

WSF Mexico 2022: from possible, the other world has become "urgent and necessary"!

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Although the 2022 World Social Forum (WSF) in Mexico City, May 1-6, was the result of a struggle, it has become clear that alterglobalism must seek to renew itself outside of these meetings without abandoning the formula with more defined objectives. The Mexico City meeting was a step backward compared to previous WSFs. This result is not the fault of the organizing committee, and the pandemic certainly had something to do with it, as mentioned in the final Declaration. However, the context is no longer the same as it was in the early 2000s, social movements are struggling to regain the initiative, and we are not heading towards the desired other world. Thus, the watchword of the alterglobalists is less that of another possible world than that of its necessity!

For several years, we noticed the WSFs have been weakening, and the detractors of alterglobalism used this to their advantage. However, the alterglobalization movements have existed for longer than the WSFs. They were born as movements of resistance to structural adjustment policies, real building sites of the neoliberal austerity policies of the 1980s². The WSF 2022 in Mexico City confirms the future of alterglobalism will pass mainly outside these meetings.

Towards the construction of a new phase of alterglobalism?

The title of the Final Declaration insists on the urgency and necessity of another world, not on its possibility. It calls for a "new phase of altermondism". The remind of the particularly hostile context to projects of social transformation leads the Declaration to recognize that "resistance does not cancel these contradictions" of the system of domination and that violence and defeats are always possible.

It also recalls that the "themes addressed were climate, agriculture respectful of the earth, sustainable economy, human rights, feminism, minorities, education, labor rights, culture, communication, self-determination of peoples... and so many others! The three axes that gathered the most activities were:

1. Economic alternatives of the people.
2. Defense of the living, the environment, and the territories.
3. Democracy, political participation, construction of citizenship, and autonomy.

It also states that "the WSF of Mexico 2022 is a step towards the construction of a new phase of alterglobalism "³. The alterglobalization movement has broken down. Even if it has contributed to weakening the burden of neoliberal policies, it has not succeeded in sowing the fear of systemic

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². John Williamson summarized in 1990 these structural adjustment policies agreed upon by the international financial institutions (International Monetary Fund, World Bank) and the US Treasury during the Ronald Reagan era, which became known as the "Washington Consensus" (Williamson, John, 1990, What Washington Means by Policy Reform, in Latin American Adjustment: How Much Has Happened?)

³. WSF 2022, *Together, building a common agenda for another urgent and necessary world*. Final Declaration, May 6, 2022, Mexico City. Online: <https://alter.quebec/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/WSF-2022-Mexico-Final-Declaration-May-6.pdf>

upheaval. Reinventing alterglobalism involves strengthening the charge of rupture in the challenge of social transformation.

The lowest participation of the WSFs

The WSF in Mexico City had the lowest participation of any WSF since 2000. The Final Declaration indicates 3,000 people⁴, the official WSF 2022 website shows 2,000 people, with 5,000 people online⁵. An independent journalism site reports a few hundred⁶. It mentions people from "30 countries on four continents". There were about 200 people from outside the host country, Mexico. The most significant proportion of this number came from Latin American countries. The other most essential delegations came from Africa, France, Quebec, Maghreb, and Norway. The group supported by Katalizo and Plateforme altermondialiste was composed of about thirty young people from Quebec, France, and Belgium, so they did not go unnoticed, as the participation was so low.

The Declaration indicates 789 workshops and assemblies in 15 places in the historical center of Mexico City. The official website mentions 365 activities. A few dozen, at best a hundred, people attended the most popular workshops. The dispersion of activities in several locations was difficult for the activity's organization, participation, and success. It is a reason why there were many delays and cancellations. The final assembly of convergence gathered about 200 to 300 people. Regarding the 500 registered organizations, this includes the international organizations online.

On the other hand, the organization of the WSF in Mexico City, initially planned for 2020, was an actual marathon for the Mexican organizing committee. A virtual meeting during the pandemic in January 2021 calmed the impatience for a WSF held in person. Finally scheduled for May 2022, it is organized in a hurry because of the multiple delays and the weaknesses of the financial support that weighed on the organizational work. From this point of view, to have succeeded in keeping an appointment was a tour de force.

