

**UNRISD Project on
UN World Summits and Civil Society Engagement**

**UN World Summits
and Civil Society:
the State of the Art**

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Acronyms

AIDS	acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
CSO	civil society organization
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
G7/G8	Group of 7/Group of 8
GDP	gross domestic product
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGLS	Non-Governmental Liaison Service
NGO	non-governmental organization
TOES	The Other Economic Summit
UN	United Nations
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Foundation
WB	World Bank
WEF	World Economic Forum
WSSD	World Summit for Social Development
WTO	World Trade Organization

1. Introduction: Setting the Scene¹

United Nations (UN) world summits have been one of the activities of the UN with a pervasive impact on the international community. From the pioneering initiatives in the 1970s, to the intense activity of the 1990s, to the follow-up events and new challenges of the present, UN world summits have effectively addressed global issues, engaged national governments, and opened up a complex and important relationship with civil society organizations (CSOs, often identified also as non-governmental organizations, NGOs). Investigating the link between UN world summits and civil society is the objective of this state-of-the-art paper, which addresses concepts, history, and qualitative and quantitative evidence on the co-evolution of UN world summits and civil society activities on global issues.

UN world summits

UN world summits—on human rights, the environment, women, social development, population, food and many other crucial themes—have played a major role in framing the terms of the debate on global issues, in developing a consensus on appropriate rules, and in providing guidelines for global and national policies. Their ability to implement change in the actions of governments, firms and other social agents, however, has been lower than expected, as shown by the follow-up conferences held five or 10 years after the major UN world summits (see section 3). Still, the effects of such events have not been limited to their stated official objectives. While international organizations and national governments have been the key players and decision makers at UN world summits, the space for civil society involvement has rapidly grown in such events. CSOs have obtained access to information, participated in some activities, have been consulted as providers of expert knowledge and have addressed the official conferences. At the same time, UN world summits have regularly featured NGOs' forums—often very large ones—where all types of CSOs have met to share experiences and build common values, identities and strategies on global issues (see appendix 1 for a list of major UN world summits). This process has had a deep and diverse impact on the development of national civil societies—depending on previous social activism, on the topics concerned, on the countries where UN summits were held—and has facilitated the emergence of a global civil society.

Global civil society

Global civil society is conceptualized here as the sphere of cross-border relationships and activities carried out by collective actors that are independent from governments and private firms, operating outside the international reach of states and markets. CSOs, networks, campaigns and social movements active on transnational or global issues are the primary agents of change in such a sphere. Global social movements can be understood as waves of cross-border collective social mobilization within global civil society, moving from strong values and emerging identities, challenging social, economic or political power, demanding change in international issues. Section 2 of the paper discusses the definitions, concepts and typologies relevant for this research.

National or global?

Global civil society has grown out of the activities such actors have carried out first within national civil societies, and later at a truly global scale. The relationship between national and transnational activities has remained very close and runs two ways: national experiences contribute to shape global agendas and actions; and these, in turn, affect the evolution and initiatives in individual national civil

¹ I thank Federico Silva and Christian Eccher for their help in the gathering of sources and preparation of figures. I thank Krishna Ghimire, Britta Sadoun, Federico Silva and the participants in the seminar held at UNRISD in Geneva on 6 February 2004 for their useful comments.

societies. UN world summits have been major events where such a two-way exchange has taken place. The focus in this paper is on the activities that identify commonalities at the global level, where shared values, identities and strategies begin to emerge within global civil society, rather than on the responses of national civil societies to such issues, that tend to be fragmented, country specific and history-bound.

Different actors, different strategies

Within the sphere of civil society a great variety of actors operate, with different and sometimes contrasting values, objectives and strategies. The focus is on the activities and organizations that have challenged the dominant strategy of neoliberal globalization and searched for alternatives, either with the pursuit of a "globalization of rights and responsibilities"—an approach that has characterized many UN world summits—or with the construction of a "globalization from below" by the emerging global civil society (see section 2).

In order to clarify the great complexity of the activities undertaken within global civil society, in particular in relation to UN world summits, an effort is made in section 2 to identify the main aspects that differentiate global civil society actors. They include the objectives (self-interest, solidarity, global common good); the forms of organization; the focus on "internal" strength or on "external" impact; the strategies of action (from protest to lobbying, from policy proposals to the practice of alternatives); the interaction with power (acceptance, dialogue, rejection), leading to specific projects of transformation, including integration, grassroots alternatives, and global social movements. An exploration in empirical terms of the differences in the approach to global issues and in the typology of actors is provided in section 4.

History and developments

Section 3 summarizes the history of the interaction between UN world summits and civil society, from the experimental efforts of the 1970s and 1980s to the mass participation in UN conferences in the 1990s, to the self-organization of global civil society in the new century. What emerges is an original relationship between institutional and social dynamics on global issues. While this is not without precedents in the past, the novelty of the 1990s has been the large-scale involvement of CSOs from all over the world and the acceleration and intensification of such links at the global level. In other words, UN summits have expanded the reach and activities of the sphere of global civil society. They have provided challenges and opportunities for the emergence of global identities and initiatives within civil society, and have stimulated a wide range of developments within national civil societies.

Sometimes integration has resulted, with CSOs becoming part of operations controlled and funded by international institutions, governments or large firms, such as policy implementation or service provision. Frequently the encounter with global issues at UN world summits has renewed the search for grassroots alternatives at the local level, stimulated by exchange of experiences and new global connections. Very often this experience has supported the emergence of global social movements challenging global powers on the same issues addressed—and left unsolved—by UN summits, as with the recent growth of world social forums.

Empirical evidence

Some evidence on CSOs active in global events is provided in section 4. After a review of previous surveys, the results are presented of a recent survey of 147 CSOs involved in global events, half of which have participated in at least one UN world summit (see appendix 2). The type, size and field of activity of organizations are described. Their view on globalization favours the perspective of "globalization from below" and of "humanised globalization", with lower support for a focus on the

national/local dimension and for a "governance of globalization" perspective. An attitude of active dialogue with UN world summits is dominant, followed by policy criticism from the outside, and efforts at integration in official summits. A long list of alternative policy proposals is also presented, showing those receiving greater priority by CSOs. Answers from the group of organizations involved in UN conferences are compared with those from organizations involved in other global civil society events.

