase brought together social or professional milieus, a second was theme-based, a third was based on regions.

5) Identifying the concerns of different milieus and discovering common priorities

In the Assembly's first phase the participants met in 20 "collegial" workshops that grouped together individuals from different continents belonging to the same social and professional milieu. This first phase involved identifying what, according to each milieu, were the priorities for change for the next decades. When the various conclusions were assembled three essential lessons emerged.

The first lesson was that dialogue is possible and rich between people that belong to the same milieu but that live in completely different contexts. Together, they manage to define the same common priorities.

The second lesson was that when we compare the priorities of the different milieus we observe a great deal of common traits: beyond traditional differences there is undoubtedly a world society that is trying to define itself and whose concerns vis-à-vis the future are comparable. Seventeen common challenges could thus be identified.

The third lesson was that the issues and transformations most often referred to were those that concerned, on the one hand, ethics and thought systems, and on the other, governance and regulatory systems. Humanity has evolved quickly over the last fifty years, under the influence of rapid scientific, technical and economic transformations. Modes of thinking and regulations haven't kept up with these transformations. Reducing this gap is a shared necessity.

6) Designing together a Human Responsibilities Charter: the Lille Charter

Each socio-professional milieu also debated the necessity and nature of a third ethical pillar for the international community, alongside the United Nations Charter and the Universal Human Rights Declaration that, drafted at the wake of the Second World War, remain the only ethical and political references accepted by the majority of the world's nations. The work of the Assembly has demonstrated a remarkable convergence of viewpoints around the idea of the need for a third pillar that would this time underline Human Responsibilities and that, during the 21st century, would serve as a reference in the drafting of international law and as a guide of conduct for each social and professional milieu and for each of the world's peoples.

The discussions that took place within each milieu and then between milieus led to a Charter project that was presented at Lille during the closing ceremony. In view of the increasingly massive impact of humanity on the biosphere as well as the irreversible interdependence that exists between human societies, the issue of responsibility, both individual and collective, has new implications. Responsibility exists because choices exist and because we must deal simultaneously with issues that are too often disassociated: immaterial development and material development, peace and justice, the progress of individual forms of knowledge and of the spirit of co-operation, the demand for the recognition of one's own dignity and the dignity of others, economic development and the respect of ecological equilibrium.

7) The broad outline of a strategy for common challenges

During the Assembly's second phase, participants met in workshops to work on the seventeen common challenges identified at the end of the preceding phase. For each of these, a workshop of twenty individuals, comprising people from different milieus, set about designing the summary of a strategy.

This reflection has been nourished by an international reflection conducted within the Alliance since 1994 that saw the drafting of sixty proposal booklets covering the various fields of human activity. The convergence that can be observed between these proposal booklets and the forms of strategy identified during the World Citizens Assembly is remarkable. The proposals that have emerged from the Alliance's work and those that emerged during the Assembly can be grouped into seven chapters that comprise the summary of a strategy for change for the 21st century.

- Chap. 1 Promoting a set of ethics for responsibility, peace, tolerance and pluralism; translating these ethics into acts within each milieu
- Chap. 2 Changing our outlook on the planet and promoting an education for all that will equip people and societies for confronting the challenges of the 21st century; designing, as a service for all society, tools of understanding of the world in all its wealth and complexity
- Chap. 3 Devising a new approach to the economy that is favourable to all of society and the preservation of the biosphere
- Chap.4 Establishing at every level, from the local to the global, a legitimate governance that is both democratic and efficient
- Chap.5 Anchoring international structuration in various socio-professional milieus and organised social forces that are conscious of their responsibilities; establishing partnerships between organisations and public authorities where roles are clearly defined.
- Chap. 6 Bringing a balance to governance mechanisms that is favourable to the weakest social groups or countries and that thus allows them to participate in world affairs, benefit from real rights and be in a position to fully vindicate these rights, and be full-fledged citizens.
- Chap. 7 Confronted with the new challenges that face humanity, in particular those that concern the protection and the management of the biosphere, creating new public regulations and resisting the domination of commercial relations.

For each chapter several hundred concrete proposals were presented and debated either in the proposal booklets or during the Assembly.

8) Initiating a reflection on the implementation of these strategies in each region of the world

The third phase of the Assembly was also carried out within workshops that were now based on world regions. Here as well we noted the desire and possibility of genuine dialogue and observed as time progressed the birth of networks and projects for common work and actions, from the building of an international network of schools of peace to a new dialogue between African societies and Persian-speaking peoples set apart by history and borders. These innumerable contacts will be one of the starting points for the acts that grow out of the Assembly.

9) Consolidating the ties between the local approach and the global approach; rooting this process in the society of Nord Pas de Calais

There isn't on the one hand a global reality and on the other a local reality. On the contrary, each local situation is deeply modified by what is happening on the global level and, inversely, global reality is nothing more than a combination of events that are each rooted in a territory or culture. This is why the regional society of the Nord Pas de Calais was deeply involved in the preparation of the World Citizens Assembly.

Thirteen regional colleges incorporating unemployed individuals as well as CEOs, neighbourhood residents as well as farmers, interreligions groups as well as academics, came together in order to bring their own reflections and perspectives to the World Assembly. Representatives from each of these milieus participated in the Assembly and the outlook that this regional society provided was confronted with the outlooks emanating from other regions of the world. The dialogue, first between the various milieus of regional society, then between the Nord Region and the rest of the world, turned out to be not only possible but rich. Following this exchange, each milieu is now drafting its own proposal notebook. All of the results of their work will soon be published.

In the wake of the Assembly, this reflection will incorporate a strategy for building a vision of the future that has been sketched at the world level. The Regional Council of the Nord Pas de Calais' support for the holding of this Assembly highlighted the link between the promotion of active citizenship at the local level and the globalisation of citizenship. This link can only grow more important in the years to come.

10) Inventing together what will emerge in the wake of the Assembly

The Assembly assigned itself extremely ambitious goals: reflecting the world's diversity, inventing the necessary methods for building dialogue and a collective reflection, designing the summary of a strategy for change for the 21st century, proposing a plan for a Human Responsibilities Charter. All of these different goals have been attained.

But these achievements call for follow-up acts: the debating of the Human Responsibilities Charter and its translation into a code of conduct for different milieus; the organisation of National and Regional Citizens Assemblies; translating elements of strategy into a plan for long-term action; the consolidation of local and world-wide networks.