

The Citizens Assemblies

*Working Paper for the First Meeting of Moderators for the
Citizens Assemblies*

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Introduction

The idea of organizing Citizens Assemblies is one of the most important outcomes of the World Assembly held in Lille (December 2001).¹ It has ripened since 1995, thanks to all the work carried out under the banner of the Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World facilitated by support from the Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation (FPH) since 1988 in response to the proposal to hold a States-General of the Planet. This Alliance led to the meeting known as the *Preparatory Convention for the States-General of the Planet*, held near Paris in September 1993, during which the *Platform for a Responsible and United World* was launched.² This meeting itself was the culmination of a series of seven continental meetings held between May 1992 and June 1993 in Santiago, Montréal, Ouagadougou, Cairo, Athens, Sarawak-Malaysia and She Kou in Southern China.

Early in 1995, we sought to create an innovative form of participation during the Copenhagen Social Summit. Inspired by events at the continental meetings, we thought that this Summit would provide an excellent opportunity to broaden the range of themes covered by the Alliance and in

¹ <http://www.alliance21.org/lille/en/index.html>

² http://www.alliance21.org/2003/article.php3?id_article=785

particular by partners' networks. Four meetings were held in February 1995 (Beijing, Rio, Cape Town, and Paris), in preparation for the Copenhagen Summit attended by all the organizers. A new text was drafted at that time: *Une Alliance mondiale face à l'apartheid social*, which was later added to the 1993 Platform.³

In December 1997, Alliance members, whose numbers were growing and who were to become increasingly active in various regions of the world, again with FPH support, held six meetings: Sao Paulo (Brazil), Bangalore (India), Barcelona (Spain), Kigali (Rwanda), Roubaix (France) and Algiers (Algeria). The Brazilian meeting was attended by nearly 120 participants from all world regions, the other meetings were either continental- or regional-based events. The event was unique in that the meetings were held simultaneously and discussed the same issues.

The Alliance was built around three approaches: geo-cultural, collegial, and thematic. Between 1995 and 2000, nearly one hundred thematic programmes, socio-professional networks, and geo-cultural groups contributed to this intercultural and international initiative.

Events in 2000 and 2001 drew on this accumulation of rich discussions and experiences. The process took the form of:

- * international, thematic and collegial meetings;
- * four simultaneous continental meetings: Africa, Americas, Asia, and Europe, together with a regional meeting in the Middle East in June 2001;⁴
- * the World Citizens Assembly, in Lille (France) in December 2001;
- * the publication, in several languages and a variety of countries, of the *Proposal Papers for the 21st Century* and the drafting of a *Charter for Human Responsibility*.⁵

³ <http://www.world-governance.org/spip.php?article299>

⁴ <http://www.alliance21.org/continental/>

The work carried out by the Alliance represents an unprecedented effort to put into action a multiple social process that takes up the challenge of coming to terms with the complexity of today's world and of overcoming the individual and collective feeling of impotence experienced by many citizens when facing new issues raised by globalization.

From the FPH's perspective, the idea of promoting Citizens Assemblies reflects the experience accumulated over twenty years since the 1988 Call for the States-General of the Planet.

The Citizens Assemblies as a means for instituting or re-instituting citizen communities at various levels

The decision to hold Citizens Assemblies is not based solely on experiences 'internal' to the Alliance. The concept of a gathering of citizens at the national, world regional, or continental level is founded on a geo-political bedrock and on the search for proposals for a new world governance. More particularly, we emphasized, in the Proposal Papers entitled *Redefining Global Governance to Meet the Challenges of the 21st Century*, the importance of the regional level as an intermediary between States and the world. The concept of world governance can no longer be construed without a reformulation of the Nation-States themselves and a redefinition of their role, modes of operation and interaction. The historic task of instituting or re-instituting citizen communities cannot be undertaken unless it is anchored in the interaction between countries and between peoples at the regional level.

Globalization and unwavering interdependence between societies and between humanity and the biosphere emphasize the need for new regulations. These, in turn, require a renewal of methods of social and political participation and new forms of links between the local and the

⁵ <http://www.charte-responsabilites-humaines.net/>

global in order that citizens, both individually and collectively, do not feel impotent when facing new problems whose level and complexity overwhelm them.