Exploring the impact of UN world summits

Section 5 combines the findings of previous sections in order to provide a framework for assessing the impact of UN world summits on civil society. It discusses the variety of interactions that have emerged, and the effects that involvement in UN world summits has had on several aspects and experiences of civil society development. A tentative typology is then proposed in order to organize the complex and fragmented evidence on the issue. A schematic sequence of such relationships includes: (i) the opening door for CSOs to global issues provided by the early involvement in UN summits; (ii) the deepening of understanding of such themes; (iii) the launching pad into the networks and activities of global civil society; (iv) the broadening vision bringing together separate issues; and (v) the closed door when the rejection comes of the demands by global civil society for change in the UN system and international institutions, in government policies and in the strategies of firms. Against such a rough model it may be possible to identify the dominant impact of individual UN summits, and the evolution of the involvement of CSOs—or groups and networks of CSOs from particular countries, active on specific issues—in the activities associated to UN world summits.

The strategies for change

After the experience of civil society involvement in UN world summits, what are the lessons learned for implementing change? The conclusions, in section 6, point out strengths and weaknesses of four types of strategies by global civil society and global social movements: (i) the protest model; (ii) the pressure model, with lobbying for reforms; (iii) the proposal model—developing policy alternatives and demands for radical change; and (iv) the model of alternative practices, with the self-organization of civil society outside the state and market systems.

Protest has been highly visible and effective in raising attention to global issues, but much less so in changing policies. Lobbying has flourished around UN summits, with modest results. The challenge of UN summits has stimulated global civil society to build shared alternatives to current policies on global issues. Still, the success in changing the course of global institutions has been modest, and a new interest is directed to alternative practices within—local as well as global—civil society. A reconsideration of the locus of change is also under way. Much more effort is now directed—especially in countries in the South—to influence national politics and the policies of progressive governments, while a growth in globally connected local actions is also evident. Again, in order to be sustained and successful, pressure for change would have to develop at all levels.

Given the breadth of the themes addressed in this state-of-the-art paper, it is important to point out here a few crucial issues that remain beyond the scope of this research.

The question of democracy

The experience of civil society participation in UN world summits has raised the key question of democracy in decision-making on global issues. The lack of a democratic answer to the question "Who decides on global issues?" remains a major weakness of the global order. Global civil society is providing an important contribution to democratizing the global order, usually with a voice of protest,

and sometimes with a voice of advice, while the question whether civil society should have a power to vote or to veto decisions on global issues is still an open one, and is not addressed in this paper.

The issue of representation in decision-making bodies

Steps toward more democratic decision-making include the practical ways through which the UN, international institutions and states could formally recognize the role of civil society on global issues. One possible way is through granting CSOs the right to have a voice on global issues, as members, for example, of the delegations of national representatives to UN bodies, regional organizations—such as the European Union (EU)—and international conferences; some very initial steps in this direction have already been taken in the case of the UN. In order to play such a role, the representativeness of CSOs and the democratic procedures for deliberation within civil society would have to be addressed, but again this issue is not discussed in this paper.

It should be noted that CSOs do not claim to have exclusive representation of fundamental values and interests and so far 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 when exclusive representation and decision-making power exists—such as in government policy making. However, the question will soon arise on how far global CSOs can increase their influence over global decisions without coming to terms with the problems of legitimacy, representativeness and accountability. Maybe new boundaries between public interest advocacy and a more systematic representation of interests will have to be drawn.

Important as they are, these challenges of greater institutional involvement of civil society in global decision-making are not the major development under way. Within global civil society, the greatest novelty has been the rise of unprecedented global social movements.

Global civil society or global social movements?

The rise of powerful global social movements demanding peace, economic justice and international democracy has changed the landscape of the new century. They move from global civil society and challenge power in markets and states. They carry a hegemonic project, developed within civil society, opposed to neoliberal globalization, aiming at restraining the rule of the market and the sovereignty of states, in the name of universal rights—human, political, social and economic ones. Thus, they demand nothing less than a reconfiguration of the relationships between the spheres of the economy, politics and civil society. A major success of global social movements has been their self-organization across the planet on a permanent basis, with an inclusive approach, leading to the successes of the world social forums started in 2001. The challenges ahead include the development of common identities and visions, and the definition of common agendas and policy proposals demanding change in global issues. Again an analysis of such developments is beyond the scope of this paper.

Over the last two decades marked by UN world summits, global civil society has emerged as a conscious force of change in global issues. A remarkable result, at the end of this study, is that it has been able to develop at the same time its internal strength and cohesion and its external impact, its involvement inside the institutional process set in motion by the UN to address global issues, and its campaigns outside the structures of global governance, leading to an unprecedented rise of global social movements over the same issues. In other words, global civil society has been able to preserve its autonomy from the market and state systems, challenging both in the name of its values and visions. This is no small achievement for global civil society, and for the largest part of individuals and groups active within it.

2. Concepts and Contexts

2.1 Global civil society

A large and growing literature has addressed the definition of civil society, from its origins in Ferguson, Hegel, Tocqueville, to the critique of Marx, and the modern meaning emerging with Gramsci,² up to the intense debates from the 1980s to the present. Within national contexts, modern definitions of civil society have emphasized its separation and autonomy from both the state and the economy—putting the emphasis alternatively on either aspect; they have looked at civil society as the sphere of social relations and the contested terrain where hegemonic projects are developed.

Since the 1980s, increasing attention has been devoted to the transnational nature, vision, scope and activities of civil society. The autonomy from the territorially bound nature of sovereign states makes it possible for civil society—and, more precisely, for major actors within it—to define itself on the basis of values and identities that transcend national/state loyalties. With the state system constrained by the rigidity of the Cold War system and by the principle of national sovereignty, and with national political and economic structures resisting change, social dynamics increasingly looked and acted beyond national borders. Since the 1980s, a growing networking, activism and social mobilization has addressed emerging global issues, defended fundamental rights and advocated change in a transnational perspective. The demands and activities of civil society moved beyond their interaction with the national/domestic political and economic spheres, and challenged political and economic power across national borders, questioning some fundamental aspects of the nature of the interstate system and of the—increasingly—global economy. This marked the emergence of what started to be called global—or transnational—civil society. A more rigorous, but still tentative, definition can now be proposed:

The emerging global civil society can be defined as the sphere of cross-border relationships and activities carried out by collective actors that are independent from governments and private firms, operating outside the international reach of states and markets.³

“Relationships” and “activities” are key words here. Viewing global civil society as a sphere of relationships, and an arena for interactions, makes it possible to conceptualize its relations to the political sphere—the interstate system ruled by the power of governments—and to the economic sphere—the globalizing economy ruled by the power of capital. Such relations generally emerge from the demands that global civil society expresses to the political and economic spheres, and vice versa, demands that could concern change either in the nature or content of particular relations, or in the definition and boundaries of each sphere.

