

PARALLEL SUMMITS OF GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY: AN UPDATE

Mario Pianta and Federico Silva

No longer parallel

Introduction

Global activities of civil society are growing very fast. In 2002 and in the first three months of 2003, growth of international meetings has been exponential. 33 major events took place, accounting for more than 30 per cent of all 108 recorded parallel summits since 1988. Many were part of the process started in 2001 with the first World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brasil, which has now spread in all continents, asserting the autonomy of global initiatives of civil society: 58% of all events are now civil society meetings with no corresponding 'official summit' (the share was 40% in last year's Yearbook).

A symbol of this transition has been February 15, 2003, perhaps the first truly global day of civil society action, in protest for peace and against the war on Iraq that was being prepared by the United States and the United Kingdom. Hundreds of cities all over the world hosted record demonstrations. While no single 'world event' took place, this was the start of a new generation of global civil society actions, advancing a common political agenda in most countries of the world and reflecting – according to all available polls – the consensus of a majority of world public opinion, what *The New York Times* described as the birth of a 'second superpower' (Tyler, 2003). This year, we also present some findings from our survey of global civil society organisations.

Parallel summits and global civil society meetings

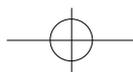
The records presented here extend the analysis of the chapter on Parallel Summits of Global Civil Society, published in the 2001 edition of this Yearbook (Pianta, 2001), and of the update in the 2002 edition (Pianta, 2002a). We have followed the same procedure for collecting and organising information on global civil society events; the main

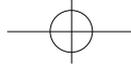
sources this time were websites, newspapers and magazines which now devote extensive attention to such gatherings. The 33 cases identified for 2002 and the first three months of 2003 are considered representative of the range of events, topics and locations.

As they move from 'parallel summits' organised in coincidence with meetings of governments or international organisations, to independent global civil society gatherings, such events are becoming larger (55% had more than 10,000 participants, and 8 events had demonstrations with more than 50,000 people), more coordinated across the globe, and with a bigger political agenda, increasingly integrating economic and development issues with demands for democracy and peace. The objectives tend to be more outwardlooking; while networking among global civil society organisations was, in last year's data, still the most important aim of the gatherings, now proposal of alternatives and public opinion work have become the top objectives.

The survey on global civil society organisations

This year, the findings on global civil society meetings and parallel summits are integrated with the results of a survey on global civil society organisations, where the focus of the analysis was the individual organisation active on global issues (Record 29; see also Record 22 on attitudes to globalisation). A questionnaire was prepared in order to gather data on the profile of global civil society organisations, their activities, priorities and views on policy proposals. The questionnaire was circulated among the international participants at the Genoa Social Forum in July 2001 in Genoa, at the 4th Assembly of the Peoples' United Nations in Perugia in October 2001, and at the Second World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in January 2002. It was e-mailed to hundreds of civil society organisations drawn from a variety of accessible sources (such as UN NGO lists, Civicus and others). The selected records shown below are drawn from a broader study, carried out by the GLOBI project





(Pianta and Silva, 2003; help from Lunaria, a civil society research centre in Rome and from the Peace Roundtable, the organiser of the Assemblies of the Peoples' United Nations in Perugia is gratefully acknowledged).

The results presented here are based on 152 respondents, representative of all continents, types of organisations and fields of action. Twenty per cent of the respondents were international NGOs, 45% were national associations or NGOs, 18% international or national networks or campaigns, the rest mainly include trade unions, local groups and research centres; they are mainly active on development, economic policies, peace, human rights, environmental and democracy issues.

Respondents to the questionnaire were civil society organisations active on global issues whose national base was for 35% in Europe, 24% in Asia and the Middle East, 22% in Africa, 6% in North America and 14% in Latin America. Such a geographical distribution assures a balanced perspective from all continents and confirms the growing presence of

civil society groups in the countries of the South. Moreover, it may be noted that the share of organisations based in the North (41%) is not different from the share of global civil society events taking place in the North (44%) over the period in which the questionnaire was compiled.