Undoubtedly, the pandemic played a significant role in the low participation. The Final Declaration reminds us of this and also points out the restrictions of the screws. But there is more. We must mention the weakening context of the networks, the decline in their capacity to diversify their action, the new priorities of the movements, especially among the global networks, and a general decline in interest in the WSFs, which even some networks associated with alterglobalism are shunning!

A drop in the interest in the movements

Several international movements associated with alterglobalism were absent, notably Via Campesina and the World March of Women, pillars of the WSF. The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) was not present in Mexico. This anti-neoliberal struggle movement, based in the Oaxaca region of Mexico, made antiglobalization history by calling for resistance on January 1, 1994⁷, when

⁴. <https://alter.quebec/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/WSF-2022-Mexico-Final-Declaration-May-6.pdf>

⁵. www.wsf2022.org

⁶. Redacción La Coperacha - Ciudad de México (2022), *Mirada al Foro Social Mundial - Mexico 2022*, May 6 2022, Online in Spanish only: <https://lacoperacha.org.mx/mirada-al-foro-social-mundial-mexico-2022/>

⁷. Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), 1994, *First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle: Today We Say Basta!*, January 1, 1994, available in English at the Brown University Library Website [online]

[<https://library.brown.edu/create/modernlatinamerica/chapters/chapter-3-mexico/primary-documents-with-accompanying-discussion-questions/document-9-first-declaration-from-the-lacandon-jungle-today-we-say-enough-is-enough-ya-basta-ezln-command-1993/>] (Accessed July 31, 2022).

the North American Free Trade Agreement came into effect. The EZLN is an army, which is an obstacle to its presence at the WSF. Nevertheless, the absence of the Zapatista movement reflects a broader political problem with the government and the convergence of Mexican social movements, many of which were absent.

Among them, we find the Frente Auténtico del Trabajo (FAT). The Central Council of Metropolitan Montreal (CCMM-CSN) has developed ties for over twenty years. The International Center for Workers' Solidarity (CISO) has also established close contacts for several years. The FAT decided not to participate because of the health context. Since the North American free trade negotiations, some FTQ and CLC unions have established relations with this federation of independent unions. We should note that the FAT decision was an opportunity for CISO and its union members, including the FTQ and CCMM-CSN, not to encourage in-person participation in WSF 2022⁸.

Activities regarding the labor movement were carried out primarily by Mexico's other independent unions, including the Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (CNTE), the Nueva Central de Trabajadores (NCT), the Unión Nacional de Trabajadores (UNT), the Unión Nacional de Sindicatos Minero-Metalúrgicos y Metal-Mecánicos de Mexico (UNASIM). The WSF's opening march integrated with the May Day march in Mexico City, which brought together several thousand members of independent unions, including telephone operators and electricians, who have distanced themselves from traditional business organizations.

Finally, we must mention the absence of the International Trade Union Movement. In addition to a representative of the Brazilian CUT, one could spot the international head of the Canadian union UNIFOR, which financially supported the WSF in Mexico City.

Plea for "other educations"

While numbers are no longer with the WSFs, quality remains. The education sector confirms that. It is not a sector much courted, except by the members of CEAAL (Consejo de educación popular de América Latina y el Caribe), an important Latin American network in popular education and which was a significant pillar of the organization of WSF 2022. One of the few convergence assemblies adopted a declaration entitled "Manifiesto for Other Educations"⁹.

There are several visions of "other education." First, there is the one aimed at the "other world" that the alterglobalization movements have wanted for twenty years. It is a question to define it as "decolonial, depatriarchal, anticapitalist and anti-racist" education, as the Declaration mentions at the outset. On the other hand, "other education" is also a project to be promoted now in opposition to the logic of performance and competition in the system as it currently exists. It is a "public, free and quality" education, with "cultural and social relevance, liberating, transformative and popular, communitarian and democratic, intercultural, diverse, plural and inclusive, based on epistemic justice and inter-scientific dialogue." Moreover, "other education" is also a plea for this non-formal education of consciousness-raising and social transformation.