Viewing global civil society as a sphere of activities implies a recognition of the highly heterogeneous actors of global civil society. They become active in the pursuit of particular objectives. They may include:

² The basic references include Gramsci (1971) and Bobbio (1976); for a review, see also Tabbush (2003).

³ See also Pianta (2001b, p.171); Falk (1992, 1999); Lipschutz (1992); Cohen and Arato (1992); Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor (2001b); Glasius and Kaldor (2002); Chandhoke (2002); Kaldor, Anheier and Glasius (2003,2005); and Kaldor (2003). This is rather similar to the UNRISD definition: "Civil society is a complex social arena, with individuals and groups organized in various forms of associations and networks in order to express their views and fulfil their interests. They could constitute anything from a global advocacy movement down to a village self-help group" (UNRISD 2003a:1).

- (i) the pursuit of narrow self-interests of a (national) social group active in global civil society;
- (ii) the pursuit of self-interests common to social groups in several countries;
- (iii) the pursuit of interests of specific social groups by non-interested actors (solidarity action);
- (iv) the pursuit of a global common good (or what is perceived as such).

Differences in perspectives within global civil society are largely based on the inclusion, exclusion or pre-eminence given to some of the above objectives. A further specification may concern the means by which such ends are pursued. A typology of means would lead to identify a distinct set of strategies and actors within civil society, and will be discussed in the next section.

Moving from abstract definitions to the experience of the emergence of global civil society since the 1980s, we can focus on the relationships and activities that have characterized global interactions—and especially those associated with UN world summits—leaving therefore aside the case of self-interests that are not widely shared on a global level. Inevitably, a great variety of values, views of the common good, and projects of society have emerged and been influential within global civil society. As this research focuses on the relationship with UN world summits, the obvious way to proceed—and to address such heterogeneity—is to focus on the relations and activities that move from values that are coherent with those of the Charter of the United Nations and, more specifically, with the concerns expressed since the 1980s by the UN world summits.

If we accept such a criteria, the key relationships and activities of global civil society that have developed since the 1980s vis-à-vis the political and economic spheres can be summarized as follows:

- (i) demands by global civil society for global democracy, human rights and peace to the state system;
- (ii) demands by global civil society for global economic justice to the economic system;
- (iii) demands by global civil society for global social justice and environmental sustainability to both systems.

Conversely, both the state and the economic systems have put pressure on global civil society to adhere to their own values and norms, but such relationships are beyond the scope of this project.

2.2 Actors and actions in global civil society

Following from the definitions above, we can now identify the types of actors and actions characterizing global civil society. A comprehensive and exhaustive classification is hardly possible; for our purposes it is important to point out that we can distinguish them according to several aspects:

- (i) the objective, previously described
- (ii) the forms of organization
- (iii) the focus, strategies of action and interaction with power
- (iv) the transformational dynamics
- (v) the content of their agendas and policy alternatives.

The forms of organizations include:

- (i) associations and NGOs

- (ii) networks and campaigns
- (iii) trade unions (and maybe some grassroots political forces)
- (iv) informal/occasional/local groups
- (v) global social movements.

Such definitions are not mutually exclusive. Networks are usually made up of associations; both formal and informal groups—as well as individuals—can be part of social movements. The term civil society organizations covers most of the formal organizations. Within CSOs a key distinction can be made between:

- (i) truly global CSOs or international networks of CSOs
- (ii) national CSOs active on global issues.

Participation in UN world summits has generally been limited to formal CSOs, but all forms of organizations can be found when civil society activism on most themes of UN summits is investigated.

A specific effort in terms of concepts and definitions has to deal with global social movements. Their dynamic, evolving nature makes them more difficult to define than CSOs. A tentative definition is the following:

Global social movements can be defined as waves of cross-border collective social mobilization within global civil society, based on permanent or occasional organizations, networks and campaigns, moving from strong values and emerging identities, challenging social, economic or political power, demanding change in international issues.⁴

They have emerged from two moves: from the national to the global scale, and from the single issue to the broader view. 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-organized solutions across national borders, interacting in original ways with the new sites of supranational power.⁵

The focus of action may be internal or external to the organization. Efforts may be directed at strengthening:

- the internal structure of the organization through (among others):
 - (i) greater human, economic and organizational resources
 - (ii) greater identity, information and understanding
 - (iii) greater networking ability and connectedness
- the external impact of the organization on:
 - (i) global/national civil society

⁴ The dynamics of social movements are investigated by Tarrow (1998); Della Porta and Diani (1999) suggest that four key aspects define (national) social movements: informal interaction networks, shared beliefs and solidarity, collective action focusing on conflicts, use of protest. The same characteristics can be applied to transnational social movements active in global civil society.

⁵ See also Lipschutz (1992); Keck and Sikkink (1998); Waterman (1998); Della Porta et al. (1999); Florini (2000); Cohen and Rai (2000); and O'Brien et al. (2000).

- (ii) global/national public opinion
- (iii) global/national economic agents
- (iv) national public institutions/policy decision makers
- (v) supranational institutions/policy decision makers.

The strategies of action may include, among others:

- (i) spreading information
- (ii) raising consciousness
- (iii) voicing needs/demands/protests on a specific decision of political or economic power
- (iv) lobbying for a specific decision or action by political or economic power
- (v) developing economic/social practices alternative to those of economic power
- (vi) developing policy proposals alternative to those of political power
- (vii) radical civil disobedience
- (viii) violent actions.

They tend to be associated with specific forms of interaction with power and may be summarized in terms of the following alternatives:

- (i) acceptance, integration and co-optation in existing power centres
- (ii) dialogue and criticism, aiming at reform
- (iii) rejection and conflict aiming at a radical change.

Finally, the transformational dynamics that emerges from such variety of possibilities may lead to identify—in a very tentative way—different models of actors and actions within global civil society:

- (i) the integration model, where a strong organizational identity, with little orientation to internal and external change, is combined with the acceptance and integration in existing centres of power, or with activities such as service provision, making these actors closer to either firm-type organizations or public-type institutions;
- (ii) the grassroots–alternative model, where local and fragmented identities give priority to the preservation of original forms of organization and action, with autonomous practices addressing specific needs, while keeping distance from power;
- (iii) the global social movement model, that combines a strong value-based identity, emphasis on internal and external change and conflict potential versus economic and political power.

A further perspective in the analysis of global civil society and its responses to UN world summits may consider the content of the documents it has produced—agendas, critiques of current problems, proposals for alternatives, policy documents, etc. A content analysis has to be focused on specific issues and needs to clearly define its sources and method. No general typology can be envisaged in this case, although in the documents produced by global civil society we are likely to include a variety of approaches similar to that identified above when considering the forms of interaction with power or the transformational dynamics.

The analysis of the agendas and policy alternatives of CSOs and social movements makes it possible to chart the evolution of their ideas and actions and understand the emergence of different views, strategies and proposals on particular issues. The studies on the interaction between civil society and UN world summits have paid substantial attention to these policy contents, assessing the distance

between the documents of the official conference and the views of different groups of CSOs, and the way in which a consensus on alternative civil society documents has been built (see the discussion and references in section 5). What is more interesting now, is that the analyses and policies produced by global civil society and social movements move from the isolation of specific issues to address broader concerns of economic justice and international democracy, in a search to give meaning to the assertion that "another world is possible".⁶

Looking at the various dimensions of the activities of global civil society discussed so far, it should be pointed out that all classifications are tentative, preliminary and incomplete. They are rarely mutually exclusive and one particular CSO may be routinely—and successfully—involved in quite disparate actions. However, such definitions and distinctions can be helpful in analysing the complex and confused world of global civil society. They may help in organizing our way of looking at global civil society, at the actors and actions within it, and, in particular, at the impact that UN world summits have had. The combination of the multiple dimensions identified by such classifications could be used to map the activism of civil society and its interaction with UN world summits.

Such a multidimensionality of the profile and activities of global civil society describes not only the variety of actors and actions. It also reflects a variety of values, worldviews, projects and strategies that may characterize streams in global civil society that otherwise may appear rather similar. Such variety of—different, sometimes conflicting—strategies is discussed in the next section. An empirical exploration of many of these dimensions is developed in section 4 using data from a survey of global CSOs.

As both global civil society and global movements have emerged in the context of globalization, we need to devote some attention to the alternative models of globalization that have characterized the last two decades.

2.3 The contrasting projects of globalization

Since the 1980s, economic and political developments have led to a growing importance of global processes, and to a wide ranging debate on globalization.

In the economic sphere, national economies have become more interdependent; trade and capital movements have been liberalized and increased rapidly; the number, activities and power of multinational corporations has surged; and new technologies have reshaped the flows of knowledge, global financial markets have massively expanded. As a result, national economic policies have become more constrained by global market processes and by the power of supranational economic institutions.

In the sphere of politics, supranational decision-making has greatly expanded, both as a result of the formal transfer of power to old and new intergovernmental organizations, such as the European Union and the World Trade Organization (WTO), and because of the emergence of informal supranational powers through interstate agreements or cooperation, such as the Group of 7/Group of 8 (G7/G8). The

⁶ Overviews of major agendas and policy documents produced by global civil society and movements can be found in NGO Millennium Forum (2000); Amalric and Stocchetti (2001); Pianta (2001a); Fisher and Ponniah (2003); Montbiot (2003); and Sen et al. (2004). Most NGOs' forums at UN world summits have produced final documents on the issues addressed.

UN has been put at the centre of demands for more effective actions, reform and democratization. The UN has also played a major role in framing the terms of the debate on global issues through the series of world summits (see the historical overview of the next section).

However, much of the new supranational decision-making power—especially that outside the UN system—has remained unaccountable to democratic processes, and exercised largely by specialized government officials and international “technocrats”. The question of democracy at the global (cosmopolitan) scale has therefore become an urgent issue.⁷

Globalization, and all the processes it entails, including the emergence of global civil society, cannot be reduced to a single dynamics. It could be better understood if we distinguish between three major, contrasting directions of globalization: (i) neoliberal globalization; (ii) globalization of rights and responsibilities; and (iii) globalization from below (discussed in Pianta 2001a, b). In a rather schematic way, they are summarized as follows.

Neoliberal globalization

Neoliberal globalization has emerged as the dominant force of the past two decades, shaping globalization in the image of the market system. Moving from economic processes, from the strategies of multinational corporations and financial institutions, it has affected the decisions of governments and international institutions, pressing most countries to follow in the policy prescriptions of the Washington Consensus—liberalization, privatization, deregulation, reduction in taxes and public expenditures. Unregulated markets, dominated by multinational corporations and private financial institutions, mostly based in few advanced countries of the North, have been the driving force of global change.

Neoliberal globalization has institutionalized the overwhelming power of economic mechanisms—markets and firms—over politics and society. The space for democratic politics and autonomous policies has drastically declined in most countries and in most fields. The space for the protection of human, social and economic rights has shrunk, as poverty, inequalities and social exclusion increased.⁸

Globalization of rights and responsibilities

The second direction, the globalization of rights and responsibilities, has its roots in the political system and in the understanding by a few “enlightened” governments and international institutions that new global problems had to be addressed at the global scale; the proposed approach was the governance of globalization.⁹

This perspective did not oppose economic globalization; it tried to accompany it with a parallel strengthening of global, somewhat democratic, political structures. And in so doing, it would also defend some spaces of civil society activity, the protection of rights and social integration.

This project has had a large influence on the agenda of the UN summits on human rights, women’s rights, the environment, social development, food supply, and the creation of the International Criminal

⁷ See also Archibugi and Held (1995); Archibugi, Held and Koehler (1998); Falk (1995); and Montbiot (2003).

⁸ See also UNRISD (1995, 2000), UNDP (1999, 2002), and Chomsky (1999).

⁹ This perspective has its roots in the series of reports on global issues started in the 1970s with the Brandt North–South Report. Major formulations of such an approach include the reports of the Commission on Global Governance (1995), Childers and Urquhart (1994), and the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization (2004). The case for such a course is also made by Held and McGrew (2002) and Held and Koenig-Archibugi (2003).

Court. It proposed the universalization of human, political, and social rights, along with the recognition of the responsibility that countries, governments, and people have in facing the new global problems. Among the results are new norms for international rights, declarations of principles, a new space for democratic processes, greater attention by states to the respect of rights, some innovative policies, and a broader political cooperation on a regional or global level—the case of European integration being the most significant.

Civil society has generally asked governments and international institutions to take initiatives in this direction and to open up participatory democratic processes at the global level. A part of global CSOs shares this view and has supported the institutions and policies advancing it (some empirical evidence of this support is provided in section 4).

Still, the idea that policies coherent with such a project could be developed in parallel to neoliberal economic policies has proved fatal. Whenever a conflict emerged between the protection of rights and the liberalization of markets, neoliberal strategies have always prevailed—global warming and international labour rights being major examples. The project based on rights and responsibilities, therefore, has had a limited influence on the direction of globalization. It did not succeed in balancing the needs of global markets and of national societies. And the extent of this failure has often been visible in the follow-up conferences held five or 10 years after the major UN world summits.

