

# PARALLEL SUMMITS OF GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY

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## The Rise of Summits

In recent decades supranational decision-making has greatly expanded, both as a result of the formal transfer of power to old and new inter-governmental organisations, such as the European Union and the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and because of the emergence of *informal* supranational powers through inter-state agreements or cooperation, such as the G7/G8.

This new supranational decision-making power has remained hidden and unaccountable to democratic processes, and exercised largely by specialised government officials and international 'technocrats'. Its most visible side has become, in the last two decades, a model of high-profile collective action on global issues by states and inter-governmental organisations: the international summit.

Summits represent an important institutional innovation in the world system, combining the legitimacy of supranational organisations, the flexibility of informal meetings of states, and public displays of concern and action on current global problems. Summits have become more frequent and influential, with far-reaching policy consequences at the national level. In a world dominated by media and instant communication, where global problems are immediately visible everywhere, summits are often the media-oriented events which 'show' that the powers-that-be are addressing them. Moreover, they are the visible part of the growing *informal* decision-making power on supranational issues.

Summits are now a key element of the emerging governance system of an increasingly globalised world; they have widely differing natures, but their roles and activities include the following tasks, many of which may be combined in the same summit.

*Framing the issue.* Summits define the issues of supranational relevance. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 has defined the nature of, and solutions to, environmental problems as we understand them.

*Rule-making.* Summits define the rules for national policies in internationally relevant fields, from security to trade, from the environment to new technologies. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) conference in Singapore in 1998 has defined the rules of a new liberalised trading system.

*Policy guidelines.* Summits define the direction to be taken by policies at the national level. The decisions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on financial rules and lending have directed national policies towards deregulation of financial flows, privatisation of public enterprises, and reduction of social expenditure.

*Enforcement.* Summits may make decisions with major effects on individual countries, especially less powerful ones. G8 summits regularly address major international crises and agree on action to be taken against particular countries, such as diplomatic pressure, embargoes, or military action, often ignoring the legitimate body for addressing international crises, the Security Council of the United Nations.

It could be argued that this is what inter-governmental cooperation has always been supposed to do. But what is new in recent decades is the extension in the range of issues addressed by summits; the greater policy impact of their decisions; their frequency, which makes them a part of institutionalised decision-making; and their high media profile, in contrast to secretive diplomacy. In short, they are a crucial part of the shift in the balance of power from national to international decision-making. While there may be good reasons for transferring power to the supranational level in order to address increasingly global problems, this shift is not unproblematic.

The range of activities carried out by summits spans the prerogatives of political power that have historically emerged in states. But what is missing is the democratic process that developed at the state level in order to extend participation and representation of citizens and social groups, and legitimise the decisions taken. In fact, the officials attending summits are either professional diplomats or—mostly unelected—government officials.

Moreover, the rules and nature of most summits, with the partial exception of the UN, reflect a strong imbalance of power among states, with rich Western countries, especially the United States, dominating many decision-making processes. While summits' decisions always follow, at least indirectly, from actions of governments, which are supposed to be accountable to their citizens, most summits fail the test of democratic legitimacy. This is true both of the distribution of power among the players involved—the governments of countries included or excluded from decisions—and of the relationship between decision-makers, society, citizens, and more generally those affected by the decisions taken (see Strange 1996; Archibugi, Held, and Koehler 1998).

The proliferation and the new power of summits raise problems not only of method—democracy and legitimisation—but also of content. What are the issues discussed at summits, and what are the strategies pursued by states, inter-governmental organisations, and other key actors?

The rise of summits is associated with the globalisation process and reflects contrasting projects of globalisation. Two main ones can be identified: first, the model of *neo-liberal globalisation*; and second, the model of *globalisation of rights and responsibilities*.

The project of neo-liberal globalisation has emerged as the dominant force in supranational decision-making and has shaped many of the changes in global economic and political issues, as well as the agenda of many summits, namely, those of the G7/G8, the WTO, the IMF, and World Bank meetings. As Richard Falk puts it, 'the characteristic policy vectors of neo-liberalism involve such moves as liberalisation, privatisation, minimising economic regulation, rolling back welfare, reducing expenditures on public goods, tightening fiscal discipline, favoring freer flows of capital, strict controls on organised labor, tax reductions and unrestricted currency repatriation', amounting to a form of 'predatory globalisation' (Falk 1999: 2).

Unregulated markets, dominated by multinational corporations and private financial institutions, mostly based in the West, have been the driving force of economic growth and international integration, reducing the space for autonomous state policies in most fields. We could argue that neo-liberal globalisation has institutionalised the overwhelming power of economic mechanisms—markets and firms—over human rights, political projects, social needs, and

environmental priorities. It is no surprise that in recent decades political activity has lost much of its relevance and appeal; social inequalities have become dramatic; and the environmental crisis has deepened (see UNRISD 1995; UNDP 1999; Chomsky 1999).

The political framework for neo-liberal globalisation was prepared in the early 1980s by the policies of Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the United States. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet system in 1989–90, building on an unrivalled military supremacy, political power, and cultural dominance, the neo-liberal project of globalisation has become the new face of the hegemony of the United States.

A second important project of *globalisation of rights and responsibilities* has emerged with efforts to bring about a universalisation of human, political, and social rights and to face the responsibilities that countries, governments, and peoples have towards emerging global problems. Such a project has largely shaped the agenda of UN summits on human rights, the environment, women, food, and the International Criminal Court. It has led to declarations of principles, opened up democratic processes, influenced national policies, and promoted inter-state cooperation in these fields at the global or regional level (Europe is a major example).

The *neo-liberal* project and that based on *rights and responsibilities* point in alternative directions that the process of globalisation may take. The latter has built on key shared values, framing the issues of global concern and stressing the need for appropriate global regulations. So far, however, it is the former which has set the rules for the global economy and has had a dominant influence on policy-making around the world.

## The Reaction of Global Civil Society

Few states have resisted the sweeping changes of globalisation, and most policy responses by governments have aimed at increasing national advantage in the new global setting. State-centred politics and the activities of established political forces have remained largely confined within the horizon of nation states.

However, governments and inter-governmental organisations are not the only actors on the global scene. Economic forces and firms have played a key role in the project of neo-liberal globalisation.

Conversely, resistance to these developments and alternative projects have emerged in the sphere of civil society, whose activities have become increasingly international. For the purposes of this chapter, the emerging global civil society has to be conceptualised, with all its ambiguities and blurred images, as the sphere of cross-border relations and collective activities outside the international reach of states and markets.

Key players in the emerging global civil society have been the social movements and networks of organisations active on international issues. Their origins lie in the social movements developed around the themes of peace, human rights, solidarity, development, ecology, and women's issues. Starting with their own specific issues, they have developed an ability to address problems of a global nature, build information networks, stage actions, find self-organised solutions across national borders, interacting also in original ways with the new sites of supranational power (see Lipschutz 1992; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Waterman, 1998; Della Porta, Kriesi, and Rucht 1999; Florini 2000; Cohen and Rai 2000; O'Brien *et al.* 2000).

Originating in poorly organised social movements, and addressing the most pressing issues of the time, strong civil society organisations that are increasingly engaged in international activities have emerged in most countries. Despite extreme heterogeneity and fragmentation, much of the activity in the sphere of global civil society consists of what Richard Falk (1999: 130) has termed '*globalisation from below*', a project whose 'normative potential is to conceptualise widely shared world order values: minimising violence, maximising economic well-being, realising social and political justice, and upholding environmental quality'.

While the values embodied in global civil society remain a long way from representing a coherent alternative, they have been powerful enough to confront the dominant visions of global order, resisting the project of neo-liberal globalisation and influencing the project of globalisation of rights and responsibilities. This chapter examines these interactions by focusing on the challenges posed by global civil society to the most visible sites of supranational decision making: international summits.

## The Invention of Parallel Summits

In order to confront the new power of summits of states and inter-governmental organisations, civil society organisations have invented parallel summits, events which could challenge the legitimacy of government summits, confront official delegates, give visibility to the emerging global civil society, resist neo-liberal policies, and propose alternative solutions to global problems. Parallel summits are defined here as events:

- organised by national and international civil society groups with international participation, independently of the activities of states and firms;
- coinciding with or related to official summits of governments and international institutions (with few major exceptions);
- addressing the same fundamental problems as official summits, with a critical perspective on government and business policies;
- using the means of public information and analysis, political mobilisation and protest, and alternative policy proposals; and
- with or without formal contacts with the official summits.

This chapter focuses on the past 20 years. But government summits and international civil society conferences are as old as globalisation itself. Charnovitz (1997) has shown that, from the late nineteenth century to the 1920s, the establishment of supranational bodies such as the League of Nations and of scores of inter-governmental organisations was accompanied by equally flourishing international non-governmental organisations and civil society conferences. At several official summits and in the operation of the League of Nations, civil society groups were often able to articulate proposals on a wide range of themes including peace, national liberation, and economic, social, and women's rights; in some cases they were even involved in official activities, opening the way for the formal recognition of NGOs in the Charter of the United Nations in 1945.

During most of the cold war years the space for international civil society activities was constrained and shaped by state power and policies. The international mobilisation of civil society mainly took the form of trying to influence government policies

on decolonisation, national self-determination, peace, human rights, development, and the environment. The political movements of the 1960s and 1970s challenged the political and economic order at the national and the international levels with a transformative perspective still focused on state power. A major exception was the rise of the women's movement, which opened the way for new forms of politics, social practices, and culture based on identity (see Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein 1989).

In the 1980s the new social movements on peace, ecology, and feminism gave new directions to the pressure for change of previous decades. They concentrated on specific issues which had to do less with state power and more with global challenges, often marked by a lack of adequate supranational institutions.

The rapid growth of NGOs turned the movements' advocacy into practical projects and alternative policy proposals, demanding a voice in existing global forums. NGOs have found a substantial opening in the UN system, in ECOSOC, and other activities. However, this official recognition of civil society work at the international level has led to very modest results in terms of visibility, relevance, and impact on the operation of the international system (see Gordenker and Weiss 1995, and the contributions in the same special issue of *Third World Quarterly*; Otto 1996; Lotti and Giandomenico 1996).

A new wave of state summits began in the mid-1970s, spurred by far-reaching political change—East-West détente, the completion of decolonisation, and a new attention to human rights—and by economic developments—the end of the Bretton Woods international monetary system, the oil shocks, and the emergence of the North-South divide. Existing inter-governmental organisations, starting with the UN, played a renewed and broader role, and other forums were established; the first G5 meeting was held in 1975.

As global issues and supranational decision-making power became increasingly important, attention and action by civil society also increased. Moving on from traditional efforts to put pressure on nation-states, attention started to focus on global problems and on the failure of states to address them in events such as summits. Symbolic actions, at first small in scale and poorly organised, were followed by more systematic international work by civil society organisations, resulting in explicit challenges to the legitimacy and policies of summits. The evolution of modern parallel summits is summarised below.

### 1980–1987: The pioneering years

Each global issue has its own history of antecedents to parallel summits. Several streams of activism have monitored and flanked UN meetings on the environment, development, women, and human rights since the 1970s. In 1972 the UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm saw the participation of a few hundreds NGOs active both inside and outside the official meeting (Conca 1995). In 1975 the First World Conference on Women held in Mexico City launched the UN Decade for Women, and was followed by one in 1980 in Copenhagen and another one 1985 in Nairobi; in all events large NGO forums were held (Alter Chen 1995). Global summits of this type, with the UN system and states allowing some room for civil society voices, were possible because of the urgency of environmental problems and of the women's movement demands, and because these issues did not challenge the cold war ideologies of the time.

On the more controversial political and economic issues, civil society had to organise its international activities independently of the operation of states, the UN, and other international institutions. So the peace movement in 1981 started to organise the European Nuclear Disarmament Conventions. Public opinion tribunals were regularly held on peace, human, economic, and social rights since the one on War Crimes in Vietnam organised by Bertrand Russell in 1967 (see Box 7.1).

The first gathering of The Other Economic Summit (TOES) to coincide with a G7 meeting was organised in 1984 by the New Economics Foundation of London, in association with the Right Livelihood Awards, a sort of 'alternative Nobel Prize' which has been awarded since 1980. At first small conferences and media events, with a strong alternative development and environmental focus, TOES have since been regularly organised in cooperation with different international networks and civil society coalitions of the country hosting the G7 summit.

### 1988–1991: The political transition

After the first small-scale initiatives, a major change occurred in 1988 at the IMF–World Bank meeting in West Berlin, where the German and European New Left organised alternative conferences and a street demonstration with 80,000 people (Gerhards and Rucht 1992). Also, an international People's Tribunal

### Box 7.1: Public opinion tribunals

Denouncing major violations of human rights to world public opinion has long been the aim of public opinion tribunals. They rarely coincide with official summits or with visible decision making by the powers responsible for such violations. They do not involve large conferences or street demonstrations. Still, they have played an important role in behaving *as if* a global civil society existed, with the moral authority to identify and judge major problems not addressed by international law.

The first important Tribunal was that against war crimes in Vietnam, established in 1967 by the British philosopher and peace leader Bertrand Russell, and chaired by French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre. Modelled on the principles used in the Nuremberg Trials against Nazi war criminals, with judges chosen from prominent international lawyers and civil society figures, it held sessions in Stockholm and Roskilde in May and November 1967. In the midst of worldwide opposition to the Vietnam war, it provided evidence of war crimes and influenced public opinion.

Many years later, the Italian Socialist politician Lelio Basso, who had authored the final report on Vietnam, established the Russell Tribunal II on Latin America, in order to denounce human rights violations by military regimes in Brazil, Chile, and other Latin American countries. The new Tribunal held three sessions in Rome, Brussels, and Rome again between 1974 and 1976. In the latter session, it was proposed to make the Tribunal a permanent body, called the *Permanent Peoples' Tribunal*, based on a 'Universal Declaration of the Rights of Peoples' launched in Algiers in 1976, and it was finally established in 1979 by the Lelio Basso International Foundation for the rights and liberation of peoples in Rome.

Since its foundation, the Tribunal has met 29 times, involving dozens of judges selected from well-known experts and Nobel laureates (among them Elmar Altvater, Antonio Cassese, Richard Falk, Ruth First, Eduardo Galeano, Sean MacBride, Adolfo Peres Esquivel, Francois Rigaux, George Wald). The Tribunal examines cases of violation of rights of individuals and peoples, raised by civil society groups, where there is a lack of appropriate protection from international law (see *Fondazione Internazionale Lelio Basso* 1998). The sessions of the Tribunal have included:

- questions of national liberation (Western Sahara, 1979; Eritrea, 1980; East Timor, 1981);
- foreign aggressions (Afghanistan I, 1981 and II, 1982; Nicaragua, 1984);

- issues of internal democratic self-determination (Argentina, 1980; Philippines, 1980; El Salvador, 1981; Zaire, 1982; Guatemala, 1983);
- general human rights issues (the Armenian genocide, 1984; Puerto Rico, 1989; Brazilian Amazon, 1990; Latin America, 1991; Tibet, 1992; the conquest of the Americas, 1992; asylum rights in Europe; children's rights, 1995; two sessions on the States of former Yugoslavia, 1995; children's rights in Brazil, 1999); and
- economic, social, and environmental rights (two sessions on the IMF and the World Bank, in coincidence with their summits in West Berlin in 1988 and Madrid in 1994; two sessions on the Bhopal case, 1992, 1994; Chernobyl, 1996; the rights of textile workers, 1998; Elf in Africa; transnational corporations and human rights, 2000).

Evolution is evident, from problems associated to peoples' rights to self-determination in the post-colonial world to attention to human, social, and economic rights endangered by the national and supranational powers, challenged also by parallel summits.

A similar Public Opinion Tribunal was organised in December 2000 in Tokyo by the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal 2000 concerning Japanese military sexual slavery in Asian countries in the 1930s and 1940s. It considered the criminal liability of the Japanese political and military authorities, and the responsibility of the state of Japan for rape and sexual slavery as crimes against humanity. Close to 500 people, mainly women from Asian and Pacific countries, including surviving victims, participated to the Tribunal; it was preceded by a hearing on crimes against women in recent wars in all continents and by symbolic demonstrations in Japan and Germany. The Japanese government was invited to participate, but did not attend the trial, which obtained considerable media attention. The Tokyo Tribunal was important for its well-organised ability to break a decade-old silence on Asian 'comfort women' and to highlight the gender dimension of international justice.

The symbolic nature of the Tribunals can be seen as a prophetic anticipation of the creation in 1998 of the Statute for an International Criminal Court, which may in future investigate and genuinely prosecute the kinds of cases that were formerly raised by Public Opinion Tribunals.



was held on the responsibilities of the IMF and World Bank for the underdevelopment of the South.

This was a major development in the political experiences of social movements, as the left movements of the 1970s and 1980s made the key institutions of globalisation the objects of their protest. For large numbers of activists previously involved in radical politics or in the peace and ecological movements of the 1980s, this attention to global issues represented a key turning point.

The next step was the development of international networks. A major advance occurred in 1990 alongside the meeting of the IMF and World Bank. At the parallel summit organised by the Bank Information Center in Washington, for the first time civil society organisations of North and South worked together on how to resist IMF and World Bank policies. This cooperation, with various degrees of intensity and effective integration, has since been a continuing characteristic of parallel summits.

The end of the cold war and the dissolution of the Soviet system created a great opening for such events, and several initiatives were taken by the emerging global civil society. In the arena of peace, a parallel summit challenged the *raison d'être* of NATO at its 40th anniversary celebration in Rome in 1989. In these years, the last Conventions for European Nuclear Disarmament took place, independently of official political or military summits, and the first meetings of the Helsinki Citizens Assembly occurred (see Box 7.2). They brought together peace and human rights activists from eastern and western Europe, and developed an alternative agenda to the nationalist revival which later led to tragic wars in the Balkans and in the republics of the former Soviet Union (see Kaldor 1999; Marcon and Pianta 2001). Similar developments took place on the environmental front, and on other specific issues, linking past mobilisations to current challenges on a global scale.

### 1992–1995: The institutional expansion

The strongest development of parallel summits has emerged with the large UN thematic conferences of the early 1990s, designed to chart the agenda for the twenty-first century on issues of increasing global relevance, focusing on the universalisation of rights.

The 1992 Rio Conference on Environment and Development and the parallel summit taking the form of an NGO Forum were unprecedented in their size, media resonance, and long-term impact on ideas and

policies, and for the emergence of a global civil society involved in building networks, developing joint strategies, and confronting states and international institutions (see Conca 1995; Van Rooy 1997).

In 1993 the UN conference on human rights in Vienna saw the participation of thousands of civil society activists, and addressed a key issue, long neglected by states in the cold war (see Gaer 1995; Smith, Pagnucco, and Lopez 1998). In 1994 the Cairo conference on population led civil society groups to forge new links on the conditions of women, families, and societies in the North and South.

Finally, 1995 was a crucial year for the emergence of global civil society. The Copenhagen Conference on Social Development and the Beijing conference on Women, both with sizeable NGO forums integrated in the official programme, were points of no return for the visibility, relevance, and mobilisation of global civil society. Several thousand NGOs participated to the events in Copenhagen and Beijing, gaining attention from official delegations, influencing the agenda and the final documents, and—equally important—becoming involved in large-scale civil society networks. The key issue of the Social Development conference was the need to combine economic growth with improvements in social conditions; its policy implications were clearly at odds with the neo-liberal prescriptions to contain social expenditure and public action. The Conference on Women addressed many aspects of women's conditions in North and South, including gender roles, family structures, reproductive rights, and social and economic activities; it called for a wide range of actions, from individual self-help to international commitments by states (on environmental, social, and women's issues, see the case studies in Keck and Sikkink 1998; Florini 2000; Cohen and Rai 2000; O'Brien *et al.*, 2000; and Uvin 1995; on women see also Alter Chen 1995; Petchesky 2000).

Alongside these major events, the parallel summits at G7 meetings continued in Munich and Tokyo; in Naples in 1994 conferences and street demonstrations took place; in Halifax in 1995 the Halifax initiative of Canadian civil society was inaugurated. In Madrid in 1994 for the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the IMF and World Bank, a major parallel summit was organised around the catch-cry '50 Years is Enough'.

### 1996–1999: Consolidation and diffusion

Parallel summits at the end of the 1990s consolidated their networks across national borders and ventured

## Box 7.2: Peace summits

The peace movement of the 1980s had a major international orientation, bringing together the European countries involved in the planned deployment of Intermediate Nuclear Forces (the 'Euromissiles', Cruise and Pershing II), the US Freeze campaign, activists in Asia and the Pacific, and reaching out to civil society and independent peace groups in eastern Europe. The key events building such international connections were the Conventions of European Nuclear Disarmament, started in Brussels in the summer of 1981 (confronting the NATO headquarters) and held every year for a decade all over Europe in cities such as Amsterdam, Perugia, Coventry, Paris, and, after the end of the cold war, Moscow in 1991. They were organised by the UK END group, led by Edward P. Thompson, the British historian, and Mary Kaldor, and a well established network of European peace organisations. Conventions included conferences, peace actions, and demonstrations, each attended by thousands of people from dozens of countries. They shared with parallel summits the combination of efforts for 'internal' strengthening of the peace movement (making links, discussing issues and strategies), and the 'external' objective of influencing governments' security policy.

As the opening to civil society activities proceeded in eastern Europe, new networks emerged. The Helsinki Citizens Assembly, based in Prague, developed links among dozens of human rights, civic, and peace groups in eastern and western Europe, paralleling within society the process opened among states by the Helsinki Final Act of 1976. Bringing together intellectuals, policy-makers, and civic leaders, it organised several conferences—the first in Bratislava in 1991, then in Ohrid, Macedonia, in 1993 and in Tuzla, Bosnia, in

1995—attended by hundreds of people, building a common alternative to the outbursts of nationalism which have caused a decade of conflict in the Balkans and in the Caucasus (see Kaldor 1999; Marcon and Pianta 2001).

The largest peace conference, with 10,000 participants, including thousands of organisations from all over the world, and representatives from the UN and several governments, was held in May 1999 in the Hague. Organised by the Hague Appeal for Peace and bringing together all major international networks, the meeting filled a gap in the series of UN thematic conferences and provided an unprecedented global venue for declaring that peace is a human right and that 'it is time to abolish war'.