The goal of the Declaration is to promote education for citizenship, affirming the centrality of popular education in a "broad, inclusive and transformative" view. It is about developing a lifelong education

⁸. Réseau québécois pour le FSM 2022 (Quebec Network for the WSF 2022), was composed of AQOCI, Alternatives, ATTAC-Quebec, Collectif *Un Québec fou de ses solidarités*, Katalizo, RISE. Online: <https://www.facebook.com/ReseauQCFSM>

⁹. WSF 2022, Education Convergence Assembly, "Manifiesto for Other Educations", Mexico City, May 6, 2022, Online <https://alter.quebec/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Declaration-Education-EN-draft.pdf>

that values diversity and inclusion during an increasing division and inequality. So, education is about cooperation, not competition.

The question of war and international solidarity

There is international solidarity among the unavoidable topics of such a meeting, especially about war! There have been a few workshops on these issues, but most of the time, they were not necessarily about the Ukraine issue. Instead, the war in Ukraine shows that the alter-globalist left in the North and South is more concerned with the struggle with US imperialism¹⁰.

Among the workshops was the one of the Transnational Institute (TNI)¹¹ in Amsterdam entitled Foro global contra la Guerra - Global anti-war Forum. Following a co-construction approach, this workshop first aimed to map the different types of wars (conventional war, war on migrants, war on terrorism, war on drug traffickers) in a sub-committee approach. Essentially composed of Europeans, the sub-group exchanges quickly raised the issues concerning the Russian aggression in Ukraine.

Since the creation of the WSF twenty years ago, about thirty wars have happened on the planet. However, the current Russian war in Ukraine impacts the world political situation and shakes international relations. Some remind the mobilization against the war in Iraq in 2003, which was exemplary. If the one today by Russia appears to be a war of the past, it nevertheless announces a new context. The opposition to the war in Iraq was part of a broad refusal to see the triumph of globalized capitalism with western imperialist tendencies in the wake of the consequences of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Eastern bloc countries. Today we are in a very different conjecture. The war in Ukraine sends us back to a polarized world and augurs a return to more violent inter-imperialist struggles.

One of the conclusions was to call for steps to denounce the systemic character of this war, which reinforces the world we do not want, especially at the end of the pandemic. Pedagogically, it is about going beyond a call against war and for peace. It is instead a question of identifying the regressive impacts of this war if we wish to develop a broad anti-war movement and convince the population. We must insist on the consequences of this war, notably: the increase of authoritarianism, the progression of the radical right, the expansion of military budgets in the West, the reinforcement of the use of oil, the increase in the number of refugees, and the brutal impoverishment of the population to levels not known since the Second World War; the reinforcement of racism, notably in the differentiated treatment of refugees in favor of the White Ukrainian people.

Local issues as a dimension of the struggle of all peoples

More generally, concerning international solidarity, the workshops addressed local issues as dimensions of the struggle of all peoples. That is how solidarity is transformed into Internationalism and becomes a dimension of the political struggle in each country. From a perspective of social transformation, international solidarity requires breaking with the North-South mold of colonial domination to follow an approach of horizontality and equality.

Internationalist solidarity from North is not "white handouts," we heard from people in the South. The pursuit of empowerment goals is essential. Among the innovative approaches, that accompaniment

¹⁰. See Ronald Cameron, 2022, *La guerre en Ukraine et les défis des mouvements altermondialistes occidentaux* (The War in Ukraine and the Challenges of Western Anti-Globalization Movements): <https://alter.quebec/la-guerre-en-ukraine-et-les-defis-des-mouvements-altermondialistes-occidentaux/>

¹¹. <https://www.tni.org/en/search/language/en>

opens up more respectful people practices¹². To mark international solidarity in the process of social transformation starts from the principle that emancipation can only be the work of the people and populations victims of racism and colonialism. The alterglobalist perspective is to allow the countries of the South to be creators of their solutions.

Relevance of alterglobalism

The alterglobalist trend was born out of a desire to resist the offensive of globalized capital. The approach turned into a global anti-systemic movement with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the 1990s. It aimed to distance itself from the Western elites who seized upon the collapse of the Eastern European regimes to celebrate the victory of capitalism over "socialism."