Globalization from below

A third, alternative direction, globalization from below, has come from the emerging global civil society. It has developed from the core values of peace, justice, democracy, protection of rights, advanced in the work of organizations and social movements active across national borders, advocating change, opposing current policies, proposing alternative solutions to global issues.¹⁰ In its name, a large part of global civil society has resisted the project of neoliberal globalization and has supported demands for global rights and responsibilities.

But this perspective raises a much deeper challenge to the power of markets and states. It represents a hegemonic project aiming at restraining the rule of the market and the sovereignty of states, in the name of universal rights—human, political, social and economic ones. Thus, it demands nothing less than a reconfiguration of the relationships between the spheres of the economy, politics and civil society.

The unprecedented rise of global social movements demanding peace, economic justice and international democracy is, at the same time, a practice of globalization from below and a manifestation of the importance of such a perspective for addressing global problems.¹¹ Globalization from below

¹⁰ According to Richard Falk (1999:130), who has introduced the concept “globalization from below” has the potential to “conceptualize widely shared world order values: minimizing violence, maximizing economic well-being, realizing social and political justice, and upholding environmental quality”. See also Brecher and Costello (1998), Brecher, Costello and Smith (2000) and Pianta (2001a,b, 2003). A similar perspective, although with different concepts, is in Santos (2003) and Sen et al. (2004).

¹¹ Arrighi et al. (1989) have pointed out the importance of social movements in the world system. The current emergence of global social movements is examined, among a rapidly growing literature, by Amin and Houtart (2002), Andretta et al. (2002), Broad and Heckscher (2003), Grzybowski (2000), Houtart and Polet (1999), Klein (2000, 2002), Pianta (2001a, 2003), Santos (2003), Sen et al. (2004) and Teivanen (2002). It may be noted that even the surge of terrorism with the attacks of 11 September 2001 against the United States, and the ensuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq did not slow down the global activism of civil society; rather, this had led to greater attention to the issues of peace, war and violence, leading to the global days of protest against the war in Iraq of 15 February 2003 and 20 March 2004.

empowers civil society and provides spaces for self-organization, but at the same time calls for a different quality of global policies that may extend and generalize such an empowerment.

Globalization from below demands a new generation of policies by governments and international institutions putting at the centre not just the affirmation of rights, but their implementation in economic and social relations; not just the principle of democracy, but its introduction in international decision-making and its development in a participatory perspective. In that, it may revive and push ahead the agendas of UN world summits. Globalization from below also calls for addressing the roots of global injustice and inequality in the market system. In that, it goes much beyond the approach of a governance of globalization.

A number of questions emerge at this stage. What is the relationship between the perspective of globalization from below and the institutions addressing global issues—including UN world summits? Is globalization from below having an impact on global decision-making? And how relevant are such views among global CSOs? The empirical evidence in Section 4 provides some answers to such questions.

3. UN World Summits and Global Civil Society: A Brief History

3.1 The role of UN world summits

This section provides a description of the sequence of UN world summits and how the involvement of civil society has grown, nationally and globally, based on the issues addressed, on the interest of national CSOs, on the locations of summits and on policy follow-ups.

UN world summits have represented an important innovation in the international arena, combining the legitimacy of the UN with the flexibility of informal meetings of states, and public displays of concern and action on major global issues. They have become frequent and influential in the 1990s, with far-reaching consequences at the national level on both government policy and the development of civil society. In a world dominated by media and communication, where global problems are immediately visible everywhere, UN world summits have also become media events that “showed” the importance of global issues and the amount of energies addressing them.

In more substantive ways, UN world summits have performed a variety of roles—many of which may be combined in the same event—and have become part of the emerging governance system of an increasingly globalized world, where summits of very many sorts have proliferated. The key roles and activities of UN summits may be described as follows.

- (i) Framing the issue—UN world summits have defined key issues of supranational relevance. For instance, the UN World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995 has framed the terms of the debate on issues such as poverty and social integration.
- (ii) Rule-making—UN world summits have tried to define the rules for behaviour and national policies in internationally relevant fields, from the environment to health. For instance, the UN World Conference on Human Rights has led to shared principles and rules on human rights; although they were not directly enforceable by UN bodies, nor could citizens exercise them immediately, they have widely influenced the legislation and practice of states and the behaviour of citizens.

(iii) Policy guidelines—UN summits have sometimes suggested the direction to be taken by policies at the national level. For instance, the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 has not only defined the terms of the debate and rules of action, but has also outlined the policy guidelines for addressing the environmental issue.

UN world summits, as most UN activities, had no enforcement power over the decisions agreed upon by governments at the conferences, nor commanded the resources for implementing policies, and had to rely on the power, interest and resources of states for addressing the issues. In such conditions, the effectiveness of UN world summits has been much greater in terms of framing the debate and of defining a few fundamental international rules—such as those on human rights—than in terms of policy implementation, as emerged in several follow-up conferences.

As this range of activities carried out by UN world summits replicates that of political power in states, great attention has been devoted to the democratic nature of the conference procedures and to the need for participation, representation and involvement of civil society. Moreover, in spite of the formally equal representation of states in the UN system, a strong imbalance of power among states remains, with rich Western countries dominating many decision-making processes and the implementation of the outcomes of conferences (Archibugi, Held, and Koehler 1998; Foster and Anand 2002).

The interaction between global institutions and global civil society did not start with UN world summits. 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 intergovernmental organizations was accompanied by equally flourishing international NGOs 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.

NGOs found an initial opening in the UN system in the Economic and Social Council (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.¹²

The series of UN world summits started in the 1980s and intensifying in the 1990s led to a renewed and broader role of the UN on global issues and to closer, wider and deeper interactions with civil society. CSOs, networks and campaigns, moving from traditional efforts to put pressure on states, started to address global problems in a more systematic way, criticizing the failure of states to address them and calling on the UN system to act. The evolution of civil society involvement in UN conferences is summarized below (drawing also from Pianta 2001b); an interpretation will be developed in section 5.

¹² On the interactions between civil society, NGOs and the UN system see Gordenker and Weiss (1995), and the contributions in the same special issue of *Third World Quarterly*; Otto (1996); Lotti and Giandomenico (1996), Falk (1998), Paul (1999), Martens (2000), Global Policy Forum (1999), Foster and Anand (2002) and NGLS (2003).