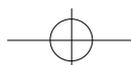
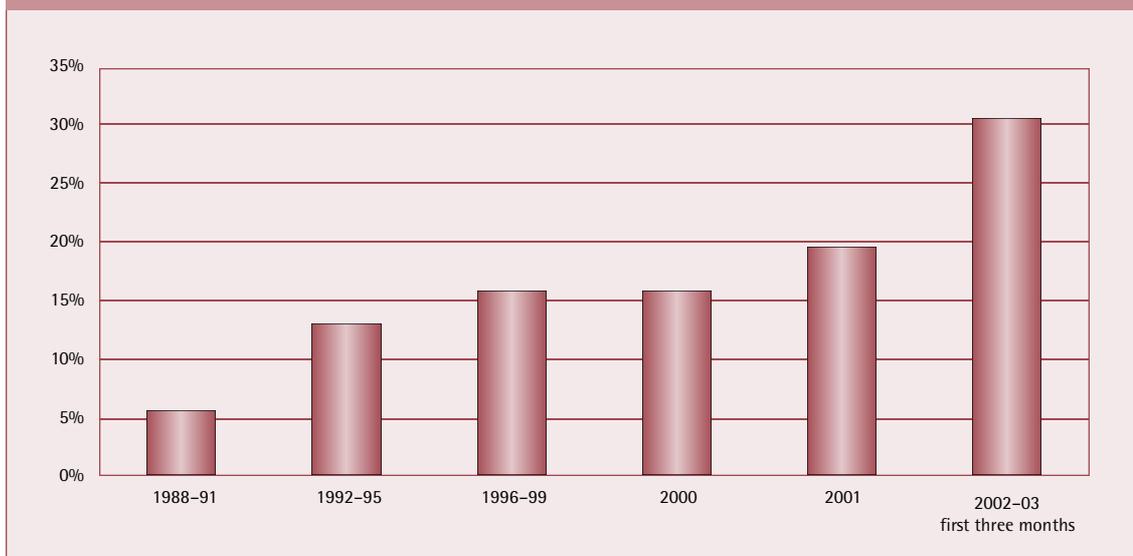
The group of respondents cover all size classes in terms of members of civil society organisations (about 10% are not membership organisations). More than a quarter of respondents are large associations with more than 1,000 members; the rest is equally spread between very small units (up to 20 members), small groups (21-100 members) and medium-sized organisations (101-1,000 members). Such a composition makes sure that a diversity of experiences and perspectives is represented in the results.

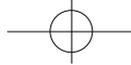
Networking is a crucial aspect in the global activities of such organisations. Two thirds of respondents belong to an international network or campaign, and the responses from networks show that they tend to be large coalitions, in half of the cases coordinating more than 26 groups.

Record 28 Parallel summits

Growth of parallel summits

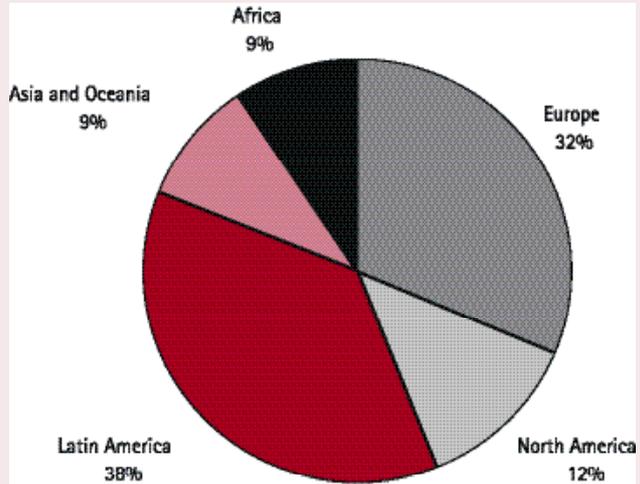
Parallel summits and global civil society meetings are increasing rapidly. In 2002 and in the first three months of 2003 one-third of all gatherings of global civil society since 1988 took place, 50% more than in 2001, while in 2000 the same number of parallel summits were recorded as in the four previous years. There is a clear exponential growth in the number of events, which always include an international conference and, in most cases, a street demonstration, in addition to several fringe and media-oriented initiatives.