If Western societies experienced their most egalitarian period in history during the thirty glorious years, notably with the development of the welfare state, it was not because of the greatness of the dominant classes of advanced capitalist countries. The socialist threat acted powerfully as an alternative to capitalism. In the last century, the degradation and the perversion of the socialist project require to refound of an anti-systemic project. It had been a long time since the socialist project had made the Western ruling classes tremble. It no longer had the mobilizing power it once had.

Thus, the alterglobalist perspective was a response to triumphant neoliberalism, proposing a society preoccupied with the aspirations, social needs, and interests of "those below." A laborious work of inventory of the collective imaginary is always on the agenda to nourish a project from popular experiences on the common good, but also in a feminist, decolonial, intersectional and inclusive perspective. For many, it was a question of retrieving the original idea of socialism as an egalitarian society.

The "other world" desired by the alterglobalists was also different from the model of socialism that had just collapsed. The refusal of the "top-down" models committed the social movements to propose a more democratic and participative society. So the alterglobalization activities inspired a renewal of political action for social transformation, notably in Québec solidaire and elsewhere in the world.¹³

In differentiating itself from the recently collapsed Soviet regimes, alterglobalism also distinguished itself from centralist internationalist conceptions. There have always been different types of Internationalism. Still, one of the main characteristics is the centralist vision of a sector, a network, or a movement. Also, the perversion of internationalism has pushed centralization to the extreme and has resulted in the subordination of movements to the prerogatives of an authoritarian, even dictatorial power.

However, the alterglobalization movement has defined itself as an opposition to neoliberalism which was celebrating its triumph. Many currents in the North and South left have prioritized the struggle against the domination of Western Imperialism. Although alterglobalism is known for its decentralized vision of socialism, the New World desire did not appear to be the answer for the populations of Eastern Europe, caught between regimes with stifled freedoms and the lure of the liberal society, with endless growth!

¹². In particular, a workshop led by the Centre de recherche et d'information pour le développement (CRID - France) presented an accompaniment projects in Southern countries based on models that have also developed in Quebec with the Projet accompagnement Solidarité Colombie (PASC) and Projet accompagnement Québec Guatemala (PAQG).

¹³. Pierre Beaudet and Ronald Cameron, Québec solidaire et les mouvements sociaux, chapter of a book to be published by the Presses de l'Université de Montréal, under the direction of Pascale Dufour, fall 2022.

The democratic control of the people over their destiny is at the heart of the principles of horizontality. The development of Internationalism in authoritarian countries and Eastern Europe is crucial in the much-needed renewal of alterglobalist movements.

The Tunis seminar: between the future of the WSF or alterglobalism

At the end of the Mexico meeting, the WSF International Council (IC) held its traditional meeting to evaluate the event and discuss future perspectives. Following the Tunisian proposal, the assembly agreed to plan a seminar on the future of the WSF in September 2022. This idea, which has been brought up for ten years, is more than welcome, as it is necessary to strengthen the weight of networks and movements. This decision seems obvious, but it raises another issue, that of generational renewal and networks interested in alterglobalism, in a context of the general weakening of global social networks.

Moreover, for the first time, the establishment of a delegation of authority mechanism seems irreversible in this instance concerned with horizontality. Nevertheless, this concern may become a diversion. The fundamental issue of the Tunis seminar is to counter the marginalization of alterglobalism to activities on the margins of realities. The Tunis seminar challenge is more about the future of alterglobalism itself and less about the WSF or the IC and its secretariat, which seems to be the concern of many IC members.

Given the international context and the demands for enlargement to a new internationalist vision, it seems essential to be more concerned with analyzing the dynamics of resistance movements than saving a model of meeting, the WSF, which no longer offers the same spring for renewing alterglobalism movements. Today, several networks, particularly in the environmental field, but not only, act locally with a global scope.

The WSFs are no longer the crucibles of collaborations likely to guide alterglobalist action, which some thematic or sectoral gatherings still can. If the WSFs can still contribute to developing a global activist alterglobalist network, it is in its dimensions of popular education and exchange of experiences between movements, without pretending to draw the path to follow. The WSFs can constitute an exercise in collective learning and political education for alterglobalization activists, likely to foster solidarity and global convergence of movements.