

## **How to link Nordic Social Forums with the Indian World Social Forum?**

### **A report from the Uppsala Social Forum 24-27 April 2003**

Leena Rikkilä and Katarina Sehm-Patomäki, with contributions from  
Tord Björk and Azril Bacal

*Uppsala Social Forum, USF, was the fourth social forum to take place in Sweden. We hope that the bonfire of cultural diversity and pluralistic richness of the USF will show example for future Forums. This shows that the Uppsala organizing committee had succeeded in addressing the very fundamental concern raised at the European Social Forum in Florence in mid-November 2002, namely the lack of cultural pluralism*

*USF concluded by developing a Nordic framework for the social forum process by proposing a clear and common vision for future work thus filling in the hole of low Nordic participation in the WSF process in general.*

Uppsala is an old and well-respected university town with nationalities from over 90 countries. Uppsala is also the proud home town of Dag Hammarskjöld, the former UN Secretary-General, which has made Uppsala the Swedish "UN town". The combination of these three factors may have been the crucial ones in creating the highly diverse and strong local hold. The global movement can be no more than a sum of the local involvement and strong regional and thematic anchorage creates possibilities for the movement to survive. Instead of fund-raising through out the year to get travel funding to go to WSF, the local movements should focus on their own framework and build strong holds in their regional capacities.

USF gave the impression of having succeeded in involving the town of Uppsala. Events were held in movie theatres and in the offices of the Red -3 Cross; there were large banderols in the streets and on buildings and the evening parties were well-attended. The main themes that surfaced among the 80 some events echoed well with main themes in other social forums; the debt problem, needs to democratise global institutons, the US-led ggressive global campaign for neo-liberalism, minorities' and human rights, woman's ssues and need for alternative media etc. But also the local problems of for instanse unsatisfactory health care at the Uppsala hospital gathered audiences. As n most social forums, the majority ot the participants were young. Globalizaton and networking also attained new dimensions due to the vast diversity among the participants; for instance, Katarina was interviewed on the Uppsala-based radio station Centro de Estudio y Trabajo sobre America Latina, CETAL, with program only in Spanish, and own papers with important distribution in Latin America. Naturally, the cultural bridge between the strong Latin American-rooted WSF process may not seem that big to the persons involved with CETAL working on Latin American cultural issues in Uppsala as to a person involved in the European Social Forum involved in adult education or day care facilities for children. The geographical shift of the WSF from Porto Alegre in Brazil to Mumbai City in India will provide welcomed new dimensions to the WSF process as we have known it until now.

### **Anchoring the global process**

New process, as everything else, suffers firstly from birth pains and then from growing pains. The task is not to perform according to perfection, but rather to create a democratic process and viable mechanisms that provides good ground for a

impressive number of organizations (63), working together preparing for the event for a year and also fund raising together proves the strength of the WSF. Whereas the pessimist quickly judges that even though the social forum events attract substantive numbers of people, the diverse backgrounds, large agendas and lack of coherent agenda pulls the carpet under the process, the optimist - realist -, however, understands that the mobilization of people is the very crucial element in building a (global) process.

Katarina was invited as NIGD member of the WSF International Committee. As representative of NIGD Katarina analyzed the reasons behind the success of the WSF as a movement and presented the strategy for global democratization that NIGD has developed, seeing global democratization as a unifying common denominator among global civil society actors.

In January 2002, the International Committee of the World Social Forum tool; the decision to root the WSF process locally regionally and thematically. In this one year only, nearly 100 social forums have taken place. Reports of the largest events are available at [www.worldsocialforum.org](http://www.worldsocialforum.org). Common for the events we have seen or heard reports from seems to be that these events attract unexpected high numbers of participants, and the participants represent very diverse walks of life. In this past year, the tone has also got more radical. As repeated by Susan George at the second Finnish Social Forum in Helsinki in midMarch, the call for structure, organization and the need for common strategies is essential for this movement to gain force. In addition to NIGD's work on this issue, complementary strategies are presently being formed by Ibase in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and the UNESCO Chair in Catalunya, Spain.