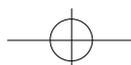
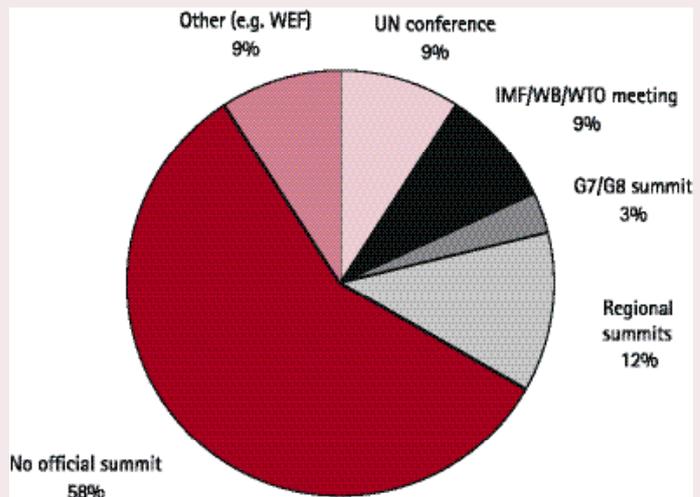
Record 28 continued. Location of parallel summits

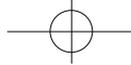
Parallel summits are no longer an affair of rich countries: the majority of global civil society meetings now takes place in the South. In the events recorded from 1988 to 2001, Europe and North America had more than three quarters of cases; now their share is 44%. A major driver behind the growth of Latin American meetings has been the Porto Alegre (Brazil) model of Social Forums, which has been replicated at the national and regional level with events in Argentina, Colombia, Uruguay, while major meetings have addressed Pan-Amazonian issues and the contested project of the Free Trade Areas of the Americas.



Types of parallel summits

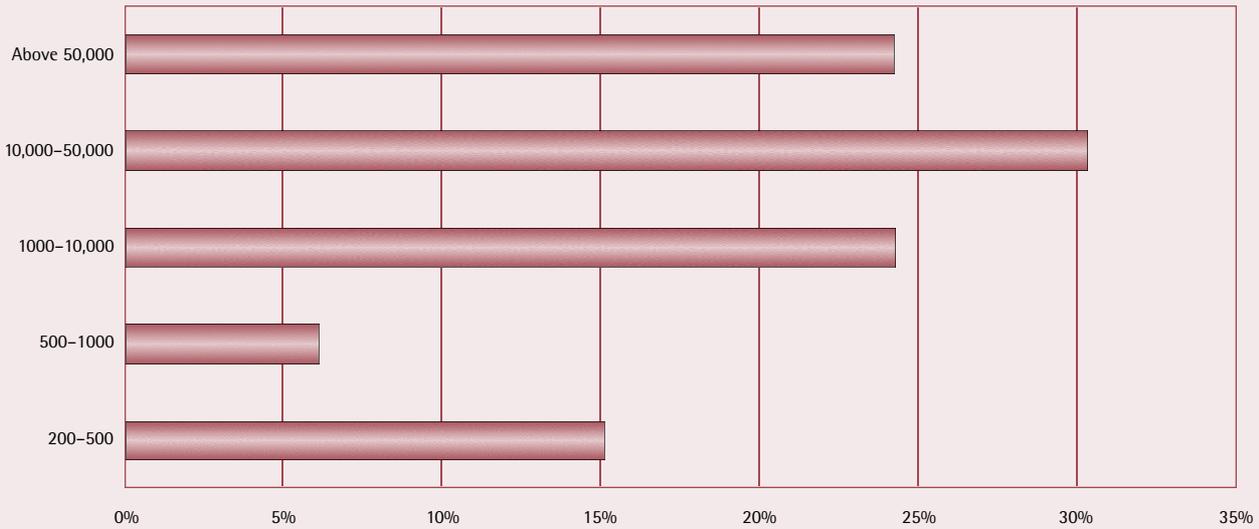
Parallel summits, shadowing official meetings of governments, have now given way to independent global civil society meetings. 58% of all events have no corresponding 'official summit' (the share was 40% in last year's Yearbook and 10% between 1988 and 2000). 12% of parallel summits deal with regional conferences (European Union, American or Asian government meetings) and 21% concern summits of the United Nations, G8, IMF, World Bank or WTO. From 1988 to 2001 these events accounted for almost two thirds of all cases.