3.2 The beginnings: The 1970s and 1980s

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 1974 the World Food Conference in Rome saw an active presence of NGOs (Van Rooy 1997). 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 in 1985 in Nairobi; in all events large NGO forums were held (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 the issues, and because these themes did not challenge the Cold War ideologies of the time.¹³

These events made it possible for the first time for the encounter of large numbers of NGOs and the development of direct relationships to decision makers on global issues—either UN officials or national government representatives. These novelties, according to several accounts, laid the ground for the transnational activities of civil society networks, facilitated the emergence of a global civil society and led to its growing interaction with the UN on global issues.¹⁴

3.3 The UN World Summits of the 1990s

The large UN thematic conferences of the early 1990s, designed to chart the agenda for the twenty-first century on global issues were a major turning point for the emergence and participation of global civil society (see the list of UN world summits in appendix 1, from UNRISD 2003).

The 1992 Rio Conference on the Environment and Development and the parallel summit taking the form of an NGOs' 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,

¹³ On the more controversial political and economic issues, civil society had to organize its international activities independently of the operation of states, the UN and other international institutions. So the peace movement in 1981 started to organize the European Nuclear Disarmament Conventions (Kaldor 1999,2003). Public opinion tribunals were regularly held on peace, human, economic, and social rights since the one on War Crimes in Vietnam organized by Bertrand Russell in 1967 (Fondazione Internazionale Lelio Basso 1998). The first gathering of The Other Economic Summit (TOES) to coincide with a G7 meeting was organized in 1984 by the New Economics Foundations of London, in association with the Right Livelihood Awards, a sort of "alternative Nobel Prize", which has been awarded since 1980 (Ekins 1992). At first, small conferences and media events, with a strong alternative development and environmental focus, TOES have been regularly organized in cooperation with different international networks and civil society coalitions of the country hosting the G7 summit. In recent years, alternative meetings to G8 summits have become large-scale global civil society events, including protests and alternative conferences, organized by large coalitions of CSOs and global social movements.

¹⁴ An assessment of the 1974 World Food Conference in Rome argues that it has been "for many voluntary organisations, particularly in the North, a springboard into international advocacy work" and that "Rome drew the attention of a whole new set of NGO actors and propelled them onto the international stage. It was the same fledgling network that would bring about more substantial changes 18 years later in Rio" (Van Rooy 1997:94, 98). In the case of women, it has been argued that "prior to the mid-1980s the world's women had not yet developed a collective identity, a collective sense of injustice, or common forms of organising. 1985 was, in many ways, a watershed year. The third United Nations World Conference on Women which took place in Nairobi, Kenya, and consisted of both an intergovernmental conference and a forum of non-governmental organisations, brought together women from across the globe" (Moghadam 2004:1) leading to the emergence of transnational feminist networks and to the much larger mobilization in Beijing 10 years later.

developing joint strategies, and confronting states and international institutions (see also Conca 1995 and 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 also Gaer 1995 and Smith et al. 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 very large NGO forums integrated in the official programme, were points of no return for the visibility, relevance and mobilization of global civil society.

Several thousand NGOs participated in 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 neoliberal prescriptions to contain social expenditure and public action.

The Conference on Women addressed many aspects of women's conditions in the 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.¹⁵

A large participation by NGOs (8,000 people from 2,400 organizations) also marked the NGO forum parallel to the UN Conference on Human Settlements held in Istanbul in 1996. In the same year, in Rome the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) World Food Summit was held, with a major involvement of NGOs both in the official activities, in the NGO forum and in other parallel events. Again in Rome, in 1998, global civil society played a major role at the conference establishing the international Criminal Court (Glasius 2002).¹⁶

In many ways, the first half of the 1990s was the heyday of the model of globalization of rights and responsibilities. Freed from the constraints of Cold War, the international community appeared ready to address global issues through a partnership of governments, international institutions and civil society, under the auspices of the UN system. A reformulation of rights and responsibilities at the global scale appeared possible in the context of new arrangements for global governance (Commission on Global Governance 1995). Great expectations were generated, and later turned sour as few of the proposals for

¹⁵ 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 Chen (1995) and Petchesky (2000).

¹⁶ A major global civil society event without an official UN summit was the Hague Appeal for Peace Conference of 1999, held during North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervention in Kosovo, that gathered 10,000 participants from all over the world and involved several governments. A series of global civil society meetings held independently of UN summits, but with an explicit reference to the need for a more active and democratic UN are the Assemblies of the Peoples of the United Nations organized every other year since 1995 in Perugia, Italy, by a coalition of Italian and international civil society organizations. They have regularly brought together representatives of CSOs from more than 100 countries to discuss issues such as the reform of the UN, economic justice, and a stronger role for global civil society; every event included a 15-mile peace march to Assisi with participation ranging from 50,000 to 200,000 people. The theme of the 1999 Assembly was "Another world is possible" (Marcon and Pianta, 2001, Pianta 1998, 2001b; Lotti et al. 1999).

reform and policy innovations generated in these years found their way through the decisions of national governments and international institutions.

The early 1990s were a period of sudden growth of global civil society. Participation in UN summits by ever-growing numbers of CSOs, increasingly also from countries of the South, and the consolidation of global links in the forms of networks, campaigns and transnational activities established global civil society as an emerging reality with a role to play in UN activities. But the rising role of global CSOs was never confined within the horizon of UN Summits alone. The strength of networking and sharing of values, visions and experiences—key ingredients of a perspective of globalization from below—developed rapidly and led CSOs to venture into an increasing range of issues and challenges.¹⁷

Besides participating in UN world summits, the emerging global civil society started to organize parallel summits to challenge G7/G8 meetings, International Monetary Fund (IMF)–World Bank meetings, European Union summits, conferences of North American and Pacific organizations, World Economic Forum meetings in Davos and other interstate summits (Pianta 2001b; Pettifor 1998; Houtart and Polet 1999). Such initiatives started from the need to confront the decisions of global powers on themes—such as debt, international investment rules, trade, development—that increasingly concerned economic issues and the consequences of the dominant model of neoliberal globalization. Such challenges—often more confrontational than the relationships with UN summits—helped to broaden the vision and actions of CSOs involved in global issues, and to set in motion waves of global social movements.

This became evident to all in Seattle in December 1999, when a broad coalition of (mainly US) CSOs and trade unions, together with a variety of global networks, challenged the World Trade Organization (WTO) summit and the Millennium Round of trade liberalization talks. Seattle was the culmination of a long process, not a sudden outburst of anti-globalization 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. While the failure of the WTO conference was equally due to the divisions between the United States, Europe and countries of the South in the perception of social activists, public opinion and trade officials themselves, this was the first time global civil society had a major, direct impact on the conduct and outcome of an official summit.