### **Methodology and participatory mechanisms**

In the final session of the WSF "Continuation" Hans Abrahamsson from Gothenburg University gave an introductory speech providing an overall global context for the Social Forum processes. For the Uppsala Social Forum audience he presented three questions 1) How the old and new movements could best ally and what does it requires from each party? 2) Should the forum link itself with the local politicians / politics, if so, how and on what conditions? 3) How to ensure the continuity of the Uppsala Social Forum? The audience sitting around seven tables discussed these questions and each table came up with reflections and proposals. Many innovative and fresh view points were noted and for instance a concrete proposal to express support to the on-going communal strike was approved. Also, a group of Swedish folk high school teachers came up with the decision to use the social forum process as a platform for defending and promoting the folk high school system.

The fact that this type of interactive session gathering all participants was used made also participants (as opposed to organizers) feel involved in the reparation of the future process.

### **What makes Swedes enthusiastic about the WSF?<sup>1</sup>**

Most of the social forums organized in the Nordic countries have taken place in Sweden. In August 2002 a regional forum of Ostergotland (eastern part of Sweden) was organized by Attac and others in Norrköping and attended by some hundreds of participants. Alongside the Forum a demonstration for protecting basic public goods

from privatization was organized. In Skane Social Forum (southern part of Sweden) that was organized in the city of Lund in October 2002 around 7.000 people took part in a number of seminars on anti-neoliberalization, sustainability and issues of global issues. The forum was organized by a broad range of organizations including trade unions, NGOs, movements critical of globalization such as Attac, environmental groups, immigrant organizations, solidarity movement, anarchists, Marxist-Leninists as well as Greens and Social Democrats from political parties. Similar events to forums were also organized during the Swedish EU presidency in 2001. A five-day counter-summit was arranged in Gothenburg and attracted 1.000 participants. The biggest event however was the Free Forum with 25.000 participants in 2001 and with 40.000 in 2002. In 2003 the political parties however refused to support the event due to the democracy deficit of the arrangements and co-ordination.

The World Social has received a lot of media attention in Sweden. When the WSF was organized for the first time in Porto Alegre in 2001 only the so called alternative media showed interested in the event. This year however the mainstream media had written extensively about the World Social Forum and the European Social Forum. Also, many reportages and features have been published in weekly magazines. The WSF has been mentioned in Swedish media 600 times by summer 2003. In Finland, the Network Institute for Global Democratization (NIGD) has published three books about the history and politics of the World Social Forum, and a number of analysis and publications around the subject is increasing in Norden. Also, different groupings from just established Nordica Action Network to Friends of Earth, Attac and trade-unions are discussing the WSF in their study circles.

The "Swedish enthusiasm" about the WSF is perhaps a combination of increasing alienation and disaffection from established ways - and of the "new alternative" and inspiration provided by for example Uppsala Social Forum to channel the creative forces and resources of local community. One of the uplifting mottos of the Uppsala forum was: "*Uppsala in the World, the World in Uppsala*", thus helping to establish a meaningful and personal link between the "larger picture" (the world) and local citizens, often lacking in daily life. ..Also, due to the demographic presence of the Latino community in Sweden, Porto Alegre might have been psychologically and culturally closer to Sweden, than let us say to India.

### **A Nordic Social Forum?**

The Nordic countries have a tradition of twenty years of cooperation in between different popular movements. In 1981, thirty environmental, peace, solidarity and women's organisations set up Nordic Alternative campaign which promoted improved control of capital flows as well as disarmament, environmental protection, solidarity to popular movements in the third world, and of building alternative ways of living locally and future studies of alternatives. This early initiative has continued in a form of Nordic People's Parliament and an Idea bank collecting information on local experiences on environmental and global solidarity work. Also, People's Global Action groups have recently formed Nordic Anti Capitalist Network. There is also a long tradition of Nordic cooperation in organizing joint protests at European Union Summits since 1997.

## Finland

The first Finnish Social Forum was organized in 2002, and in 2003 the forum gathered a bit more than 1.000 participants. The trade unions and KEPA (an umbrella organization for non-governmental development cooperation organizations) organized also separate events to promote global solidarity with bigger number of participation. Over the years, the Finnish movements have also developed close links the Indian popular movements and with the WSF /India through the Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam initiative.