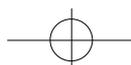
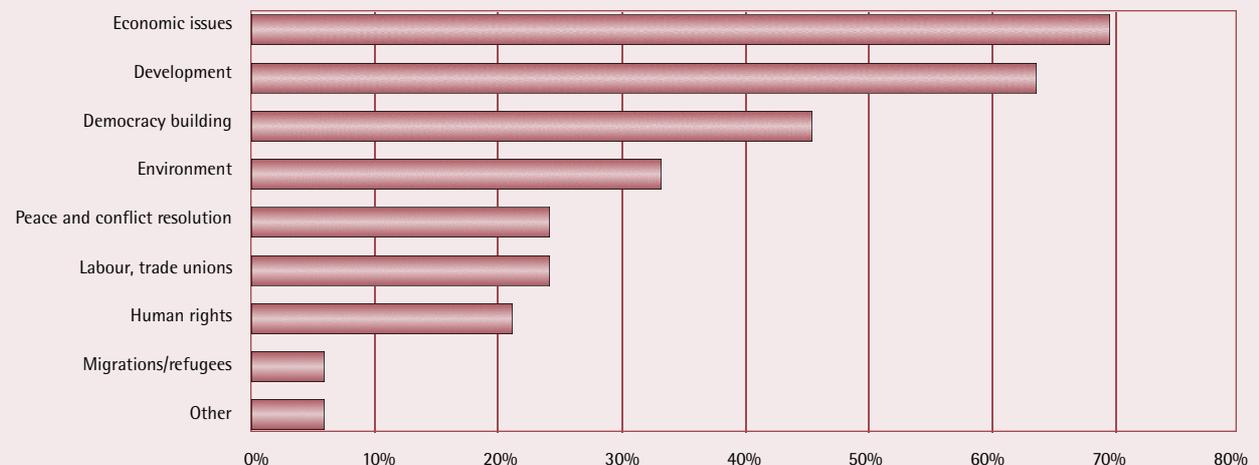
Record 28 continued. Number of participants

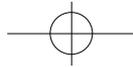
Global civil society meetings are becoming larger. Since January 2002, 55% of events have had more than 10,000 participants; of these, half had demonstrations with more than 50,000 people and an additional 25% have had between 1,000 and 10,000 people. In last year's Yearbook events with more than 10,000 people accounted for 33% of all cases. The increase in the number of events goes hand in hand with their growing size, as they move from being the reserve of small groups of specialists - between 1988 and 2001 40% of events had less than 1,000 people - to becoming a widespread experience with mass participation.



Fields of activity of the organisations involved

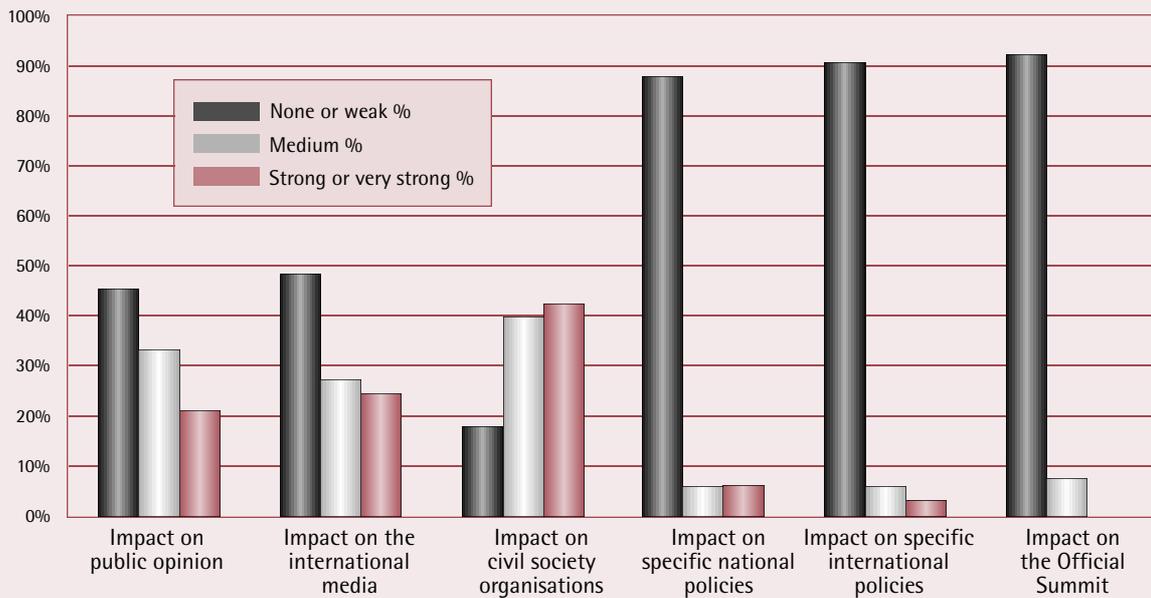
What are the themes on which the organisations involved in global events work? As in the past, two-thirds of events (multiple responses are possible here) have resulted from the work of civil society organisations active in development and economic issues (trade, finance, debt, etc.). As in last year's data, groups working on democracy issues are active in close to a half of global event; peace organisations are also stable with a presence in 25% of parallel summits. Human rights issues lose importance to one-fifth of events, while environmental organisation recover their historically large presence in one third of events. There is an increase in the presence of trade unions and labour organisations, which are found in close to a quarter of all events, and of groups active on migrations and refugees issues (6% of cases).





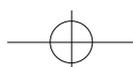
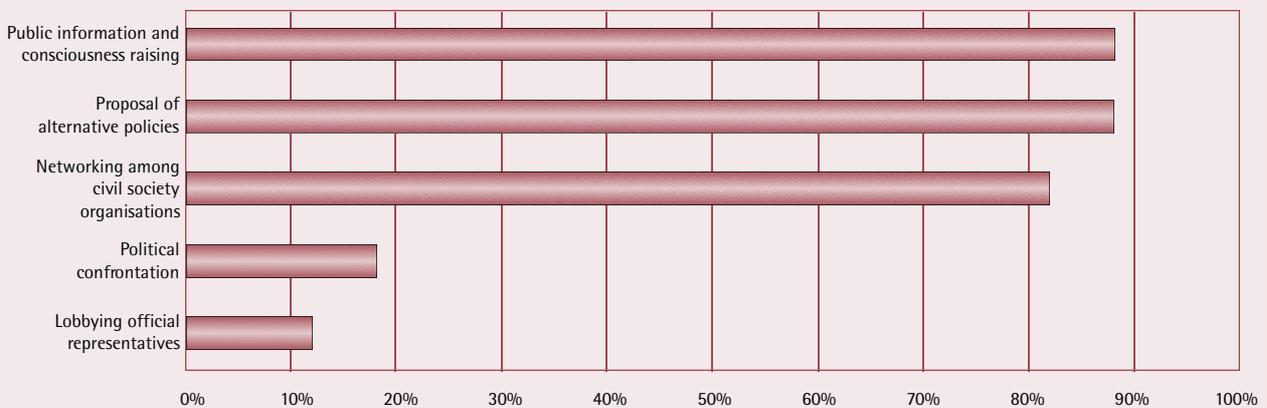
Record 28 continued. Assessments of the results

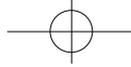
Do global civil society events have an impact? This evaluation, based on the judgement of organisers, participants or from media reports, clearly has to be treated with great caution. As in the past, the strongest impact is on civil society itself, where 40% of events is judged to have a strong or very strong effect, a big increase compared to the 25% of 2001. Another 40% of events has a medium impact. By all evidence, parallel summits and global meetings have indeed changed the face of global civil society organisations. On the basis of available documentation, their impact is rapidly increasing also on public opinion and the international media, where a medium or strong effect may be identified in the majority of events. Little or no impact can be detected on international policies and on official summits.



Record 28e Objectives of parallel summits

What are the purposes of global civil society meetings? Since January 2002, in more than four-fifths of cases (multiple responses are possible) the objectives were disseminating public information, proposing alternative policies, and networking among civil society organisations. The latter has maintained its past relevance, associated to the need for building the internal strengths of global civil society. The outreach to a wider public and the pressure on policy makers have increased in importance as global movements are increasingly able to develop alternative policies to those carried out by governments and international organisations.

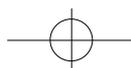
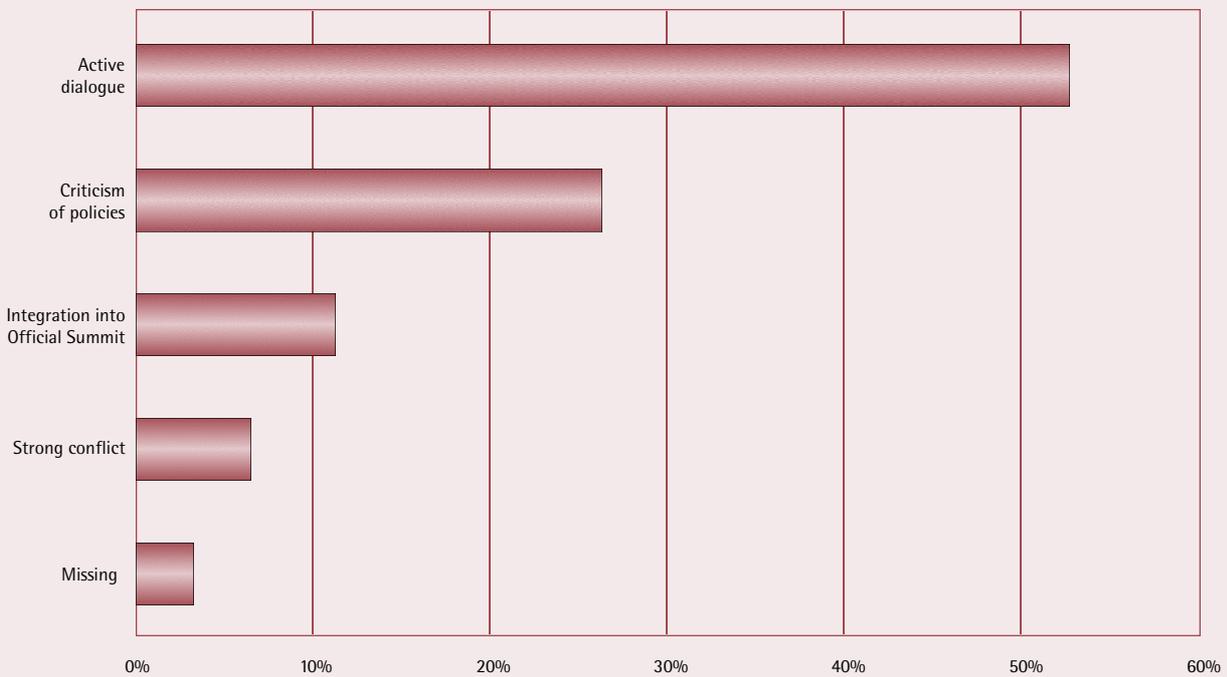


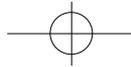


Record 29 Survey of global civil society organisations

Attitude towards official summits

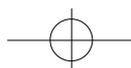
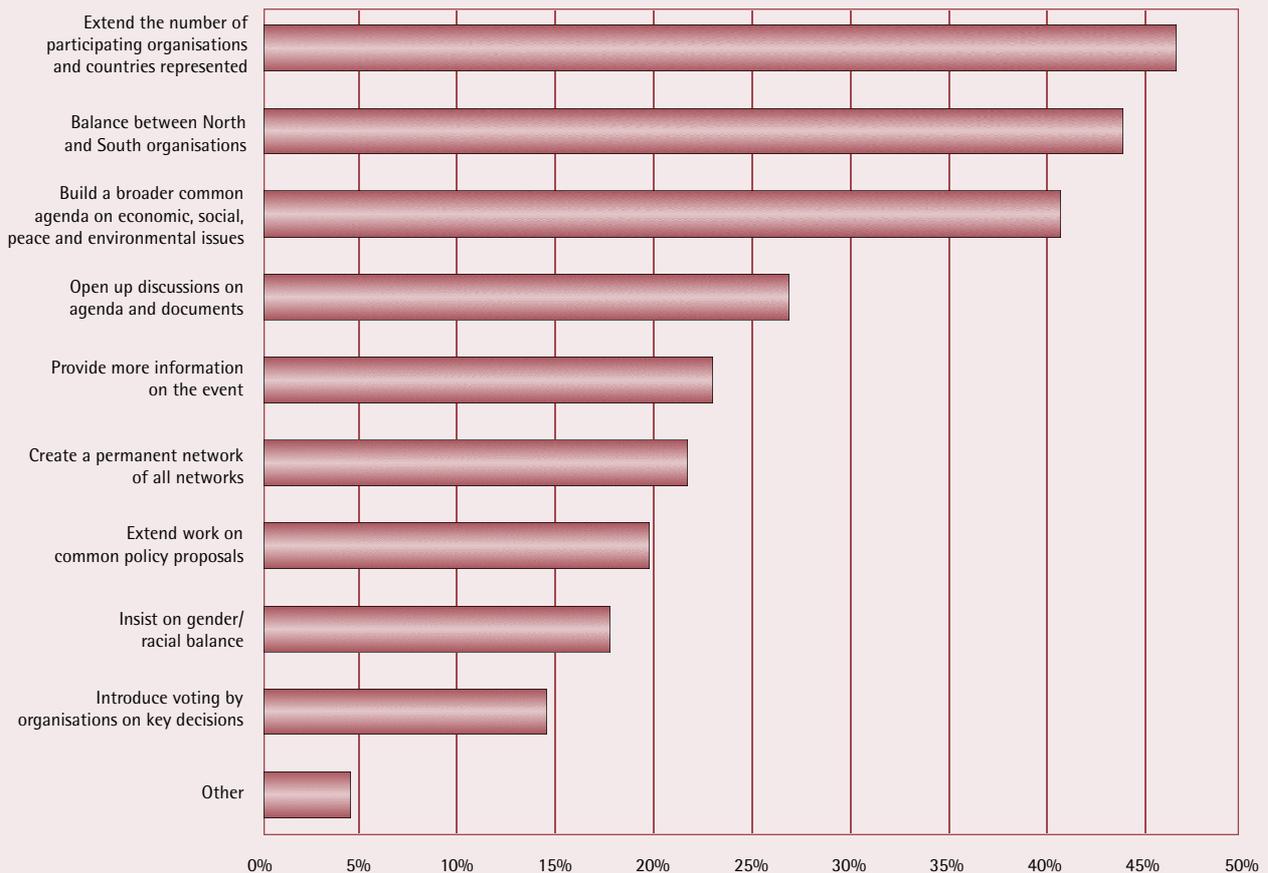
The survey on global civil society organisations included a specific question on parallel and official summits: *'What is the main attitude of your organisation/group versus official summits?'* More than half of respondents chose *Active dialogue*, one quarter *Criticism of policies*, 11% *Integration in the official summit*, and 7% *Strong conflict*. These answers are a useful complement to the data provided above on Parallel Summits, as they emphasise the search for dialogue which emerges from civil society groups (with little reciprocity so far from governments and international institutions). Within organisations active on global issues we may therefore identify a large group of dialogue seekers, a substantial group of radical critics, a small group prepared to be integrated in official activities and a very small (and probably under-represented in the survey) group with rejectionist positions.