Why were such events not organised to coincide with meetings of the UN, NATO, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), or European governments? A mass social movement such as the peace movement has an autonomous dynamic setting its own calendar, agenda, and timing; important decisions are still, at least formally, in the hands of states and the domestic political sphere may still appear relevant to policy making, while the most powerful decision makers—NATO, the governments of the superpowers or of states at war—are simply too remote from the reach of civil society; in fact, the nature of military power—closely guarded by generals and military alliances, inaccessible, and arbitrary—makes it the most difficult one to confront at the international level. Still, the claims from peace movements—that political and military power has to be accountable to global society and that new arms races and wars lack legitimacy—are fundamental arguments similar to those made in parallel summits.

into an increasing range of issues, with a diversity of forms of organisations and types of events. They steadily built up their strength, which became evident in Seattle in December 1999, when they challenged the WTO summit.

G7 parallel summits mobilised increasing numbers of people in Lyon in 1996, Denver in 1997, Birmingham in 1998, and Cologne in 1999. The issue of Third World

debt, raised by the worldwide campaign Jubilee 2000, became a major focus for mobilisation that took highly original forms (Pettifor 1998). The IMF-World Bank summits encountered a small parallel summit even in Hong Kong in 1997, as did the World Economic Forum in Davos (Houtart and Polet 1999).

Parallel summits in this period started to extend to major regional gatherings, including meetings of

### Box 7.3: The Assemblies of the Peoples' United Nations

As the United Nations celebrated its 50th year in 1995, an unconventional parallel summit was held in Perugia, Italy, with the first meeting of the Assembly of the Peoples' United Nations, a conference with civil society representatives from more than 100 countries, each invited by a local authority. The Assembly heard witnesses of world problems and called for reform and democratisation of the United Nations. Organised by Tavola della Pace (Peace Roundtable), coordinating 500 Italian local and national groups and 350 local authorities, the Assembly has since then been convened every other year with the same format, focusing in 1997 on economic justice, in 1999 on the role of global civil society—arguing that *'a different world is possible'*—and in 2001 on *globalisation from below*. Before each Assembly delegates visited hundreds of local authorities in an experiment to link global issues and local education, and dozens of conferences and workshops were organised all over Italy on specific issues. A major event which has ended every session of the Assembly has been the 15-mile march from Perugia to Assisi, a historic peace movement route, attended on average by 50,000 people. An extraordinary march by 100,000 people was held in May 1999 against Serbian repression and NATO bombing in Kosovo (Lotti and Giandomenico 1996; Pianta 1998; Lotti, Giandomenico, and Lembo 1999).

This experience has resulted from the need of global civil society to convene, exchange knowledge, share a common language and world view, disseminate information on ongoing activities,



Assembly of the Peoples' United Nations, 1999.  
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integrate the different agendas of single-issue campaigns, and deliberate on common priorities. More initiatives of this sort are emerging, either self-organised or developing around institutional events such as the Millennium Forum of NGOs at the United Nations, or loosely related to official summits such as the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre (see Box 7.4). These increasingly large conferences are likely to become a permanent aspect of the world social and institutional landscape, asserting the existence and autonomy of global civil society.

the European Council (such as People's Europe in the UK in 1998) and of North American and Pacific organisations. Within UN activities, NGO events marked the FAO Rome World Food summit in 1996 and the conference establishing the International Criminal Court in Rome in 1998.

A major 'parallel' summit without an official summit was the Hague Appeal for Peace conference of 1999, held during NATO intervention in Kosovo, which gathered 10,000 participants from all over the world and involved several governments (see Box 7.2).

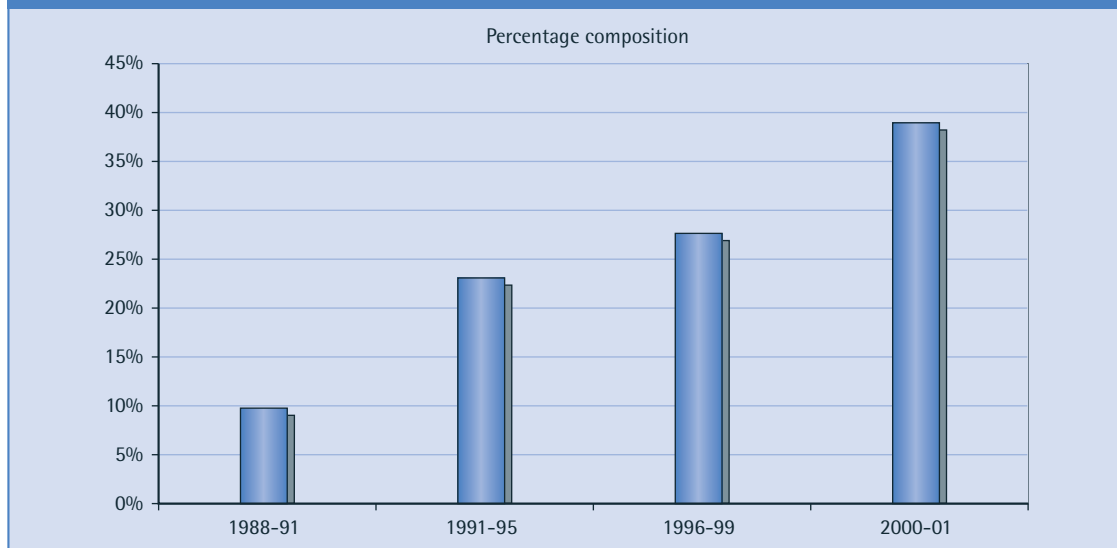
Another set of 'parallel' global civil society summits held independently of official summits were

the Assemblies of the Peoples of the United Nations organised in 1995, 1997, and 1999 in Perugia, Italy (see Box 7.3), which brought together representatives of grass-roots groups from more than 100 different countries to discuss issues such as the reform of the United Nations, economic justice, and a stronger role for global civil society; each event included a 15-mile peace march to Assisi with 50,000 people taking part (Pianta 1998; Lotti, Giandomenico, and Lembo 1999).

Finally, in December 1999, the parallel summit and the street protests in Seattle against the ministerial meeting of the WTO marked the peak of these years of consolidation. Seattle was the



Figure 7.1: The growth of parallel summits



culmination of a long process, not a sudden outburst of anti-globalisation sentiment. It captured the attention of the media, the imagination of people, and—at last—the attention of policy-makers because it had both the arguments and the strength to disrupt the official summit. The failure of the WTO ministerial meeting to launch a new comprehensive Millennium Round of trade liberalisation was equally due to the strong divisions between the US, Europe, and countries of the South. Still, in the perception of social activists, public opinion, and trade officials themselves, this was the first time a parallel summit had a major, direct impact on the conduct and outcome of the official summit (see St Clair 1999; Gunnell and Timms 2000; Kaldor 2000; on trade see also Charnovitz 1994; Marceau and Pedersen 1999; Scholte *et al.* 1999).

### 2000 and after: frequency and radicalisation

The example of Seattle led in 2000 to a dramatic proliferation of actions combining in the same way alternative proposals on global problems and street protests against international decision-makers, developing a radical challenge to the project of neo-liberal globalisation. The World Economic Forum at Davos, the European Councils in Lisbon and Nice, the UN Millennium forum of NGOs in New York, the Okinawa G8 summit, the Prague IMF-World Bank

conference, followed in 2001 by the Porto Alegre World Social Forum and the Genoa Social Forum at the G8 summit, have filled the agenda of global civil society on a monthly basis (see Box 7.4).

They have been characterised by mass participation, a radicalisation of their actions, very high media attention, a greater impact on the official summits, as well as by growing police repression. Global civil society is now an active subject on the world scene and government policies and international institutions cannot afford to ignore it. The responses to demands for a different direction in the process of globalisation will test the ability of existing institutions to respect democracy and assure the effective governance of global problems.

### Analysis of parallel summits

What lies behind the evolution of parallel summits set out in the concise overview in previous section? A survey was undertaken specifically for this chapter in order to investigate and report on the nature of parallel summits, the events that occurred, their forms of organisation, and their impact. A questionnaire was circulated to hundreds of civil society organisations; and dozens of newspapers, journals, NGO publications, and web sites were monitored in order to gather systematic information. From the findings, 61 cases of parallel summits have been selected, which are

#### Box 7.4: Seattle and after: parallel summits in 2000–2001

**Seattle.** On 30 November 1999, the opening of the WTO ministerial conference in Seattle was blocked by day-long street demonstrations. Sit-ins by civil disobedience groups, protest actions, and a large trade union march brought to Seattle 60,000 people, organised by about 700 groups, including environmental, student, solidarity, labour, and other grassroots organisations. Minor violence against property also occurred, with windows smashed by small extremist groups. Police responded brutally to the non-violent protest, made hundreds of arrests, and in the evening a curfew was declared. The key demands of WTO critics were stated in the platform 'Stop Millennium Round', signed by 1,400 organisations from all over the world. Teach-ins and workshops preceded the protest, highlighting the negative effects of the current trading order, demanding rules more favourable to poor countries and to environmental and social needs, and calling on the WTO to open itself to global civil society. Seattle showed the extent and determination of the protest against a pillar of neo-liberal globalisation, obtained worldwide visibility through the media, and struck a chord in global public opinion. At the same time, the divisions between the US, Europe and Southern countries prevented the launch of the Millennium Round of new trade liberalisation talks. The resulting message was that the protest was possible, visible, and remarkably effective.

While other parallel summits had involved greater participation, the combination of unprecedented media coverage and perceived effectiveness had a dramatic effect on the initiative of global civil society. A few weeks later, in January 2000, the still-shocked business and political leaders invited at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, were confronted by an alternative workshop and new street protests.

**Washington DC.** In April 2000 the targets of a parallel summit were the IMF and World Bank, gathered in their spring meeting; after workshops and conferences, 20,000 protesters, under strong police control, voiced their criticism of official financial and economic policies.

**The United Nations.** In May New York hosted a major UN event, the Millennium Forum of NGOs, with 1,200 participants, opening the door to civil society views on world problems and UN activities; alongside a highly detailed document, the outcome, however, was an ineffective debate with no follow-up and no impact on the special UN General Assembly held in the autumn. At the same time in New York, a parallel summit monitored the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty conference. Equally disappointing, in June, in Geneva and New York, were the follow-up meetings, five years on, of the UN summits on social development and women; they were marked by little commitment by governments and lively NGO meetings.

**Asia, Africa, and Australia.** July saw minor initiatives against the G8 summit in the remote Japanese island of Okinawa, while, on the other side of the world, thousands of civil society activists met in Durban, South Africa, for the Aids conference; even in the official Aids summit the interests of pharmaceutical multinationals were boldly confronted by African governments and social organisations. Other parallel summits held later in Africa included a Dakar conference on African debt in December and a Tanzanian meeting on IMF policies in February 2001. In September 2000, in Australia a major event was the protest against the Melbourne session of the World Economic Forum; after a week of workshops on global and local issues, with a bitter media campaign against the protest, the summit was confronted by a street demonstration with 10,000 people; clashes with the police occurred at its fringe.

**Prague.** Back in Europe, an important parallel summit was held at the end of September 2000 at the autumn meeting of the IMF-World Bank in Prague. 20,000 protesters from all over Europe, including groups prepared to carry out civil disobedience and violence against property, were confronted by strong police repression. After a busy programme of alternative conferences, the heads of the IMF and the World Bank in Prague had to accept for the first time a public debate with civil society representatives (see chapter 3 by Desai and Said in this Yearbook).

**The European Union.** The European Council has also become the target of regular protest. In spring 2000 in Lisbon, while governments talked of plans for an 'e-Europe', alternative conferences and street marches demanded a social Europe. An EU conference on peace and reconstruction in the Balkans was met by a parallel conference in May in Ancona. The European Council held in Nice in December 2000 to approve the new European Charter of Fundamental Rights, was met by a similar combination of alternative workshops denouncing the lack of democratic policy-making in Europe, street protests with about 50,000 people, and equally strong police controls.

On the environmental front, world governments met in the Hague in November and failed to agree on actions on climate change; a parallel summit there discussed the issues and put forward new proposals.

**Porto Alegre.** In January 2001 the first World Social Forum was held in Porto Alegre. The key organisers of such an original event were Brazilian progressive organisations (the municipality of Porto Alegre, the Workers' Party, trade unions, and Sem Terra, the movement of landless peasants) and Attac, a French-based network with organisations in dozens of countries, demanding a Tobin Tax on currency transactions and challenging neo-liberal globalisation. Timed to coincide with the World Economic Forum in Davos (where new protests and strong police repression took place anyway), the event at Porto Alegre attracted 20,000 activists from all continents (but a weak US contingent, see Klein 2001) and demanded democracy in the management of globalisation and a return for the role to national governments (there were two French government ministers at the events), under the now recurrent slogan '*a different world is possible*'.

**The Americas.** Civil society in North and South America has also been busy confronting the plans for a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), discussed by heads of state in April 2001 in Quebec. The parallel summit there, launched by the Continental Social Alliance, attracted 2,000 delegates to a Peoples' Summit discussing human, social, and trade union rights, and 20,000 participants to street demonstrations in the midst of very strict police measures.

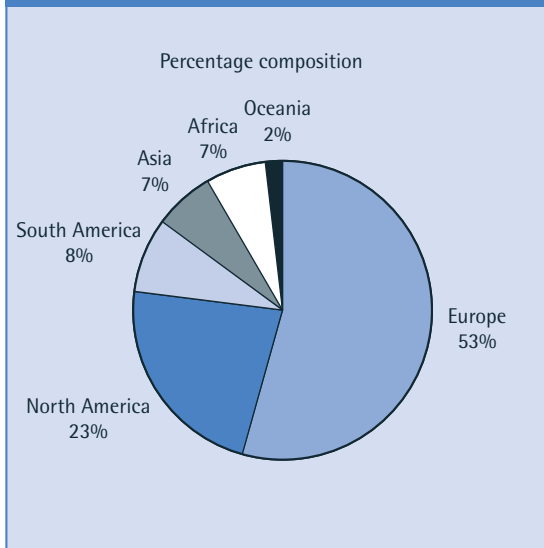
The trade negotiators had been met by criticism and street protests two weeks beforehand in Buenos Aires, as Argentina was afflicted by a deepening financial crisis after a general strike against the policies imposed by the IMF.

**Italy.** Porto Alegre has inspired the name of the Italian coalition organising the G8 parallel summit in Genoa, in July 2001. The Genoa Social Forum saw a flurry of alternative conferences and demonstrations, attracting a hundred thousand participants from all over Europe. A rehearsal of the events was carried out in March with parallel initiatives marking the Naples Global Forum on governance, where violent street clashes took place between groups of protesters and the police.

This breath-taking sequence of parallel summits after Seattle shows the extension and radicalism of ongoing protest, which continues to be met by a refusal by existing powers to open up to the demands of global civil society. To the conferences, media events, and occasional marches which made up parallel summits in the past, systematic large-scale street demonstrations have now been added, with increasing civil disobedience and isolated acts of violence used by a small number of participants. This combination of closely held undemocratic power and radicalising protest, however, has started a perverse spiral of police repression and aggressive protest which has put in danger the effective right to demonstrate in many cities. Media coverage of parallel summits concentrates on violent episodes rather than on the issues at stake, and power-holders try to portray all protest as actions by 'anti-globalisation' extremists. The strategy pursued by governments, international institutions, and media aims at reducing the space for contestation, delegitimising protest against summits, and turning a fundamental issue of democracy and accountability into one of public order. These developments leave little room for optimism about the possibility of more democratic and inclusive forms of global governance.

Information on parallel summits can now be found regularly in, among other publications, The US magazine *The Nation*, in the French monthly *Le Monde Diplomatique*, and in the Italian daily *Il Manifesto*.

Figure 7.2: Location of parallel summits



considered representative of the range of events, topics, and locations. The results are presented here, shedding new light, in a systematic way, on the emergence of parallel summits, on the forces at play, and on the role of global civil society.

Figure 7.1 shows the distribution over time of the selected parallel summits, following the periodisation presented above. The four years 1988–91 account for only 10 per cent of all events, as parallel summits slowly emerged on the political scene. From 1992 to 1995 the institutional expansion associated with the large UN thematic conferences accounted for nearly a quarter of events, often on a very large scale. A slightly higher share is found in the following four years 1996–9, culminating in the Seattle protest. Since then the number of events has risen dramatically: 40 per cent of all events took place in 2000 or in the first six months of 2001.

Figure 7.2 shows the location of parallel summits; over half have been held in Europe, close to a quarter in North America, and smaller proportions in South America, Asia (where the events are likely to be under-represented), Africa, and Oceania. Such a geographical distribution may also give some indication of the origin of those who attended parallel summits, as the large majority of participants comes from the country where the event is held or from neighbouring ones.

Figure 7.3: Type of official summit

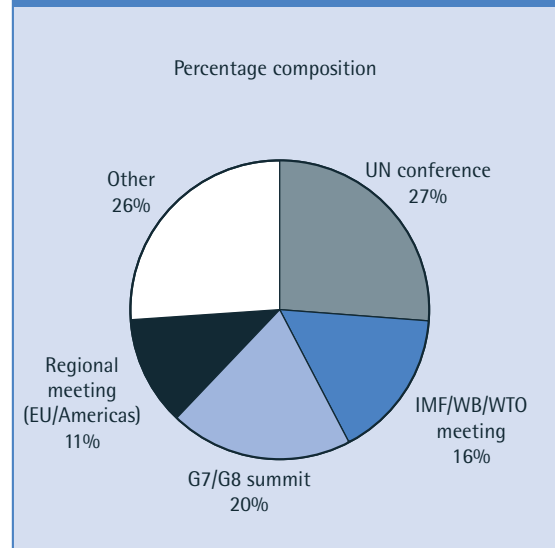


Figure 7.3 shows the types of summit with which the parallel events were associated. More than a quarter of them were UN conferences, one-fifth G7/G8 summits, slightly fewer were IMF, World Bank, or WTO meetings, followed by regional meetings in Europe or North America. The wide range of events is shown by the one-quarter of cases developed around 'other' conferences, including peace and environmental meetings.

Figure 7.4 shows that parallel summits have been organised by coordinating bodies including national civil society groups of the hosting country, in 80 per cent of cases involving also international NGOs. In a third of cases local groups were also active, with a lesser involvement by trade unions, local authorities, and other forces such as professional organisations, official institutions, and specific networks. The building of cross-border links among organisations—discussing agendas, providing knowledge and building partnerships—clearly emerges as the dominant process in the preparation of parallel summits.

Who are the organisers of parallel summits? To this question multiple responses were possible and totals therefore do not add up to 100 per cent. Figure 7.5 shows that two-thirds of events have resulted from the work of civil society organisations active in economic issues (trade, finance, debt, and so on) and development. A third flow from actions by human rights and environmental groups, a quarter from

Figure 7.4: Organisations and groups involved in the coordinating body of parallel summits

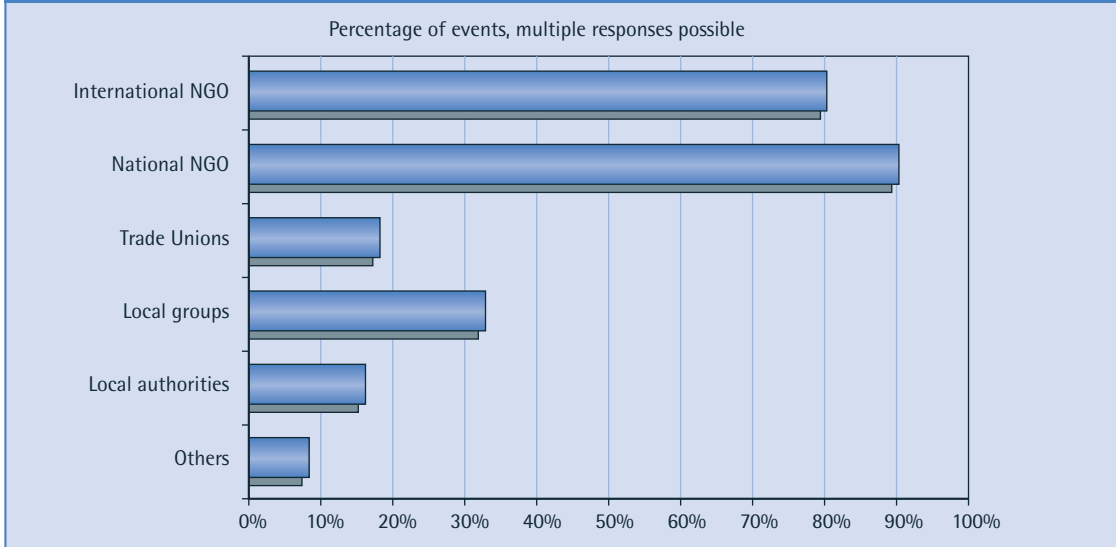
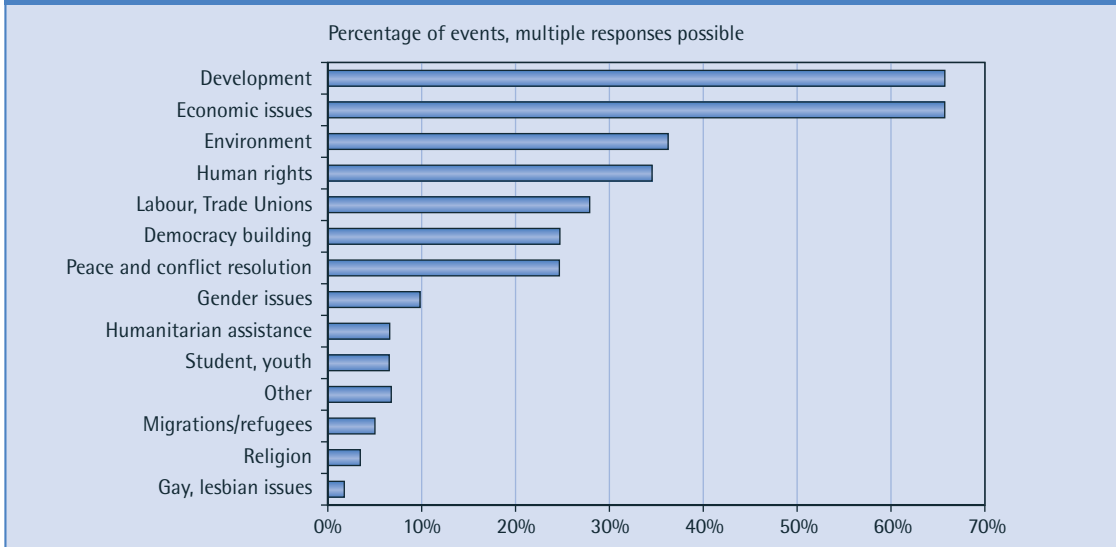


Figure 7.5: Fields of activities of the organisations involved in the coordinating body of parallel summits



trade unions, peace organisations, and campaigners for democracy. Other organisations have been involved in up to 10 per cent of parallel summits.

We may perhaps link this evidence with the two main challenges posed by parallel summits identified above: on the one hand, resistance to neo-liberal globalisation is likely to be the focus of the parallel summits organised by groups active on economic, development, and trade union issues; on the other

hand, pressure for the globalisation of rights and responsibilities may characterise those organised by human rights, environment, peace, and democracy activists. As multiple answers were possible here, further analysis has been carried out by assigning each parallel summit to one of the two groups considered above. Figure 7.6 shows the evolution over time of the events where economic globalisation or global rights could be identified as the dominant issue.



Figure 7.6: Dominant issues in parallel summits

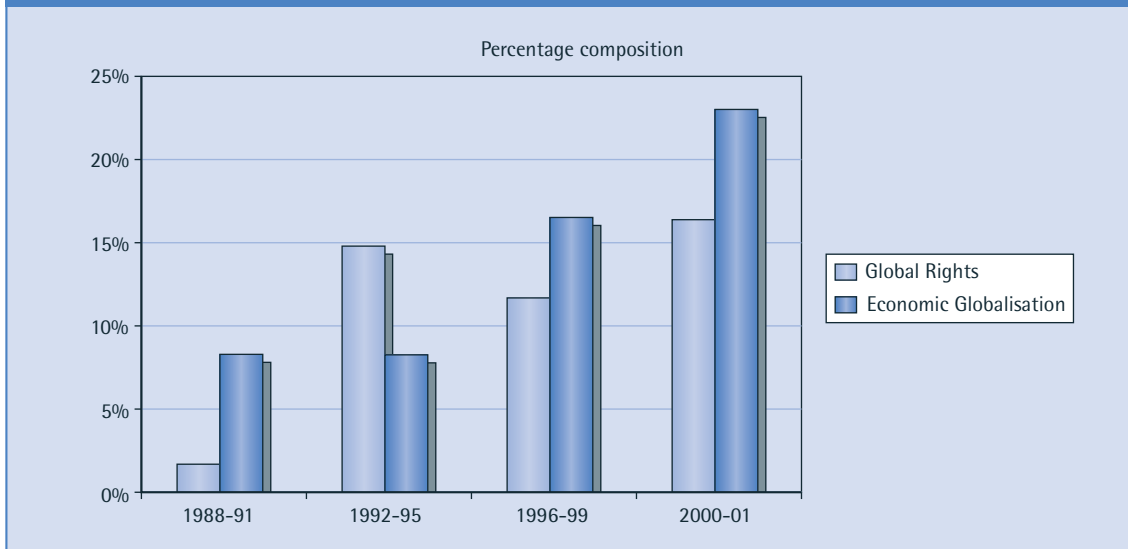
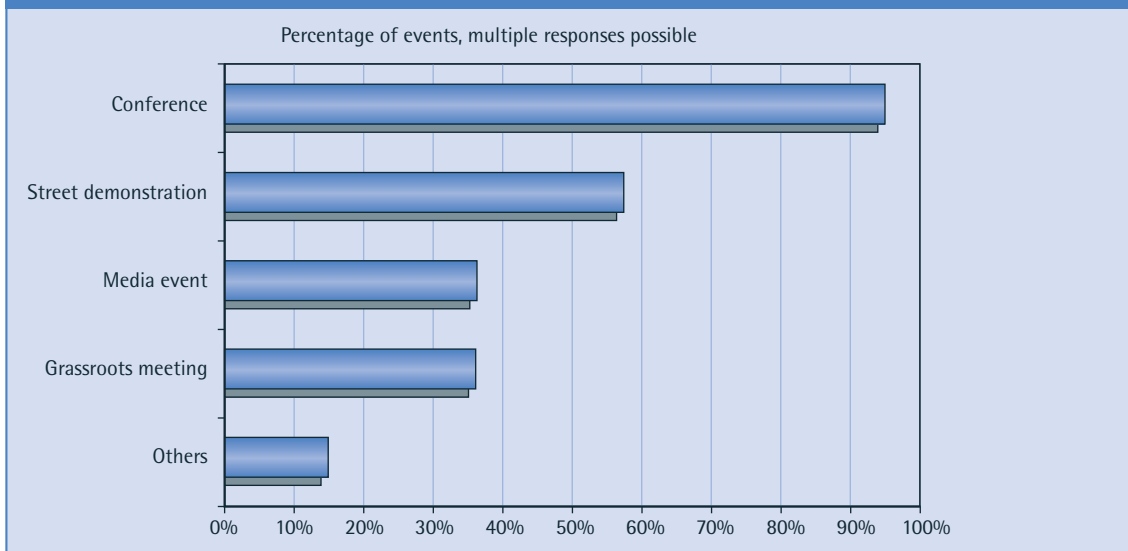


Figure 7.7: Types of events



Two opposite patterns emerge. Economic globalisation issues start in the late 1980s with a higher but stable relevance, then grow rapidly in the late 1990s and even more after 2000. Global rights issues, after a weak start, become the most important theme in the 1992–5 period of ‘institutional expansion’ marked by the large UN conferences, and remain more or less stable in terms of overall relevance up to the present, sharing the upward dynamics after 2000.

This succession of themes reflects, on the one hand, the urgency of issues and the internal dynamics of the actors and movements involved and, on the other hand, the opportunities offered by the agenda of official conferences. Confronting neo-liberal globalisation is at present the most important issue emerging from parallel summits, but it goes hand-in-hand with demands for global rights and responsibilities.

Figure 7.8: Number of participants in the events of parallel summits

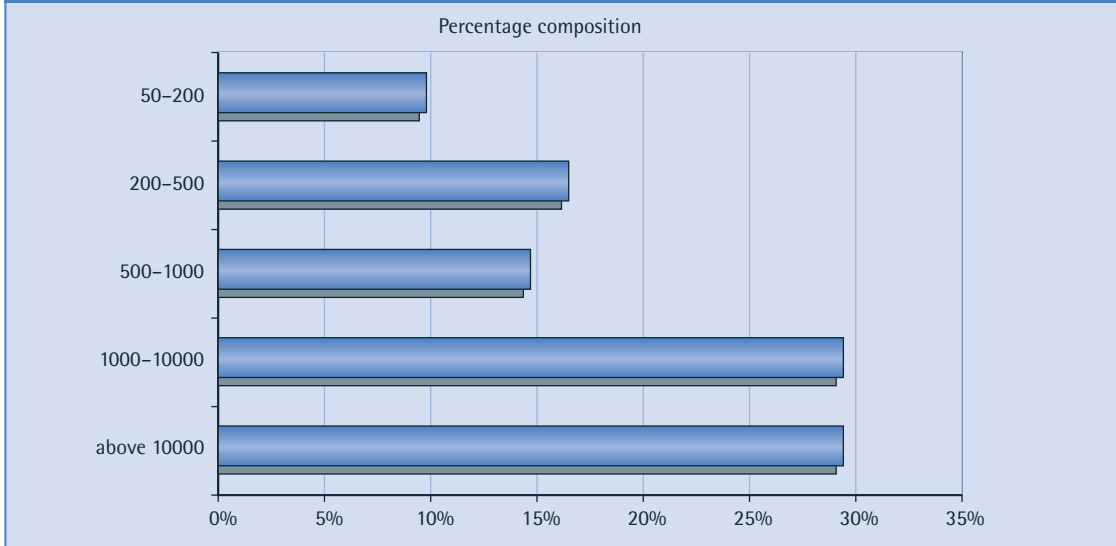
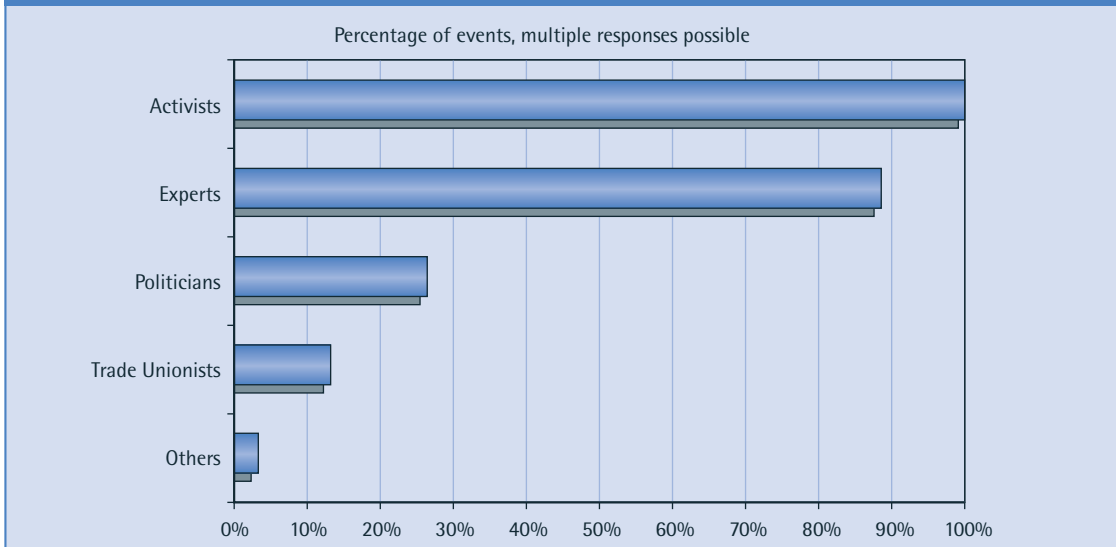


Figure 7.9: Types of keynote speakers



What type of event is a parallel summit? Figure 7.7 shows that it is always a conference, associated with street demonstrations in half of the cases or with media events and grass-roots meetings in a third of them. Symbolic events, meetings with institutions, street theatre, and other actions complete the picture of the activities undertaken in parallel summits.

Figure 7.8 shows that parallel summits involving more than 10,000 people and those involving between 1,000 and 10,000 people in each case amount to nearly 30 per cent of the total, suggesting that parallel summits are not an élite affair and that street demonstrations, when organised, are significant protests. It may be added that participation has clearly grown in more recent years (see Box 7.4). On the other hand, a third of parallel

Figure 7.10: Objectives of parallel summits

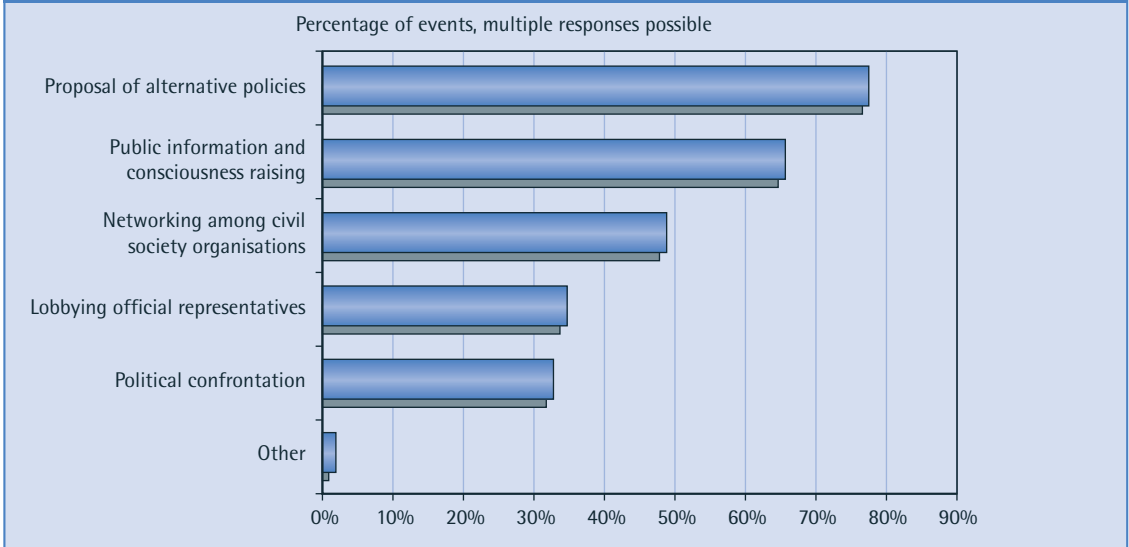
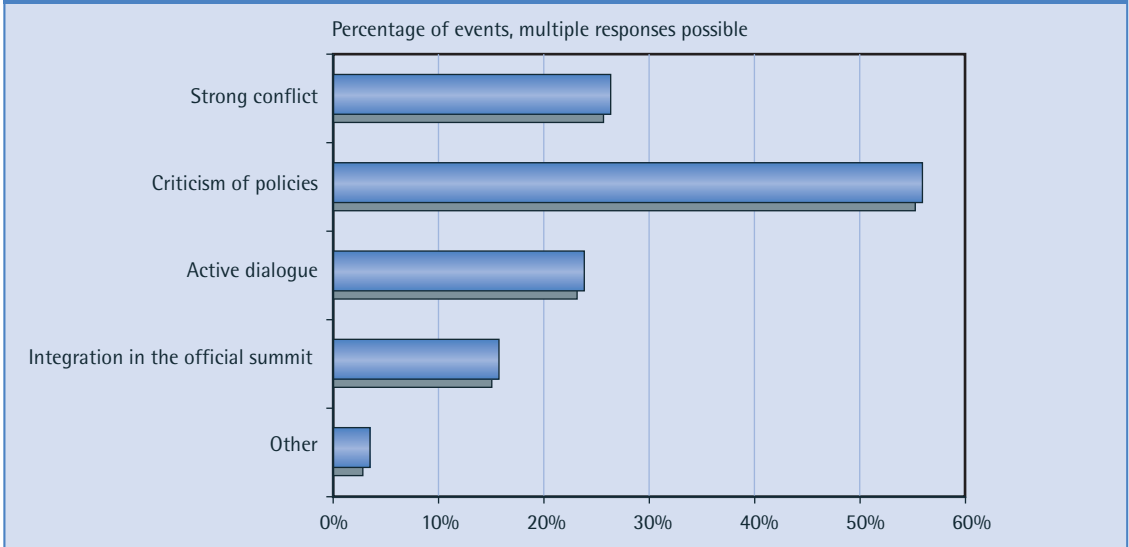


Figure 7.11: Relation to official summit



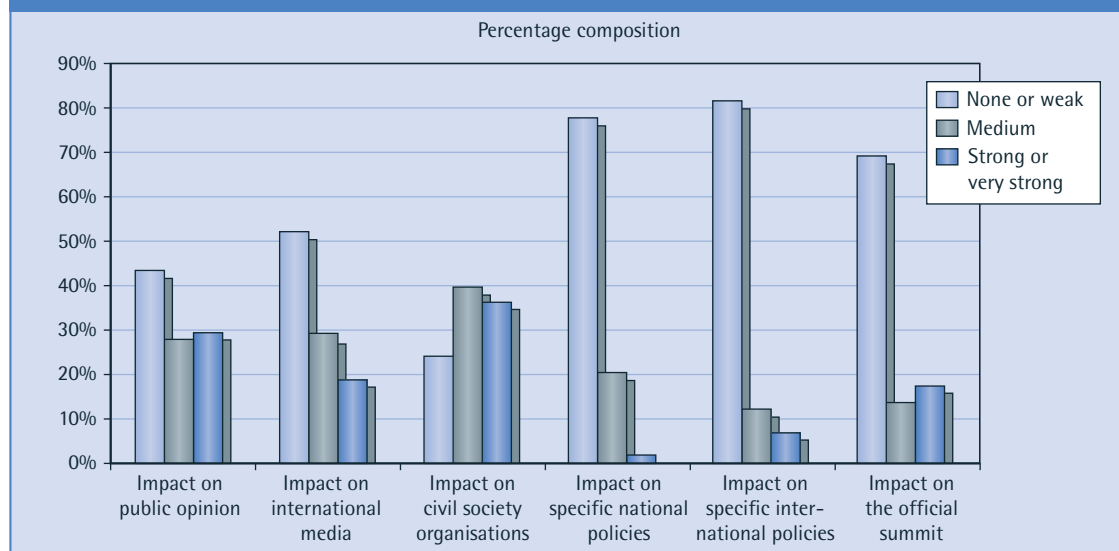
summits have between 200 and 1000 participants and a few have involved an even smaller number of people.

As shown in Figure 7.9, activists are always the key players and speakers at parallel summits, in close cooperation with experts brought in for educational, visibility, and strategy-making purposes. Parallel summits in three-quarters of cases do not need politicians (or else politicians are not interested in

such events) and even fewer involve participation by trade unionists, in spite of the potential for alliances indicated in a few important cases. Again, a variety of other actors are involved, from poor farmers to official representatives, in specific events.

Figure 7.10 shows that parallel summits mainly propose alternative policies (in three-quarters of cases), disseminate public information (two-thirds) or address the need for networking among civil society

Figure 7.12: Assessments of the results of parallel summits



organisations (half). This is a systematic pattern in the objectives of parallel summits (as confirmed also in other surveys: see Benchmark Environmental Consulting 1996) which indicates the two parallel needs of such events: building up the 'internal' strength of global civil society and making more effective its 'external' activity, based on the development of alternative proposals. Following from this, both in logic and in importance of the listed objectives, is the relationship to political power, whether in the form of lobbying officials or in the more radical form of political confrontation (one-third of events each). The relatively low relevance of lobbying official representatives may be due to the declining frequency of UN-type summits open to civil society lobbying and to the resistance to such a relationship from other international institutions, but also to the emergence of a broader agenda of civil society, increasingly autonomous from that of official summits; again this confirms a previous finding of NGO surveys (Benchmark Environmental Consulting 1996). Interestingly enough, no other objective has emerged as a relevant one.

The issue of lobbying brings us to the type of relationship with the official summit, shown in Figure 7.11. The main mode of interaction is the criticism of policies, typical of more than half the parallel summits. A quarter of events engage in active dialogue and a quarter in strong conflict. Less

frequent is integration in the official summit, confirming the lack of opportunity for civil society to be formally included—as has happened in a few UN conferences—in the activities of official summits.

What is interesting from these results is that widely differing modes of interaction coexist in the same event. Strong conflict may be associated with active dialogue; even when there is integration in the official summit, criticism and conflict occur as well.

The outlook still appears open for the integration (or co-option) of parallel activities into the operation of international institutions. The activities of global civil society so far have usually avoided both passive integration into the machinery of global governance and isolation in a ghetto of ineffective radical protest. The responses from international institutions and states will be crucial to the future evolution of these activities of global civil society.

It is very difficult to assess the results of parallel summits. They have been judged either by the organisers of the events or, when information has been available, on the basis of media reports, and clearly these results have to be treated with great caution.

The strongest impact of parallel summits is on global civil society itself, where three-quarters of events were judged to have a medium or strong effect; the impact on public opinion follows with an

Figure 7.13: Evolution of the impact on official summits

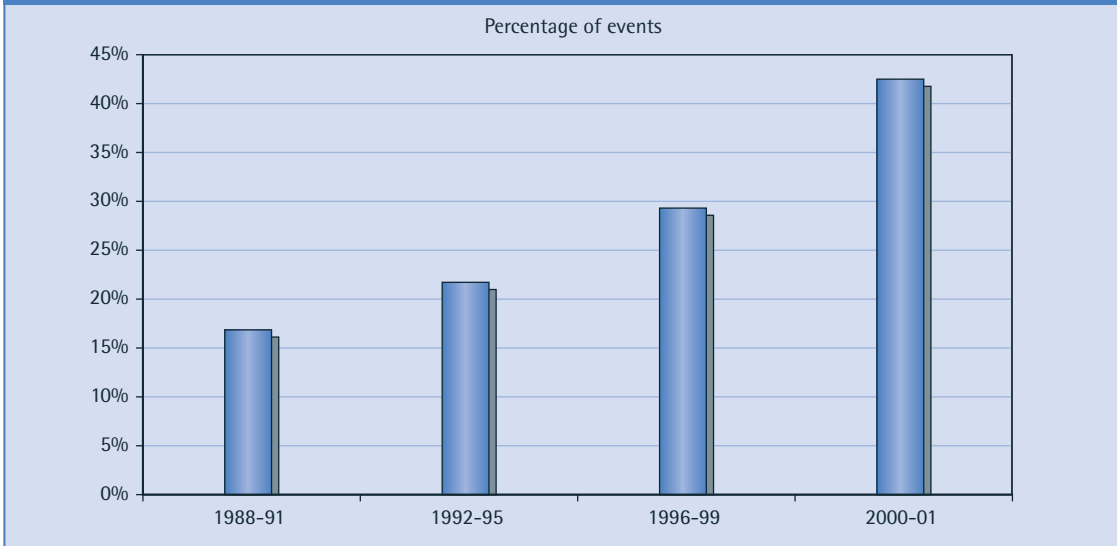
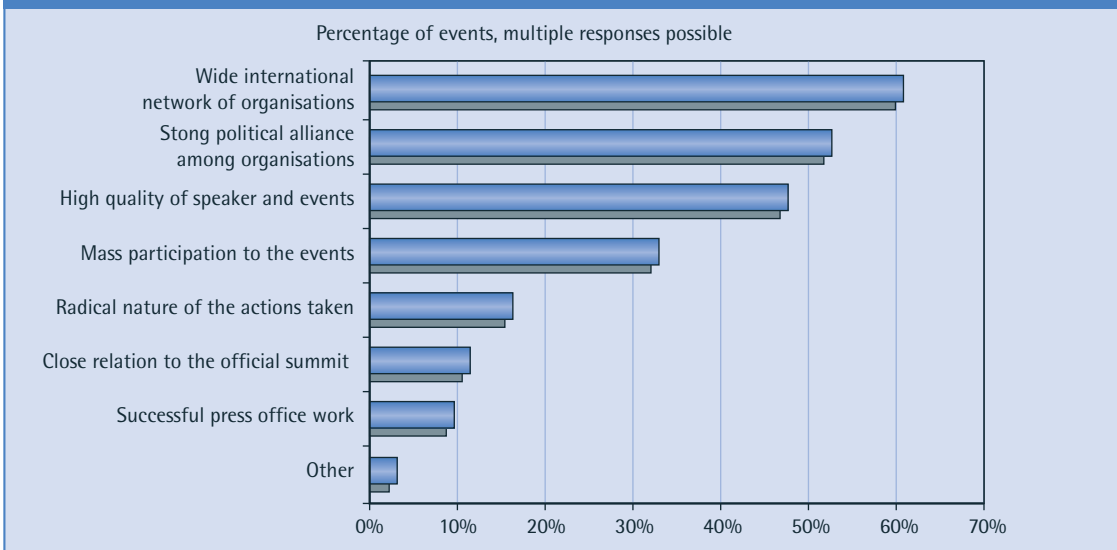


Figure 7.14: Factors of success of parallel summits



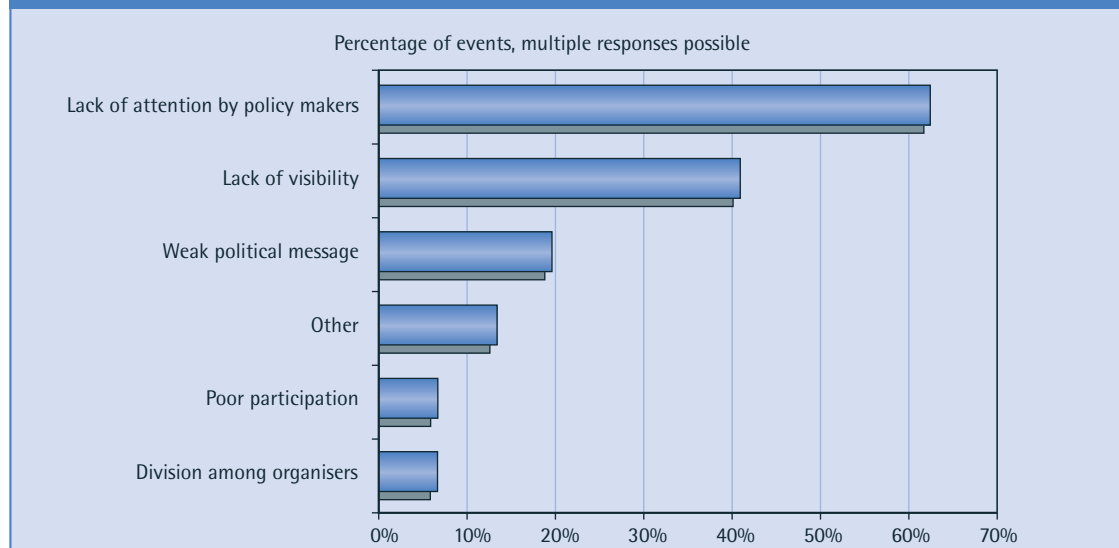
even distribution of weak, medium, and strong results, while parallel summits are judged to be less successful with international media (Figure 7.12). This may confirm the priority given to 'internal' build-up and networking within civil society, and the successes obtained in this regard. The lesser impact on the media may be associated with their long-standing lack of interest, if not hostility—although after Seattle

parallel summits have become major news stories—to the difficult and sometimes specialist nature of the issues involved, and to the summits' lack of resources for carrying out activities targeted at mainstream media and the general public.

The impact of parallel summits on specific national and international policies has been very weak, with few results, especially at the international



Figure 7.15: Factors of weakness of parallel summits



level. While the overall impact on official summits is similarly low, the percentage of strong results is higher. Parallel summits have long been ignored by official ones or were not interested in affecting them. On the other hand, Figure 7.13 shows how events with medium or strong impact on official summits have evolved over time. A steady rise of their influence is visible, with 40 per cent of parallel summits in 2000–1 leaving their mark on the government conference.

An important factor in affecting official summits is the possibility of building alliances, outside civil society, with sympathetic governments of selected countries—frequently referred to as 'like-minded'—or with particular international institutions (essentially of the UN family), or of exploiting the divisions among governments on major issues.

Finally, the evaluation of the major strengths and weaknesses of parallel summits suggests that different factors are relevant. Figure 7.14 shows that the wide international network of organisations, the strong political alliance among them, and the high quality of speakers and events are ranked as the most important factors making for success in half or more of the cases. Mass participation is counted as a success in a third of parallel summits (half of which had planned a demonstration, see Figure 7.7) while radical protest emerges as less important. In a small number of specific cases, factors making for success include a close relationship to official summits and

press office work, which are not present in most parallel summits.

The 'internal' strategy of building global civil society activities appears to be considered successful when a strong cross-border political alliance is developed among the actors of different countries. The building up of learning and competences through high-quality presentations and debate is important in this process, and it can be used either for 'internal' strengthening of networks or for the 'external' objectives of assuring mass mobilisation or effective lobbying of official decision makers.

The weaknesses of parallel summits, shown in Figure 7.15, stem mainly from the lack of attention of policy-makers (or the failure to make them listen to civil society) in almost two-thirds of events, and from the lack of 'external' visibility (40 per cent of cases). A much lower number of responses point out 'internal' weakness in developing an adequate political message, divisions among organisers, or poor participation. Clearly these factors are much more relevant than is apparent from the survey of organisers or from often superficial media reports; divisions among organisers have been highly visible in several recent events and are likely to grow as parallel summits become larger and more important.

The overall picture of parallel summits which emerges from these data has important similarities with the findings of a survey of 520 individuals who participated in international government conferences

representing non-governmental organisations, largely focusing on UN meetings, in particular the Copenhagen Social Summit of 1995 (Benchmark Environmental Consulting 1996). The objectives for participation were equally divided between making links with other NGOs and influencing governments, confirming the combination of 'internal' concerns for strengthening cross-border civil society activities and the 'external' aim of changing state policies. Also, in the ex post facto evaluation of the impact of participation, the survey found that a major result was networking and discussion with other NGOs, although the dominance of larger, English-language and Northern NGOs was felt (Benchmark Environmental Consulting 1996:17). Other important outcomes were a clearer definition of problem areas, followed at some distance by contacts with their own government and UN officials (Benchmark Environmental Consulting 1996: Chs 3–4).

In relation to decision makers, two models of action emerged from the Benchmark survey: the lobbying model extended to the international arena, and demands for a new model of inclusive global governance open to NGOs. While the former is relevant to selected cases, greater interest has emerged in the latter, with a variety of approaches among NGO actors: 'whereas some of these players are willing to work within the existing script for democratic decision making, others reject it and are working towards other forms of democratic governance' (Benchmark Environmental Consulting 1996: 4; see also Krut 1997). The growth of parallel summits can be interpreted as an outcome of the latter strategy.

Still, many questions along this road remain unanswered. The major ones are the representativeness of NGOs and the democratic procedures to be established for decision-making. Both issues emerged as problematic in the Benchmark survey and have not been addressed directly by parallel summits either. As long as parallel summits do not claim formal representation of global constituencies, or make substantial deliberation beyond occasional final documents, these problems may be lived with. The ability of global civil society to provide a solution, however, will be crucial for identifying more democratic forms of global governance.

A smaller survey was carried out in 1995 on 100 civil society representatives participating in the first Assembly of the Peoples' UN in Perugia (see Box 7.3) coming from Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia plus Australia in similar proportions. The main areas

of activism and concern by the respondents were human rights (almost 30 per cent), peace, and economic and development issues (about a quarter each). As the focus of the Assembly was on the reform of the UN, questions were asked on civil society's views on the UN and its reform. Half of respondents had positive views on the UN system, a third had negative or very negative ones; the UN activities which were most appreciated included the protection of human rights and peacekeeping, followed at a distance by economic development and help in peoples' self-determination. Military interventions met with the greatest disapproval, followed by the power of the Security Council, superpower dominance, and bureaucratic ineffectiveness.

In the views of these representatives of global civil society, the most urgent reforms of the UN include reducing the power of the Security Council and eliminating the veto power of some of its members; democratising UN structures, including peoples' representatives; and creating a second assembly of the UN. Open questions on the ways in which global civil society could strengthen its role in the UN system were also asked, and the responses pointed out the need for a greater voice and role for NGOs in decision-making, more democratic representation and an NGO assembly at the UN, and direct participation of NGOs in UN-sponsored projects (Lotti and Giandomenico 1996: 170–6).

## The Lessons from Parallel Summits

From this analysis of parallel summits, a number of key issues emerge which are likely to be crucial in shaping our understanding and future developments.

### Global civil society, social movements, and politics

What is the social base of initiatives such as parallel summits, which have challenged global powers? The hundreds of thousands of individuals and the thousands of organisations which have been actively involved in the events documented here have in common a broad set of values and policy objectives; yet they remain highly heterogeneous in terms of interests, capabilities, focus of concern, approach to power and politics, national perspective, global awareness, and world view.

Demographic aspects also should not be disregarded. The Benchmark survey of participants from NGOs to international conferences found that 58 per cent of respondents were male; 40 per cent of the total were over 50 years of age, 33 per cent in their 40s, 25 per cent in their 30s, only 12 per cent under 30. Participants to parallel summits are likely to be, especially in recent years, substantially younger than this group of NGO professionals, but they are likely to share high levels of education, knowledge of foreign languages, and a middle-class background.

How can we conceptualise such a complex combination of commonalities and differences? The concept of an emerging global civil society is of great help in this regard. It identifies a sphere of cross-border relationships among heterogeneous actors who share civil values and concern for global issues, communication and meanings, advocacy actions, and self-organisation experiments. This is not a sphere which can be expected to produce well-defined social actors, common behaviour, or widely agreed political strategies and practices. What it is producing is a challenge to the inability of the current inter-state system to address global problems in a legitimate, democratic, and effective way. This is essentially what parallel summits have been about. Global civil society wants to bring back into the public arena the supranational power appropriated by unaccountable inter-governmental organisations and powerful states, multinational firms and banks, technocrats and officials, which is visibly exercised in places like international summits. But how can global civil society establish itself in the face of political and economic power? The rules, procedures, permanent structures, and activities which can strengthen and empower a cross-border civil society are difficult to define, develop, and to make effective.

How social actors organise for the purpose of recovering power over global issues is a different question, leading to a search for the ways in which individuals and groups act on these issues within global civil society. It means identifying the *social movements and networks* operating across borders, their social dynamics, forms of organisation, action, and impact (see Keck and Sikkink 1998; Pianta 1998; Klein 2000; Cohen and Rai 2000).

What should be done with this reclaimed power is yet another issue, bearing on the *political sphere* and calling into question the political projects of social movements and other forces.

The lessons we can draw from the analysis of parallel summits is that they have been the stage on which emerging global social movements are struggling to organise, confront global powers, and develop their own political project.

The typology of movements—*rejectionist, reformative, supportive, and alternative*—used by other chapters of this Yearbook can be considered here in order to summarise their social and political orientation and adapt it to the case of parallel summits.

