Global Solutions Wiki

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On the site of the State of the World Forum, a case is made at some length for a *Global Solutions for Global Challenges: a proposed International Consultation and Global Solutions Wiki*. The articulation could be understood as one indicator of the psycho-social "state" of the World Forum. The proposal calls for the following comments:

1. There is indeed a strong case to be made for a *Wiki-solutions*, or a *Wiki-strategies*, in the light of the success of *Wikipedia*. One proposal, additionally addressing the challenge of memorability through song, had previously been made in *Participative Development Process for Singable Declarations: applying the Wikipedia-Wikimedia-WikiMusic concept to constitutions* (2006). Arguably "strategies" encompasses advocated approaches and possibilities without necessarily predicting closure on "solutions" -- or implying any guarantee that they will solve the problem at which they are directed.

2. A significant challenge in relation to any "strategies/solutions" approach, is that every solution advocated or implemented can be seen as a problem in its own right from some other perspective, or can give rise to problems or aggravate existing problems. It cannot be assumed that solutions are free of problematic outcomes. Making that assumption would be indicative of a very optimistic mindset unfamiliar with the complexity of which it is necessary to be aware if matters are not to be made worse. Of course many geo-engineering proposals in response to climate change are currently made on the basis of just such assumptions (*Geo-engineering Oversight Agency for Thermal Stabilization (GOATS)*, 2008).

3. The proposal appropriately points to various precedents in order to position its focus. Curiously, although noting various recent sector-specific UN initiatives covering a handful of issues, it fails to note longer-term initiatives such as that of the *Global Strategies Project* providing online profiles of 32,547 strategies and solutions (with 284,382 links) advocated by international constituencies (singly or in collaboration). The background section of the extensive commentary on that initiative identifies a number of other endeavours -- including those at the local level (used to enrich the profiles). These profiles are systematically linked to those of the corresponding database of the *World Problems Project* providing online profiles on 56,564 issues (with 276,791 links). Profiles in both databases are linked to those on 62,463 international organizations (with 952,987 links) -- the "international constituencies" (including UN bodies) whose documents were consulted to elaborate the profiles in all the databases. The problems and strategies databases form part of the *online Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential*, first published in hardcopy form in 1976, funded privately and latterly by the European Commission.

4. Irrespective of the failure by the researchers of the State of the World Forum to detect the above initiatives, it might be asked whether this was an indication of a questionable framing of a needed *Wiki-solutions*. Is it the case that it is conceived in the light of the current framing of climate change being the "most urgent problem facing humanity" -- all other issues then to be treated as secondary or irrelevant, irrespective of their importance to particular international constituencies, or peasants short of water? What does this imply about the constraints on the "global" framing of the proposal? Is this an indication of some dangerous form of tunnel vision or sivo thinking?

5. The proposal rightly points to the challenges of enabling and filtering input, especially delicate in relation to strategies which arouse considerable ideological and other objections. The *Wikipedia* project has considerable experience of the challenges this poses with respect to much less problematic material. However the challenge remains as to who has the right to input and edit "solutions" and who has the right to mark them for deletion, as in the *Wikipedia* process? Furthermore with what transparency is this done and to what extent do profiles have to be "protected" on a daily basis against problematic revisions? A case study of such *Wikipedia* handling of biographic profiles, argued that unidentified editors could effectively act unchecked like the religious police of *sharia* law. The methodology of the above databases is instructive on many of these challenges.

6. The proposal indicates that "We" (presumably the State of the World Forum) are currently in the formative stages of 'the largest social movement in history'. It states:
This is reflected in the 'one -- and maybe two -- million organizations' working on ecological degradation, climate change, and 'social justice' issues around the world as well as the roughly 30% -- 35% of the populations in the US, Europe, Canada and Japan which may be categorized as Cultural Creatives. This new and emerging population is 'paying close attention to world events and global trends' and is also 'fed up with politics and politicians.'... as many as 60 million adults in the US alone.

- This massive 'social movement' does not currently 'match the scale of the problems' we are currently confronting and it has not been 'mobilized into a cohesive political force' or a 'united front that can counter the massive scale and power of the global corporations and lobbyists that protect the status quo.' In addition, the immediacy and urgency of the challenges we face suggest that we must act quickly and together and now if we are to ameliorate rapidly deteriorating conditions.

The intention is apparently to ensure the mobilization of the organizations and the cultural creatives, through the initiatives of the State of the World Forum. Curiously the proposal takes no account of past endeavours with similar aspirations regarding issues such as peace, environment, development, and the like -- or even of the World Social Forum. Arguably there are learnings from such initiatives. Have they been considered?

Briefly put, why does the set of organizations in any such case not respond coherently to calls for mobilization in support of any defined initiative or strategic priorities? (cf Collective Learning from Calls for Global Action, 1981; Cooperation and its Failures (from the 1960s through the 1980s): 12 metaphors towards understanding the dilemma of the 1990s, 1989). Perhaps more striking is the case of the "cultural creatives". The proposal fails to recognize that labelling a category, such as cultural creative, does not automatically signify that those so identified:

- identify with the label
- respond to calls framed in terms of the label
- are amenable to being directed or orchestrated by those formulating or using the label

The challenge in practice might be compared to that of "herding cats". It is a feature of that profile that cultural creatives have an unpredictable take on conventional presentations of challenges and proposals for action. It is also significant that there are few examples of gatherings of a representative range of disparate cultural creatives which can be said to have engendered new insight or new action -- in which they have then collectively engaged. In fact many avoid dialogue with each other -- a principal reason for the multiplicity of organizations they individual inspire.

Many international initiatives might well be considered as memorials to individual cultural creatives and their disciples -- and to the outcome of bitter "turf wars" (possibly as bitter as those of the Middle East). Any new efforts at their "mobilization" needs careful attention. As cultural creatives they may well have a radically different view of priorities and be resistant to questionable declarations that climate change is the most important challenge facing humanity. From their perspective any such declaration recalls the purported dangers of the weapons of mass destruction purportedly held by Iraq (as affirmed to the UN Security Council) -- back when the USA aspired to imperial leadership.

7. Any focus on a particular (elite) group and a multiplicity of associations (deemed relevant) raises a major issue regarding those who do not buy into that framing or those initiatives, and do not act according to the requirements of any "mobilization". The issue is that of the "left behind". Whilst they may indeed appear, from one perspective, to be irrelevant to the challenge of "saving civilization", many are unlikely to be passive, will have other agendas, and may actively resist being "targeted" in any way by those who have been successfully mobilized -- even if such targeting is framed as "saving their souls", as in the past.

8. The particular framing by the State of the World Forum of the valuable initiative towards a Wiki-Solutions of some kind is unfortunate. It runs the risk of duplicating or undermining other efforts. Other initiatives will be developed to compensate for its inadequacies, selectivity and blindspots -- whether or not they are recognized. More curious however is the seeming transition from a focus on "America as Empire", as envisaged some years ago, to one where the imperial ambition, of American cultural inspiration, relates to millions of associations with "relevant" objectives and to a particular understanding of "cultural creatives". There is considerable experience of this pattern in a number of sectors. Some even have a century of experience of the pattern (Celebrating an Institutional Century of the UIA, 1907-2007). It cannot be said to have worked and typically engenders alternative initiatives by those considered irrelevant or who design themselves out. The State of the World Forum should learn from this or be condemned to repeat history.

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