Record 29 continued. Ways to democratise global civil society events

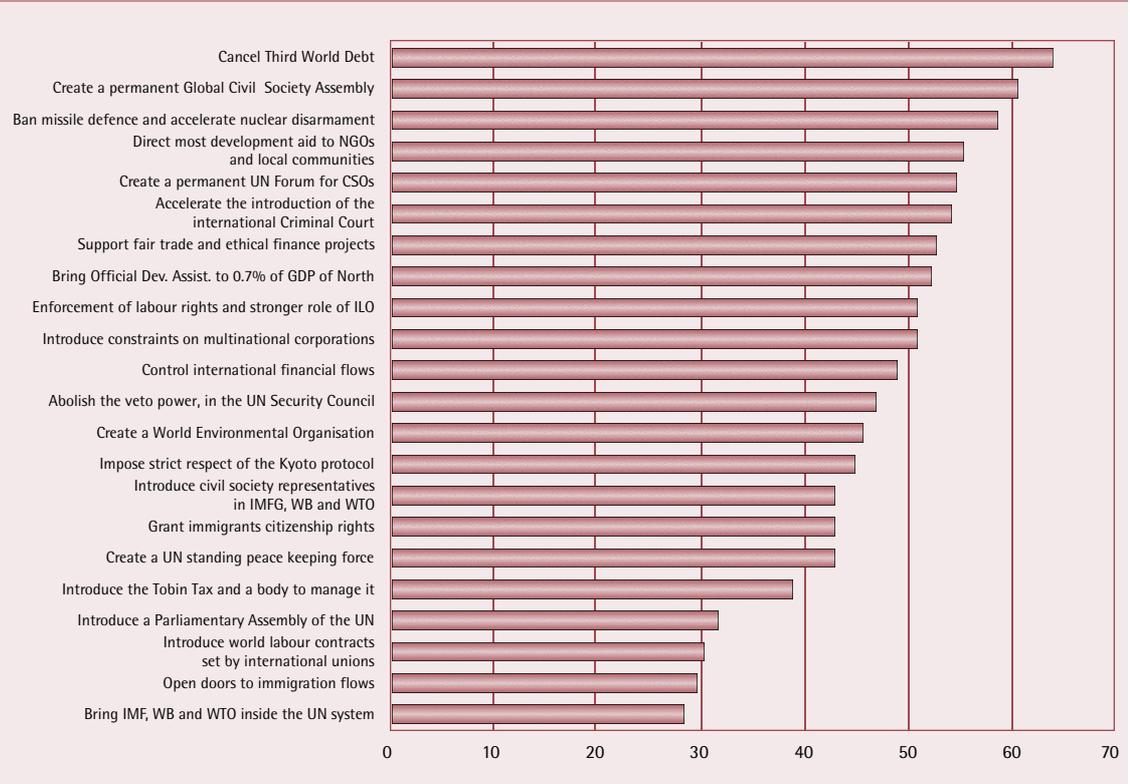
'How could global civil society events be made more democratic and effective?' The problems of internal democracy are important as the global reach of civil society becomes wider and more diverse. More than 40% of respondents (which could provide up to three answers) recommended to extend the number of organisations and countries involved in global events; a better balance between North and South organisations; building a broader common agenda on different issues. The emphasis is therefore on the inclusive capacity of global civil society events to integrate more experiences and more issues. A second group of recommendations, with 20 to 27% of preferences, deals with the practicalities of global meetings and the search for effectiveness, including the need for more inclusive discussion of the agenda and documents of meetings, for more information, for building a network of networks, and for more work on common policy proposals. Insisting on gender/racial balance is demanded by 18% of respondents, while only 14% argue for introducing voting in civil society meetings. In the search for greater internal democracy and external effectiveness, the emphasis is put on the need to broaden the base of civil society groups active on global issues and stimulate their participation and involvement. The strong interest in building a common agenda and common proposals shows that there is more interest in democratising the content of civil society actions, through consensus building, than in the procedures (such as voting), which may become important in formally established institutions.





Record 29 continued. Alternative policy proposals of global civil society organisations

'How do you judge the relevance of the following policy proposals for global civil society activities?' A variety of proposals circulating among global civil society groups were listed, concerning different issues and topics. Make global civil society visible and established is the most popular objective, including the creation of a permanent Global Civil Society Assembly modelled on the World Social Forum. Make development possible is the demand behind support for the cancellation of Third World debt, greater flows of development aid, a greater role of NGOs and support to fair trade and ethical finance. Assure peace and justice is a need associated to nuclear disarmament and the International Criminal Court. Balance global capital and labour is the aim of demands for labour rights and limits on corporations. Democratise international institutions is a call addressed to the UN, IMF, World Bank and WTO. Control global finance is the demand receiving the least attention among economic issues. Protect the environment and Grant rights to immigrants are issues with the lowest priorities.



PARALLEL SUMMITS OF GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY: AN UPDATE Mario Pianta and Federico Silva

References

Pianta, M. (2001), 'Parallel Summits of Global Civil Society', in H. Anheier, M. Glasius and M. Kaldor (eds), *Global Civil Society 2001*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, pp. 169-194.

Pianta, M. (2002), 'Parallel Summits of Global Civil Society: an Update', in M. Glasius, M. Kaldor and H. Anheier (eds), *Global Civil Society 2002*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, pp. 371-377.

Pianta, M. (2003), 'Democracy vs. Globalisation. The Growth of Parallel Summits and Global Movements'. In D. Archibugi (ed.) *Debating Cosmopolitics*, Verso, London, pp.232-256.

Pianta, M. and Silva, F. (2003), *Globalisers from below. A survey on global civil society organisations*, GLOBI Research Report, Rome.

Tyler, P. E. (2003), 'Suddenly, it's U.S. and Rest of the World'. *The New York Times*, 17 February 2003.