The type of events considered here—defined above as international civil society events addressing the same issues as official summits, with a critical perspective on government and business policies—means that *supportive* positions are largely irrelevant in our case.

Most of the *rejectionist* or *isolationist* movements have traditionally not been interested in building cross-border networks for confronting globalisation on its high-profile terrain, that of official summits. Only with the recent radicalisation of protest at summits after Seattle have such forces begun to be involved in parallel events. Yet the use of the general label 'anti-globalisation movements' for activism in Seattle, Prague, Porto Alegre, or Genoa is highly inappropriate and misleading.

It was argued above that 'globalisation from below' is the broad project shared by the largest part of the forces which have been active in parallel summits. It is a project that rejects the strategy of neo-liberal globalisation and seeks to influence the possibility of a globalisation of rights and responsibilities.

*Reformative* movements, on the other hand, tend to accept the broad institutional setting and concentrate on changes in procedures and policies. A part of the NGO world has clearly joined parallel summits with such an approach, emphasising the opportunities for integration and dialogue with the more open inter-governmental organisations. But a large part of the agenda of parallel summits raises fundamental questions about the legitimacy and power of the present institutional setting, and seeks change which cannot be reduced to a return to national sovereignties.

*Alternative* movements combine two contrasting attitudes: while they refuse to accept the existing institutions and centres of global power, they concentrate on building separate, alternative arrangements and mechanisms whose viability is important in environmental and community issues, but much less so when human rights, peace, or the global

economy are at stake. They are therefore unlikely to consider parallel summits as a high priority in their activity, although they have often been a significant presence.

The notion of *radical* movements may be more effective in identifying a broad part of the social forces involved in parallel summits, making clear their engagement on the same issues as those defined by supranational powers but outside the institutional framework they offer for addressing global problems. The struggle between the project of 'globalisation from below' and the neo-liberal one is clearly of a radical nature; the efforts to influence a globalisation of rights and responsibilities may include a reformative approach.

Moreover, we should bear in mind that the social forces involved in parallel summits are highly dynamic, and positions and strategies may evolve rapidly. The division between moderate reformers and radical critics, which is partly already there, is likely to develop further. However, the current structure of parallel summits and the profile of these movements do not lend themselves easily to such a split; for example, some of the radical critics are Christian-based organisations, not left extremists. A likely strategy by international institutions is to attempt to integrate the former in some loose form of involvement in global governance, and to marginalise the latter, portraying them as dangerous rebels on which greater repression could be exerted (see Box 7.4). The behaviour of authorities in Seattle in 1999, in Prague in 2000, and in Italy in 2001 would suggest that this has become a dominant strategy by states and supranational powers.

A second division at parallel summits may develop between the social forces and movements more concerned with the specific issue of their activity and those struggling to broaden the agenda. While these differences of orientation are always present, the current dynamic is clearly towards a broadening of the vision and action, raising the political profile of parallel summits. This may be resisted by some organisations more concerned with the effectiveness of their action on specific issues.

A third, obvious division at parallel summits has occasionally emerged between Northern and Southern civil society organisations. Official (and parallel) summits are largely concentrated in the North, where civil society has much greater resources to confront them. The hegemony by Northern NGOs on parallel summits, however, is likely to be

challenged by increasingly active and assertive civil society groups from the South, as already shown in the Porto Alegre World Social Forum.

### The co-evolution of official and parallel summits

What do these perspectives mean for the future of parallel summits? In order to explore the possible development of global civil society action, it is useful to go back to the different activities carried out in summits, outlined in the opening section, and consider the possible outcomes in terms of integration, critical dialogue, and open conflict with global civil society. Building on the evidence of the survey and on recent events, Table 7.1 speculates on the types of possible interaction between official and parallel summits, distinguishing between the dynamics of summits associated to the project of *neo-liberal globalisation* and those reflecting the *globalisation of rights and responsibilities*.

A strategy of integration in official summits is much more likely in events associated to the latter project, where international organisations and civil society may cooperate because they share an interest in strengthening global approaches and in reducing the power of states. Summits associated to *neo-liberal globalisation*, on the other hand, reflect a project where global civil society has no place; the international institutions which have been key players in this field, the IMF and the WTO, have been particularly closed to NGOs, and more conflictual outcomes could be expected.

In any event, a strategy of integration would require much extended access for civil society, in the usual form of accreditation of NGOs, in the arrangement for NGO forums or liaison activities, or with more radical innovations in global governance processes assuring that global civil society has a 'voice' and a 'vote' in global decision-making. However, while some states and inter-governmental organisations may be prepared to give it some voice, almost no one would give global civil society any form of vote.

Official summits in charge of framing issues, rather than taking decisions, are more likely to be open to the voice of global civil society, as in the case of the large UN thematic conferences, a key example of *globalisation of rights and responsibilities*. This may lead to formal integration or critical dialogue, while in the case of summits linked to *neo-liberal globalisation* critical dialogue and conflict are likely to emerge.

International institutions and summits in charge of rule-making or setting policy guidelines are unlikely to formally integrate the voice and the vote of global civil society; in the summits associated to neo-liberal globalisation both critical dialogue and conflict may result, while in those where rules on global rights are discussed critical dialogue is the most likely outcome, but integration may also be possible, depending on the issues at stake and on the degree of openness of the institution.

Summits with enforcing power tend to be closed to civil society influence, exclude integration, and resist critical dialogue, leaving conflict as the most likely outcome in their relation to parallel summits.

As the dynamics of global governance are in flux, and new institutions and procedures have to emerge in this field, it is important to keep in mind that institutional choices in the architecture of global decision-making will have an impact on its relationship with global civil society. The fundamental challenge in terms of institutional architecture is to find ways to open supranational decision-making power on setting policy guidelines and enforcement to civil society also. The accountability of such decisions taken by states and international institutions remains a crucial test of the democratic nature of the international order.

### The question of politics

The analysis of parallel summits has suggested that the ability to develop strong political alliances among organisations is an important factor in their success. As most civil society organisations move from the experience of working on single issues and have the objective of extending international networking, the issues of how different social forces, issues, and policy interests are brought together becomes crucial. This has historically been the task of politics, and it should be evident that when global civil society challenges the political project of neo-liberal globalisation, or supports a project of globalisation of rights and responsibilities, it has inevitably to engage the political sphere.

This, by the way, is also the result of the spectacular failure of traditional national politics—in terms of the operation of political processes and activities of political parties—to understand and act on behalf of broad sections of society on the problems raised by globalisation.

Clearly, the most self-aware players in parallel summits have no doubt about the political nature of their challenge. But addressing the question of politics may not be easy for global civil society. How far can civil society organisations substitute for political processes (in particular, mediation among differences, extension of consensus-building), without losing their nature and effectiveness? In other words, what are the boundaries between public interest advocacy and overall policy integration? The ability of parallel summits to evolve from contesting the single issues of official ones towards developing broader, independent political agendas will be a crucial part of the answer.

The road towards politics makes the issue of representation more thorny. Business and government critics of civil society have regularly challenged its right to 'represent' public interests, to speak in the name of subjects without voice or power, of nature, or of fundamental values. The stronger response to such arguments has so far been that civil society organisations do not claim to have exclusive representation of these interests (anybody could start a new civil society group and be active on the same issue with a different agenda), and have no 'vote' in global decision-making. This means that they do not need to behave as representative and accountable democratic bodies in the way that is required for exclusive representation and decision-making power (for example, in the case of government policy-making). As broader political concerns emerge in the actions of civil society organisations, and as their power to influence decisions grows, how far can they go without coming to terms with the problem of representation and legitimacy? In other words, what are the boundaries between public interest advocacy and a more systematic representation of interests? The ability of parallel summits to reach formal agreements among global civil society organisations and to make decisions concerning their own governance will be the first steps in addressing these questions.

Equally difficult could be the road towards *policies*. How far can civil society organisations be involved in or co-opted into global governance mechanisms, identifying specific policies and procedures, without losing their independence and credibility? In other words, what are the boundaries between public interest advocacy and policy implementation? The ability of parallel summits to point out specific policy solutions and open, effective implementation procedures will be crucial for progress in this direction.



Table 7.1: The dynamics of official and parallel summits				
Type of relations between parallel and official summits	Type of summit			
	Framing the issue	Rule-making	Policy guidelines	Enforcement
<b>Summits associated with neo-liberal globalisation</b>				
Integration	Possible	Unlikely	Highly unlikely	Impossible
Critical dialogue	Highly Likely	Likely	Likely	Highly unlikely
Conflict	Likely	Likely	Highly likely	Highly likely
<b>Summits associated with globalisation of rights and responsibilities</b>				
Integration	Likely	Possible	Unlikely	Highly unlikely
Critical dialogue	Highly likely	Highly likely	Likely	Likely
Conflict	Possible	Likely	Likely	Highly likely

### The response from power

Finally, the evolution of the actions of global civil society on global issues will depend on the ability of the existing power centres to recognise, respond to, adapt, and integrate them.

International institutions are faced with many alternative courses of action. They may resist all pressure, sticking to the formal mandate they have from states, and introducing only cosmetic improvements to their policies and image. This is more likely to happen in large organisations with enforcement and policy guideline-setting powers; this would lead to a radicalisation of conflict with global civil society. The IMF and the WTO are typical cases. The WTO decision to hold the 2001 ministerial conference in Qatar, as far as possible from the reach of global civil society, clearly shows that this is the course it has chosen.

A second option for international institutions may be reforming their own rules, procedures, and policies, meeting some requests of civil society, and integrating and coopting some organisations. This is more likely in activities of 'framing the issues' and in organisations without enforcement power. Most UN bodies fall into this category, perhaps also the World Bank, although political and bureaucratic resistance may strongly limit progress in this direction.

A third option is that international bodies contribute to a more radical rethinking of the problems

of global governance and join with global civil society groups in redesigning the institutional tools for addressing them. This may be more likely in fields where the institutional architecture at the global level is still fragmented and in flux, often meeting the opposition of states which resist passing authority to international institutions, as in the cases of the environment or the International Criminal Court, where inter-governmental organisations and NGOs have often teamed up to confront states. A similar cooperation, if not alliance, is emerging in the case of UN agencies such as UNHCR, UNDP, UNICEF, and UNEP, which rely on NGOs to carry out their mission.

The players, however, are not just global civil society and international institutions. States do continue to have a key role, but they have largely failed to play it seriously. State institutions so far have been moderate supporters of the neo-liberal project of globalisation, and, by and large, passive listeners to the calls for a globalisation of rights and responsibilities. On these challenges they have not been directly pressed to change by civil society, which has given priority to proposals and action at the international level, where key decisions are made. Will this position of states change, at least in some countries more responsive to civil society? Will the national political sphere recover some of its natural role as the place for democratic debate and decision making on values and policy priorities? Well-

structured national political processes might be an important means of channelling the pressure of civil society in a constructive way. But these are unlikely developments in most countries.

It is more likely that the central contest will continue to be that between supranational powers and the emerging global civil society. While the ability of the global governance system to operate effectively and respond to pressure for change remains uncertain, we can be sure that parallel summits are here to stay for an extended period, and so are the broad social forces which have invented them.

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