The idea of a citizens assembly is now part of the political landscape, especially in Latin America. In the context of globalization today, it represents a key element in the process of transforming political systems and redefining governance. For example, the preparation of Constituent Assemblies in Ecuador and in Bolivia corresponds to this search for redefinition. Campaigns for Constituent Assemblies have already been launched in Argentina and in Chile. In fact, the idea of establishing a social and political process with the aim of developing a new constitutional framework is growing in various regions around the world, because it opens up possibilities for profound changes in the legal and institutional framework of current political regimes. Democratic demands strive to go beyond the structures of political systems shackled by constitutional regimes that no longer correspond to such issues as regional integration, cooperation between countries and regions, new insertion of these economies and societies into a globalized world.

Methodological Tools for the Citizens Assemblies

The Citizens Assemblies give particular importance to a specific methodology at two levels:

a) preparation of a Citizens Agenda indicating, for each socio-professional milieu and for each citizens alliance, the three phases to be put in place:

- diagnosis and validation of perspectives for each level,
- sharing and drafting of common strategies, and,
- return to specific situations and development of action plans.

A *Calendar for the Citizens Assembly* will thus be drafted and sent out via web sites, radio stations, newspapers, television channels, journals participating in the process.

b) The creation of methodological guides for the various milieus and alliances that will allow convergence towards a homogeneous and interrelated approach. This involves:

- preparation of notes tracing the evolution of discussions;
- organization of Internet forums by milieu and by alliance;
- development of Proposal Papers;
- discussion of charters of responsibility by milieu and by alliance;
- use of synthetic mapping software which creates an interactive vision of the many initiatives launched; and,
- creation of a 'Citizens Assemblies' web site with a database of notes and documents. This site will publish notes, documents, maps, proposals, charters, etc.

The Citizens Assembly is a social process spread over time

...we trace the path as we walk ...

A Citizens Assembly is a long-term process. It cannot end with a single meeting in the short term.

The objective is to encourage contributions from all social and professional groups in any one region to the emergence of a vision and of perspectives for facing the changes of the 21st century and then to bring these perspectives together and see which common priorities and strategies emerge.

The Citizens Assembly allows the development of a collective reflection on the region's future by placing it squarely at the heart of a vision for the evolution of the region itself and of the whole planet.

To launch this process, the proposed method involves the use of regional thematic and socio-professional workshops that will bring together active players from various social-professional milieus. Their discussions will concentrate on the identification of major challenges in the region and the development of proposals to meet those challenges. The Citizens Assembly itself will thus be transformed into a space for permanent dialogue among societies in the countries involved.

The decentralization of workshops, whether geographically or institutionally, implies the availability of common tools and methods, together with the appropriate human resources and techniques.

A Pilot Committee, whose members will reflect geographical, cultural, and socio-professional diversity in the region, will coordinate the entire process. They may represent institutions or active networks. A number of thematic and socio-professional workshops will then be established.

Each workshop will have an organizing team, whose responsibilities, in collaboration with the Assembly's Pilot Committee, will include:

- identification of some thirty participants;
- preparation of working documents that will serve as the basis for workshop discussions;
- designation of the workshop moderator;
- designation of venues for the workshop's meetings; and,
- search for funding.

Each workshop will be required to develop a proposal paper that will serve as the basis for shared debates within the Citizens Alliance.

2010: Organization of many events for the launch of the Citizens Assemblies

In 2010, a large number of meetings will bring participants together and pool the results of the various workshops created during the period 2007-2008-2009 in the various regions where Citizens Assemblies have been established. These are expected to look towards the long term. They are not limited to a single meeting, but rather will set up a permanent interactive process between work carried out by local and socio-professional workshops and the sharing of results at meetings.

The 2010 series of meetings will be organized in workshops re-constituted along strategic lines emerging from the work carried out by the socio-professional and thematic workshops. The objective is to promote debates, develop proposals, and validate strategic approaches.

Thus, the process is expected to prepare and lead to foundation meetings for the Citizens Assemblies in a number of regions (Mediterranean, Southern Cone, Asia, Sahel-Sahara, Europe, etc.). Of course, meetings will not necessarily be identical. The diversity of regional situations will ensure that each meeting has its own specificity. But the holding of **several meetings** of Citizens Assemblies in **2010** in the various regions of the world, will provide significant breadth to this new drive towards the construction of innovative spaces for world citizenship.

We expect the following outcomes to emerge from this process:

- a- identification of a diversified social fabric;
- b- emergence of a regional or sub-continental civil conscience that will be linked by similar processes in other parts of the world;
- c- creation of a document library, a directory, and web sites open to all.

A Possible Itinerary

The Citizens Assembly will benefit from links at the regional or sub-continental level: this will make it relatively easy to organize the meetings.

The diagram below summarizes the five possible phases of this itinerary:

