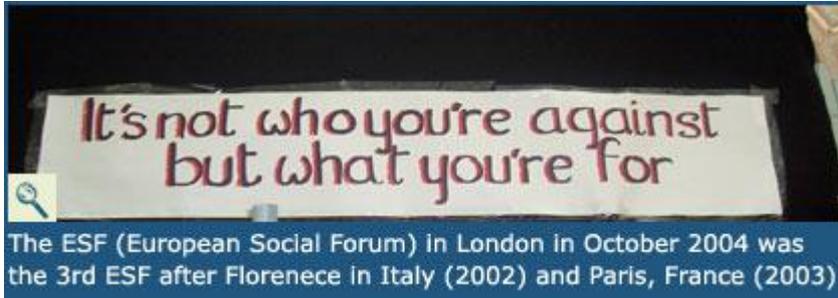


Is another world possible?

12 Nov 2004



Between the 15th and 17th of October 2004, the third European Social Forum (ESF) was held in London in the United Kingdom. Over three days, more than 25,000 people from all over the world gathered to attend a range of discussions, workshops and activities reflecting the groundswell of people in Europe who believe that 'another world is possible'.

What is the background?

The idea of establishing a European Social Forum came about after the success of the first World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001. The European Social Forum was first convened in 2002 in Florence, Italy to create a continent-wide equivalent of the World Social Forum. The second ESF was held in Paris, France.

The Porto Alegre system is based on participatory decision-making where people from different interest groups get together to openly discuss and debate how they would like to see a particular issue or situation resolved. Rather than considering factors such as the next parliamentary elections or end-of-year financial forecasts; such decision-making and discussions consider the potential of social, cultural and environmental implications that could occur and what ways could be considered to manage daily life to improve a particular condition.

Bruice (2004)[i]

What are participatory decision-making and social forums?

Participatory social forums were convened after a range of internationally recognised mass protests occurred (such as in Seattle in 1999) to voice dissent against the current global establishment. International organisations such as the World Trade Organisation, The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as well as globally powerful Corporations were considered by some to be undemocratically elected organisations whose decision-making practices resulted in widening inequalities across the globe as well as risking the health and natural environment of the planet.

Participatory Decision-Making processes have proven crucial in developing sustainable systems of communication between people concerned with the world in which they live, and allow people the space to empower themselves in deciding their viewpoints, opinions and how they would like the world to be managed.

Why is participatory decision-making considered to be sustainable?

Participatory decision-making processes are crucial to effective governance. Participation ensures transparency, accountability, equity, efficiency, and, ultimately, sustainability. **Transparency**, because information, priorities, strategies, actions are open to all stakeholders. **Accountability**, because by sharing in decisions, partners are accountable to the public; and to each other vis-à-vis the tasks they have committed themselves to; **equity**, because the groups which are usually excluded from the decision-making process have the opportunity to present their concerns and defend their interests; **efficiency**, because information is shared and decisions are taken in common, avoiding overlap and duplication of efforts.

UN Habitat Project

<http://www.unhabitat.org>

The past ten years has seen a rapid growth in the number and volume of people globally taking part in non-violent direct-action (nvda). People have used creative and imaginative methods to generate press and general interest and awareness of global issues and proposed schemes that threaten the sustainability and daily survival of people and the natural environment in different parts of the world.

Many of these decisions that have united people into action are seen to have evolved from *neoliberal* policies that encourage the selling off of the world's resources and businesses 'owning' global resources such as water and crop seeds for profit over people's rights to basic necessities such as water and food.

These criticisms have been particularly highlighted in the global protests against President of the United States of America, George W Bush's decision to 'go to war' with Iraq in 2003. This decision has been criticized by hundreds of thousands of people in America and beyond for putting the profit interests of transnational corporations and the already economically rich before the welfare of the people of Iraq, the soldiers from the US and the UK, as well as the civil liberties that affect people in every country around the world.

Under the UN Declaration of Human Rights, every person has a right to express their own thoughts and opinions. The technologies that have assisted in the process of globalization has also forged links between numerous disorganizations who share similar issues-based concerns.