## Denmark

The Danish movements have been busy with the Danish EU-presidency. The NGO-Forum was organized in Copenhagen with 1.000 participants in 2002. Inspired by Porto Alegre some local NGO-forums were also set up in Aalborg and Arhus (cities) during this campaigning. Among the Nordic countries Denmark has the longest tradition of EU Summit protest via the European network called Towards Another Europe that was set up to participate in the Euro marches and EU-Summit in Amsterdam in 1997.

## Norway

An event called Globalization Conference resembling a Social Forum was initiated in Norway already some years ago. Since 2002 they started to call themselves "An other world" and linked the event with the Social Forum process. The success of the Norwegian Social Forum last year has also reached our ears. Yash Tandon, in particular, has spoken encouragingly of the Norwegians' efforts.

Whereas conferences usually end by conclusions and farewells, the USForanizers had named their final session "the continuation". At this session, as also in previous discussions, framework for Nordic Social Forum was proposed as reference for future work. The defence against the dismantling - or fight for the survival - of the welfare state would constitute a unique, highly relevant, uniting and important common framework for civil society movements in the Nordic countries. This also invites to a positive fight for the welfare state rather than against the dismantling of it. A common fight for the national post system (against privatisation) was mentioned as a one very concrete example of potential cooperation between Nordic activists.

The second European Social Forum is scheduled to take place in Paris, France in mid-November 2003. The first planning meeting took place in Berlin, time wise colliding perfectly with the USF. It has been decided that the third planning meeting on the ESF will take place in September in Gothenburg, Sweden, and it was also discussed that perhaps that meeting could also invite to a first planning meeting of a Nordic Social Forum?

## **What could be the link with th-e Nordic Forums and Indian WSF 2004?**

The next World Social Forum (2004) will be organised in Mumbai, India.<sup>2</sup>

The moving of the WSF from Porto Alegre to Mumbai is going to be an interesting challenge for the Nordics too. There is longstanding collaboration in between Finnish

and Indian social movements which actually dates back to the meeting organized in 1989 in Finland where an Indian critic of the concepts of development and modernization was first introduced. The contacts created in that meeting developed into an exchange program of political activists between India and Finland. The organizations involved succeeded even to attract the interest of the governments of both India and Finland. This India-Finland tie has also been effective in the international council of the WSF.

The collaboration could also be very concrete. As the organizers of the Uppsala Social Forum have said: "We are open to establish a communication channel and a working dialogue with the local organizing committee of the Indian WSF. They could consult directly with us, via internet, telephone and if needed, they could visit us in Uppsala, to discuss of our general and particular lessons learnt from our first Social Forum in Uppsala."

"Some of us have had some direct organizational experiences from the World Social Forum, the World Education Forum, and the European Social Forum, which might be of some help to our Indian comrades. In that regard, keeping in mind the organic link that was built in Porto Alegre between the World Social Forum and the World Education Forum, in recognition of the deep connection that exists between transformative (consciousness-raising) education and social change, it might be worthwhile to consider the pedagogical dimension as one important organizational component of the fourth World Social Forum in India (irrespective of the fact that the next World Education Forum will continue to take place in Porto Alegre next year)."

The Nordic participation in a global WSF has been somewhat modest so far. As of now there should be many possibilities also for Nordic collaboration within the WSF India, as has happened within the European context. It was after all in Norden where the direct contact in between India and Brazil was first established in Helsinki (2001) when Vijay Pratap from Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Ashok Rao from an Indian trade-union met with Candido Gryzbowski from Ibase (Brazil) and the idea of an Indian World Social Forum started to grow.

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FOOTNOTE: Uppsala Social Forum took place on 25-27 April 2003 in Uppsala, Sweden, and attracted some 3000 participants. The organizing committee included 63 organizations, and the work was chaired by Markus Selin. The total budget of the event was some SEK 80 000, and this money was raised through active fund raising activities. The largest part of the total budget, SEK 40 000 was provided by Forum-Syd. For more information on USF, see <http://www.uppsalasocialforum.org>. NIGD was represented by Leena Rikkilä and Katarina Sehm-Patomäki The

<sup>1</sup>Tord Bjork and Azril Bacal

<sup>2</sup> Website for World Social Forum 2004: [www.wsfindia.org](http://www.wsfindia.org)