3.4 After 2000: The self-organization of global civil society

In 2000, the example of Seattle led 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 neoliberal globalization.

The first major UN event that followed was a rather institutional one, the Millennium Forum of NGOs held in New York in May 2000 with 1,350 representatives of more than 1,000 NGOs that did not produce much in terms of social mobilization, but developed an important and comprehensive document (NGO Millennium Forum 2000). This helped broaden the vision of CSOs that had entered the

¹⁷ Further studies on the variety of directions taken by the activities of global civil society include Clark (2003), Fisher (1997), Keane (2003), Laxer and Halperin (2003), Naidoo and Tandon (1999), Scholte (1999), Smith and Pagnucco (1997), Fowler (2000) on development NGOs, Gallin (2000) on trade unions, Kaul (2001) on global public goods. Regional studies on CSOs include Bayat (2000) and Green (2002).

global arena moving from initiatives on individual issues and had previously been reluctant to engage into a comprehensive perspective on world challenges. Themes such as peace, disarmament, globalization, equity, democracy that had not been included in the previous UN summits, nor in the agenda of major global civil society events, were put at the centre of the final document.

In parallel, the UN Millennium Summit of World Governments adopted in 2000 the Millennium Declaration, from which the Millennium Development Goals have been developed, a policy agenda that in recent years has shown again converging efforts by UN institutions and CSOs (UNDP 2003). Among the several UN events taking place since 2000, including many follow-ups from previous conferences, it is important to point out in particular the following three events.

The World Conference on Racism and Xenophobia held in Durban, South Africa, in 2001 saw the participation of 8,000 people from 3,000 CSOs to the NGO forum, whose final documents were presented at the conference. The conference highlighted strong divisions—usually along North–South lines—both among governments and among CSOs on issues ranging from the implementation of equal rights to the reparations for the slave trade, to the Israeli–Palestinian question. In some ways, it showed that the well-tested process of UN summits involving civil society could fail to produce a consensus on highly divisive global issues.

The UN–World Bank conference on Finance for Development in Monterey, Mexico, in 2002 was a rare opportunity to address global economic issues, a theme on which the gulf between the operation of markets and government policies on one side, and civil society alternatives on the other had grown particularly wide. In spite of a long preparatory process and important civil society events organized outside the official conference, no opening was obtained for the demands of CSOs on issues ranging from debt, to development aid, to the proposal of a Tobin Tax on currency transactions. Monterey represented a unique encounter between neoliberal globalization, driven by global finance, and the attempts at reforms called by a global governance perspective, with the actors of globalization from below on the sidelines. The lack of change in the operation of financial markets showed the inability of the model of neoliberal globalization to accept a reform, even after the stock market crash of early 2001. A few months later, a major financial crisis hit Argentina, the showcase country of the policies of the Washington Consensus.

Ten years after the Rio conference, the World Summit on Sustainable Development was held in Johannesburg in August–September 2002 with 8,000 participants and a wide range of alternative events and protests. The assessment by the conference of the failure to reach most environmental goals set a decade before and the scaling down of several objectives represented a major disillusionment on the effectiveness of the UN world summit process.

In different ways, all three events showed the boundaries that a perspective of globalization of rights and responsibilities could not trespass. The world economy, the environment and race relations could not be effectively addressed. The dominance of neoliberal globalization and its pro-market policies could not be questioned. The door opened by involving civil society in debating global issues had been closed. Such an outcome was made starker—but not determined—by the arrival in 2001 of the new US administration of George W. Bush, with its unilateral pursuit of national interests.

As the perspective of globalization of rights and responsibilities faced a stalemate, the actors and activities of global civil society developed an autonomous agenda for change, independently from the sequence of world conferences. Since Seattle, international meetings of CSOs have multiplied in a

variety of forms. Protests and parallel summits have increasingly confronted the gatherings of international institutions. And global civil society meetings, convened by ever-growing coalitions of CSOs and social movements, have proliferated in all continents. These events have taken place on a monthly basis in every part of the world. They have been characterized by mass participation in street demonstrations, ranging from the tens to the hundreds of thousands, attracting very high media attention, as well as growing police repression. Thousands of CSOs have become active on global issues, built alliances and radicalized their views and actions. The time for globalization from below had come, and with it a powerful wave of global social movements.¹⁸

The main process that has provided space, visibility and an inclusive organization to such movements is the World Social Forum. In January–February 2001 the first World Social Forum was held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, followed every year by ever-larger events, and moved in January 2004 to Mumbai, India. Dozens of regional social forums have been held since then in all continents; the number of participants involved in all these initiatives may be on the order of one million people. Through intensive discussion and exchange of experiences, such events have helped to build common values and identities, a widely shared critique of neoliberal globalization, while advancing a different hegemonic project and policy alternatives. Global civil society no longer meets at events organized in parallel with official summits, in front of the locked doors of political and economic power. Global social movements have emerged as self-organized, autonomous actors on the global scene.

Against this backdrop of the parallel trajectories of UN world summits and of the emerging global civil society, the next section provides some empirical evidence on the CSOs active on global issues and involved in UN conferences.

4. Evidence of CSOs Participating in UN World Summits

4.1 Evidence on CSOs and UN world summits in the 1990s

The brief historical account on UN summits and global civil society discussed above can be integrated by the evidence emerging from surveys of CSOs active in global issues and involved in UN events. In spite of the difficulties of quantitative analyses of such activism, the profile, ideas and strategies of such CSOs emerge from a few empirical studies based on questionnaires put to either individuals or organizations.

Benchmark Environmental Consulting (1996; Krut 1997) carried out the first systematic empirical study on participation in UN world summits on 520 participants at the UN Social Development Conference in Copenhagen in 1995 and on representatives of NGOs at other international government conferences. The objectives for participation in these events were equally divided between making links with other NGOs and influencing governments, pointing out the combination of “internal” concerns for strengthening cross-border civil society activities and the “external” aim of changing state policies. Also, in assessing the impact of participation, the survey found that major results were the networking and discussion with other NGOs, and that the dominance of larger, Northern, English-language NGOs was widely felt as a problem (Benchmark Environmental Consulting 1996:17). Other important outcomes were a clearer definition of problem areas, followed at some distance by contacts

¹⁸ For a documentation of the rise of global civil society events and global movements see Pianta (2001b, 2002), Pianta and Silva (2003b), Amin and Houtart (2002), Santos (2003) and Sen et al. (2004).

with their own government and UN officials (Benchmark Environmental Consulting 1996:chapters 3–4).

In relation to decision makers, two models of action emerged from the Benchmark survey: (i) the lobbying model extended to the international arena; and (ii) 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 toward other forms of democratic governance” (Benchmark Environmental Consulting 1996:chapter 4).