Journalists tend to call the people who take part in mass demonstrations the 'anti-globalization movement'. Those concerned refer to themselves collectively as the 'social movement', the 'citizens' movement' or the 'global justice movement'. In a pinch, if the headline space is really at a premium, they'll settle for 'alter-' or 'counter-' as preferable to the inaccurate, even insulting 'anti' globalization. The movement is not 'anti', but internationalist and deeply engaged with the world as a whole and the fate of everyone who shares the planet. It also has plenty of concrete proposals to offer, making it easily more 'pro-globalization' than its adversaries. It all depends on what kind of globalization one means, and for whom ...

Susan George (2004) *Another world is possible if* Verso, London.[ii]

How about the Third European Social Forum?



The 3rd ESF (European Social Forum) in London in October 2004. Between 20,000 and 30,000 people traveled from different parts of Europe to take part in the forums and sessions discussing social justice and environmental sustainability issues.

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Although this social forum is held within Europe, the diverse range of issues discussed and debated are global in as much as many of the themes within the topics up for discussion are felt by people in different manifestations around the world. The motivation for exploring 'big' issues is to create dialogue between people and to consider the possible strategies that could be employed in order to manage the world in more peaceful, sustainable and equitable ways. Some of the themes that were up for discussion during the three days included:

- Water privatization
 - Climate Change
 - Sustainable energy
 - Carbon-trading and its repercussions
 - The privatization of state education systems
- Globalization and its impacts
 - The war in Iraq and American Imperialism
 - Racial equality
 - The rights of women
 - Who controls the media?
 - Global business and food production
 - The arms industry and waging global wars

While many people felt that the ESF was a success in that many world famous speakers were present at the discussions; there were strong feelings equally that the groups who had organized the London forum had also excluded people from the three days because of the financial costs of attending the forum (£30 per person) as well as additional costs of traveling to and from the conference as well as having to find the funds of staying somewhere. Some delegates also felt that they were attending a 'trade fair where you can buy your revolutionary face on a t-shirt and feel you've somehow played your part in challenging things you don't like about the way the world is run'.

To counteract this a number of disorganizations based themselves in London for the duration of the conference and held their own social forums on similar themes to the event funded in large part by the Mayor of London, but only asking for donations to cover overhead costs.

- Which approach do you think is more inclusive and why?
- Why do you think the police monitored the disorganization spaces?

How would you begin to tackle some of the world's problems like poverty or Climate Change? How would you run the world to make life fairer for all people living on the planet? Why do you think in the 21st century there are such huge inequalities between people?

[i] Bruce I (2004): *The Porto Alegre Alternative: Direct Democracy in Action*. Pluto Press. London.

[ii] George S (2004): *Another world is possible if* Verso. London.

This work was created and written by Jo Norcup BA (Hons) MA (Research) PGCE and Fawcett Fellow (2004) in the Department of Geography at UCL, London. Jo is a geography and SEN teacher for the London boroughs of Greenwich and Lewisham. She has created other feature resources and handy hints and tips for the RGS-IBG 'Geography in the News' website, as well as other geography web resources for BBC Bitesize, BBC Learning Zone, Sky+ and Channel 4. She is currently co-authoring and sole authoring geography textbooks for (Longman and Hodder) and is a member of the Geographical Association.

Activity 1 Future Planning

Teacher Brief

Geography has been acknowledged by many practising geographers and academics as being a vital school discipline because of the subject's ability to engage scholars and make them think about the consequences and outcomes of particular events and actions. As such geography plays a vital role in developing the skills necessary for future planning (Kent 2004)

Aim

There are two possible ways suggested here in which the ESF could be used as the basis for a class lesson

- 1) To hold a 'mock' European Social forum' exercise as an end of unit activity to encourage revision of key themes that cut across units; or
- 2) To choose a key issue that cuts across a number of schemes of work (such as water management [maybe as an activity to tie into a specific end of unit] and organise a participatory decision-making activity based on your chosen issue

Cross-curriculum links / skills

Both 1) and 2) facilitate the following:

- The development of persuasive writing and oral debating and listening skills (ties into *English literature* and *English language*)
- Listening and speaking, empathy and understanding; linking personal responsibilities and personal political ideas and practices (*PSHE / Citizenship*)
- Understanding of past uses of resources and past development relationships between countries (*History*)
- Religious and spiritual understanding (*RE*)
- Can be used in *Languages lessons** in order to develop reading and comprehension skills of language students by getting them to research websites containing topical themes in France (<http://www.attac.org.fr>) and translating articles for English-speaking geography classes.

* In this instance French is an example, but many of the European Social Forum issues were discussed in more than 7 languages. This allows language students and students with English as a second language (ESL) to access ICT resources and translate for geography debates and discussions of this kind.

Preparation and Resources

Look up relevant websites on the internet to find out topical events concerning your particular discussion point

Running of Activity

As this would be an end-of-unit investigation it is suggested that adequate time is allotted for students to revise / research background to the issues they are going to be discussing.

1) If you are running an European Social Forum (or similar) -based lesson:

a) Make sure that the themes that are going to be discussed are decided upon in a participatory decision-making way. Ensure that a list of 20 themes discussed within the ESF is given to the class and ask them to decide between them which 5 themes will be considered.

b) Next allow students to split into 5 groups (1 theme / issue per group). Ensure that you tailor this to the needs of the students.

c) Give them a hand out about how to manage participatory decision-making meetings (resources section) and get them to devise an agenda about how they will be considering and approaching looking at the future management of a particular theme:

- Whose needs must be considered? Now? In the longer term?
- What barriers are there currently in hindering sustainable future development of this issue / theme?
- How could this issue be resolved? What approaches could be taken?

d) Give student's time to research the issue and theme they are looking into. You might like to split this activity over two lessons with extension work in between in order to allow student adequate time to undertake research (with the first lesson looking at future geographies and future decision-making and the second taking part in the decision-making exercise itself)

2) If you are running a single-issue participatory decision-making activity; ensure that there are enough students to represent the different interest groups concerned about a particular issue.

For example, if you are considering looking at water management, make sure you have stakeholders representing :

- Landowners
- Agriculture
- Government
- People not on piped systems
- Businesses
- Economically rich
- Doctors and medical staff
- Researchers and hydrologists
- Developers
- Any other people (non-government organisations / aid charities)

Ensure that, as with 1), students are given enough time to look up and research their particular standpoint

Debrief

Students within each group to discuss how they felt the process went. Written work could include their understanding of what participatory decision-making is and their own evaluation on the process. They should discuss this and back up any arguments they make in their evaluation within the context of their chosen geographical issue, thus allowing themselves to express their understanding and knowledge of applied geography.

Another suggestion is to actually run a whole-school activity that involves participatory decision-making about a particular issue that is important in your school. If you have a geography club in your school the issues could be linked in so it might be to do with whether or not students should be allowed to drink water in class; or what to do to solve the rubbish / littering in the school grounds?

There might even be local school and community themes that you might want to consider investigating for possible coverage of participatory decision-making? (You could check with the local Authority's Local Agenda 21 initiatives to see if there are potential links that could be made).

Suggested ICT activity

Compare and contrast the two European Social Forum websites:
<http://www.fse-esf.org> and <http://www.dissent.org.uk>

Review and evaluate the above websites. Which website do you feel is more suited to the spirit of social forums and participatory decision-making and why?

Consider the following factors when answering:

- 1) the range of groups and individuals represented
- 2) Was it free to attend?
- 3) What sort of activities were available considering the resources given to organise the event?
- 4) Could you get there a) if you were in a wheelchair? B) With young children? c) If you were elderly?
- 5) Were there maps to find the venues?
- 6) What times were events scheduled? Were there any clashes?
- 7) Were there language translators?

Extended Reading / Literacy Links

Future worlds

George Orwell: 'Animal farm' and '1984'

George Orwell's novels 'Animal Farm' and '1984' both concern the ways in which individuals interact socially in order to create a particular experience of the world.

Read these books and consider the following:

What do you think influenced George Orwell to write these books?

What do you think George Orwell is trying to tell future readers about the way the world is run?

What do you think George Orwell was trying to inspire readers to think about in terms of the way one's actions can affect the future of the world we live in?

Read the final line of '1984'. How does this make you think about the world as it is today? Do you think Orwell's predictions came true? To what extent?

E M Forster 'The Machine Stops'

Another short story about what a future world might be like.

Read and consider the similarities and differences between the world today and what E M Forster was writing about.

Resources

Participatory Decision Making – How to do it.

Thinking skills pointers / handy hints and tips

From [http:// www.ewita.com/EWITA%20Tools/MeetingSkills/meeting_skills.html](http://www.ewita.com/EWITA%20Tools/MeetingSkills/meeting_skills.html)

Working together in mutual regard with one person is difficult enough, let alone working together with a group. The key to time and meeting management includes good organizational and planning skills.

1) decide on what you want to discuss

The first step toward managing time and meetings begins with a good agenda. The agenda serves as the meeting road map and is critical to the success of the meeting in three ways.

1. it clarifies the objectives so people understand the meeting purpose and tasks;
2. distributing the agenda prior to the meeting helps participants plan and prepare to make an effective contribution; and
3. During the meeting, the agenda provides direction and focus for the discussion.

Another concern regarding agenda development is to prevent an overcrowded agenda.

Consider how much time you will have to discuss the issues on the agenda and try to stick to it. If there are resources or reports that you have researched and want other people to see before the meeting then make sure they get the resources in good time before the meeting so they can consider the material before you have your meeting.

Make sure that if you want your report to be detailed and cover all the background details you wish for others to consider before the meeting then bear in mind the importance of

- a) being concise,
- b) be grammatically correct and
- c) be as complete as possible.

Creating a Shared Focus

The agenda should be reviewed before the meeting and before each topic is presented. This also includes reviewing the desired outcome. Reviewing the agenda at the beginning of the meeting allows members to get focused, develops shared expectations for the meeting, and it reaffirms the teams shared mapped idea of the time allocated for the meeting.

Meeting Outcomes

Good agenda planning requires two critical components:

- 1) clarify the desired outcome for each topic and
- 2) design a process to reach each outcome.

The outcome is what members will expect from the topic, and process is how the group will manage itself to reach the desired outcome. When discussion of a new topic begins, team members need to know what they are expected to achieve for that topic.

Additionally, many topics can be handled more effectively if a process is designed to assist the group in reaching their intended outcome regardless if the group is reaching consensus, taking a vote, or simply gathering opinions and concerns.

Meeting Process

When a topic is introduced at a meeting, most groups automatically go into open discussion and continue the discussion until it's time to move on to the next topic. Conducting a meeting in this fashion typically leads to *lengthy meetings, frustrated members, unclear outcomes, and group divisiveness*. However, by dividing the thinking time into various participation formats (or designing a process) helps to maintain the group's attention and concentration, and typically leads to more productive meetings. For example, if the topic is Review ABC Architecture and the desired outcome is providing team comments to the Architects, it may be more effective to subdivide this topic. First brainstorm a list among the members of positive and negative aspects of the topic; record all comments on an easel pad so the team can view them; then review the items recorded and categorize or group similar items.

Categorizing/Sorting Team Ideas

Categorizing items and sorting items into categories are two different tasks. Creating categories can be difficult for groups because people don't share common meanings for words. Although categorizing can become time consuming, it is important when a team wants to gain a deeper understanding of each other's values and goals.

Sorting items however can be a fairly easy task. By using pre-defined, simple categories such as cost, desirability, potential problems, time needed, and next steps, a team can reduce a large list of items into manageable ideas. Remember that when brainstorming or categorizing you are not seeking to convince members your idea is right, nor are you there to argue another member's idea is wrong. The purpose is to quickly gather the breadth of team opinions regarding the topic and making sure all members are heard. After ideas have been categorized or grouped, the final phase should allow for open discussion. During open discussion, members can examine each cluster or grouping of ideas and add any other points they feel may be missing. Once all of the ideas have been sorted, the team has quickly and concisely formulated their collective comments thus reaching their desired outcome: to provide team comments.

Additional Meeting Techniques

There are four other key items critical to time and meeting management:

1. use an ideas bin and
2. establish and use ground rules
3. meeting evaluation
4. Minutes.

Ideas Bin

A "bin" consists of blank sheets (one or two) torn from an easel pad and taped to the wall. Any idea that is unrelated to the current topic is written on the easel pad paper (i.e. placed in the bin). The bin serves two valuable purposes:

1. it stores ideas for consideration at an appropriate and convenient time and
2. it allows discussion to stay focused on the agenda topic.

Using the bin is an effective way to keep discussion focused and it helps people to convey their thoughts and ideas without being disruptive to the meeting. During the meeting the board leader should record bin items as they come up. If you want to encourage individual involvement for meeting effectiveness, all members should share responsibility for moving unrelated

items to the bin when they feel the discussion is getting off track.

Ground Rules

Ground rules are explicit rules that the group agrees to follow to help them facilitate productive discussions. Whether the board leader presents the ground rules or the board formulates them collectively, all members should reach consensus on following the ground rules. The ground rules should be written down on an easel pad or recorded somewhere for everyone to see at each meeting. Ground rules lay out the expectations of "the way things should be done at meetings." Ground rules are used to facilitate group interaction, not to restrict it. The group can change the ground rules or add new ones based on group needs.

Ground Rule Examples

- Arrive and start on time;
- Stick to the Agenda;
- Focus Discussion on Agenda Topics
- Listen to Understand
- Respect different View Points,
- End on time.

Meeting Evaluation

It is important for everyone to evaluate how the meeting went in terms of how people were treated during the meeting, whether all parties felt they had a fair chance of expressing their views and opinions, whether or not they felt the agenda had been met, and whether there were suitable things for people to do (action points) that different members of the meeting could go away and do afterwards.

Minutes

To maintain a record of each meeting, minutes of that meeting should be distributed to each team member and become part of the historical record of the series of meetings. Progress on agenda items should be noted, any concerns raised during the meeting, and open points from the Bin charts, and a copy of the Plus/Delta chart should be included in the agenda.

Facilitative Leadership

In order for teams to manage group process (e.g., manage themselves to be effective teams) they should also foster facilitative leadership.

Facilitative leaders help to increase overall group effectiveness. A facilitative leader is who exercise and practice the values of collaboration and empowerment. A facilitative leader encourages their group to share in equal participation by making sure all members have a chance to express their thoughts and opinions on an issue.

Team Collaboration

Not only do facilitative leaders share their reasons for their statements or actions (explaining why) but they also share their feelings about a topic so others do not have to make assumptions. Untrue assumptions are typically the cause of group conflict. Collaboration ensures everyone on the team has a chance to express him or herself. A facilitative leader asks the team for their opinions or ideas regardless of whether members agree or disagree. If a member has a different view, the leader does not get defensive but rather explores the possibility of this added perspective. Approaching different opinions in this manner allows the "undiscussable" issues to be expressed - this also reduces potential conflict.

Team Empowerment

When members recognize their input is important and different viewpoints

are encouraged, they develop ownership in the team's decisions and actions. Facilitative leaders also strive for team empowerment, which means distributing power among the team. Empowerment occurs when members begin demonstrating the values of collaboration and sharing responsibility for the success of the meeting. This also includes sticking to the agenda, using a bin, and following the ground rules. Distributing power among team members typically leads to better decisions and trust among the group since members recognize the value of their input and develop a shared commitment to the board's success.

Summary

Time and meeting management skills include:

- planning and using the agenda;
- using a bin;
- establishing ground rules;
- exercising facilitative leadership.

It is easy to get caught up in the pressure of the meeting and lose sight of perspectives. Working together in mutual regard takes time and practice. Explore your style for managing meetings while slowly incorporating new skills and techniques. Keep in mind that stress diminishes creativity and spontaneity and generally lowers the quality of results or input achieved by groups. The best board participation comes from people who are able to laugh together, discuss issues, and take pride in their efforts. So relax and explore your style with these ideas.

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ICT Resources

- 1) Web links – some suggested web-sites that may be of interest

<http://www.dissent.org.uk>

Grassroots organised free or donation events on the fringes of the 'official' European Social Forum that had been funded by the Mayor of London.

<http://www.fse-esf.org> – so-called 'official' site organised and funded by the Mayor of London, Socialist Worker, Globalise Resistance, Stop the War Coalition, the TUC, RMC and The Guardian.

Events and sessions described in 5 European languages.

- 2) News-reports on the European Social Forum (these can be printed out and examined in terms of the different viewpoints and opinions about the event to draw out critical thinking skills of students reading media reports and questioning the way articles are edited and the way information and the world is represented)

http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp_world_business/view/112137/1/.html

Article from Channel Asia News (business news section) entitled: European Social Forum fails to attract the poor, says activists.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk>

The Observer / Guardian

The Guardian gave itself the tagline of being the 'official' paper of the ESF, yet all prior ESFs have been covered by Independent Media Organisations. What does that say about the way information was controlled and reports were made about the event?

There are daily articles covering the event, an interesting piece to consider is one by Matthew Tempest, political correspondent
Sunday 17th October 2004-11-11 Anarchists storm European Social Forum

Also important link:

<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/esf/comment/0,15212,1329866,00.html>

entitled 'New Politics takes a bow'

Commentary about new politics and political discourse in international relations and the crucial role of social forums.

Other international media links can be researched by going to Google search engine and typing in 'European social forum London'

<http://www.indymedia.org.uk>

Indymedia is an organisation that evolved from the people protests in the late 1990s. Independent journalists and people involved in actions write up their own accounts of events, by-passing the editorial controls of mainstream media.

<http://www.newint.org>

New Internationalist Magazine on the web. Contains information about key global issues. Excellent resource.

Issues and themes for discussion

Good general websites

<http://www.iied.org> international institute for environment and development. Produce and research on a wide range of global issues and produce education and resource packs on participatory decision-making.

Water privatisation

<http://www.wdm.org.uk>

World development movement. Lots of resources and papers on issues that tie in with themes of geography and development. Resources and their management.

<http://www.unesco.org/water/wwap>

United Nations world water assessment programme website.

<http://www.wateraid.org> Wateraid charity concerned with the sustainable provision of non-contaminated water to populations lacking water

<http://www.freshwateraction.net>

<http://www.rainwaterharvesting.org> concerned with collection of fresh drinking water.

Climate Change

<http://www.risingtide.org.uk/>

A campaign group interested in promoting alternative approaches to living and reducing the impacts of the oil and fossil fuel industries in affecting climate change.

The global selling off of public services

<http://www.attac.fr>

European-based campaign organisation concerned with people challenging the privatisation of utilities and services such as health and education. Website in a number of European languages and would be a good site for translation for

geography / languages students.

Refugees and Asylum

<http://www.thevoiceforum.org>

European website promoting the human rights of people seeking asylum.

Wider reading/ References

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Monbiot G (2000) The age of consent: A manifesto for a new world order. His website <http://www.monbiot.com> has a range of geographical commentaries written for publications such as Resurgence and the Guardian that may be of interest.

New Internationalist Magazine – monthly magazine concerning itself with key international themes and issues. Their 'No-Nonsense Guide ...' Series covers over a dozen themes including water, the arms trade, globalisation, Islam, Women, Sexuality, Climate Change, and International Development. The website has ordering details.

Seabrook J (2004) Globalisation and Local Lives: Consuming Cultures. New Internationalist. UK