A smaller survey was carried out in 1995 on 100 civil society representatives participating in the first Assembly of the Peoples’ UN in Perugia coming from the Americas, Africa, Asia plus Australia, and Europe, in similar proportions. The main areas of activism and concern of the respondents were human rights (almost 30 per cent) and 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 that 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; democratizing UN structures, including civil society 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, for a more democratic representation and the creation of a Civil Society Assembly at the UN, and for direct participation of NGOs in UN-sponsored projects (Lotti and Giandomenico 1996:170–176).

A survey of 155 transnational human rights organizations—two thirds of which were based in Western Europe or North America—was carried out in 1996 exploring their goals, strategies and activities. Two thirds of them had attended the 1993 UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna or the related NGO forum, and about half participated in the Beijing or Copenhagen UN summits. Contacts with UN bodies were moderate, and the priorities in their activities concerned public education, reporting of human rights violations and lobbying of governments (Smith et al. 1998).

More recently, a number of surveys on individual participants to global civil society events—such as the Genoa Social Forum, the Florence European Social Forum, etc.—have been carried out identifying the social and political profiles of activists and supporters (Andretta et al. 2002; Andretta and Mosca 2004). Such studies do not consider their involvement in UN world summits, or their views on the role of the UN in general.

4.2 A survey on global CSOs

This section provides evidence on a sample of CSOs participating in UN conferences, based on the recent GLOBI survey of 147 organizations involved in international events of global civil society. In addition to presenting some general results of the survey, drawn from the research report (Pianta and Silva 2003a), here an original analysis is carried out on the subset of organizations—about half—that

participated in at least one UN world summit, in the associated NGO forum or in a related parallel civil society event. The results shed light on the nature and type of civil society players at UN conferences, on their vision and attitudes, on their increasing involvement in UN events and on their policy priorities.¹⁹

As there is no clearly defined "universe" of global CSOs, the survey was directed at organizations and groups participating in global civil society events. While the sample cannot be "representative" in a statistical sense, its significance—once a substantial number of cases, as in this case, are present—depends on its ability to cover CSOs from all regions of the world, of diverse types and size, and active in all major fields.²⁰ The results of the survey shed light on the overall aims and activities of global CSOs, and make it possible to compare the responses of participants in UN summits to the answers of CSOs involved only in other types of global civil society events that were used as a control group. The underlying hypothesis is that CSOs participating in UN conferences tend to be larger, more structured organizations, active in fields closer to the themes of UN summits, maybe with a greater institutional orientation and interest in a close relationship with UN activities.

The profile of global CSOs

Figure 1 shows that 48 per cent of total CSO respondents participated in at least one UN conference and related events. 52 per cent had no such an involvement. The two subsets can therefore be easily compared. Their distribution by continent, in figure 2, shows that CSOs from Asia and Oceania accounted for 36 per cent, followed by Europe (26 per cent), Africa (16 per cent), Latin America (12 per cent) and North America (10 per cent); this represents a rather balanced coverage of CSOs from all continents.²¹ Comparing these results to the regional origin of CSOs non-participating in UN Summits, shown in the bottom part of figure 2, we find higher shares of CSOs from Europe—due to responses obtained also from smaller and younger organizations, and from Africa and Latin America—where the "barriers to entry" to UN events may have been higher at the time UN Summits took place. An important result is that in both distributions the majority of respondents come from countries of the South.

¹⁹ The GLOBI survey was a project of Lunaria, a Rome-based research CSO and of the Peace Roundtable/Tavola della Pace, a network of hundreds of Italian CSOs which since 1995 has organised global civil society events. The questionnaire has been circulated among international organizations participating in a number of global civil society events, including the Genoa Social Forum in July 2001 in Genoa, Italy; the 4th Assembly of the Peoples' UN in Perugia, Italy, in October 2001; and the Second World Social Forum held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in January 2002. Over that period the questionnaire, which was available only in English, was also sent by email to about one thousand email addresses of organizations on major NGO lists, including the NGOs represented at the ECOSOC of the UN, the members of Civicus, Social Watch and other international civil society networks. A file copy of the questionnaire was available in that time to Internet users on the Web sites of Lunaria and of the Peace Roundtable/Tavola della Pace. In appendix 2, the list of responding organizations is reported.

²⁰ A discussion of the statistical properties and bias of this sample is beyond the scope of this work. Respondents cover all size classes in terms of membership—about 10 per cent are not membership organizations. More than a quarter of respondents are CSOs with more than 1,000 members; the rest are evenly spread over very small units (1–20 members), small groups (21–100 members) and medium-sized organizations (101–1,000 members). Such a composition ensures that a diversity of experiences and perspectives is represented in the results. Data on regions, types of organizations and fields of activity are presented below.

²¹ Due to lack of resources, the questionnaire was produced only in English, and this may explain the limited involvement of Latin America CSOs.

Figure 3 describes the participants in UN conferences and related events by type of organization: 19 per cent of the respondents were international NGOs, 18 per cent were international networks,²² 44 per cent were national associations or NGOs, 13 per cent were national networks or campaigns; the rest included local groups and trade unions. Compared to the group of non-participants—not shown here—the only significant difference is that international networks are more likely to participate in UN events.

Figure 4 shows the size of the organizations in terms of membership, comparing participants and non-participants in UN world conferences and related events. About 35 per cent of participants were large associations with more than 1,000 members; another third had between 101 and 1000 members. For non-participants, the combined share of the largest CSOs is just 40 per cent. The opposite is found for smaller CSOs; among those with less than 100 members, two thirds did not participate in UN events, but were involved in other global civil society events. Participation in UN conferences has been dominated, in other words, by the largest CSOs, that were more attracted and more able to find the resources and access to UN events. Networks, moreover, are more likely than other types of organizations to have a large membership. The presence of a large share of smaller, but internationally active CSOs is a challenge for opening up UN conferences to their participation in the future.

Figure 5 shows the fields of activity of respondents. More than one third of the organizations participating in UN conferences were mainly active in development issues—against just one quarter of non-participants. The fields of human rights and peace had 15 and 12 per cent respectively of participating organizations, while the shares of non-participants are reversed; 8 per cent—in both subsets—were active in democracy, and smaller shares were active in economic issues, labour problems, the environment, youth, humanitarian assistance, gender issues, cultural problems and social work, in this order. As could be expected, the major differences between the two subsets emerge in the fields where UN summits have been particularly important—such as the case of development, over-represented among participating CSOs—and in the fields where no UN conference took place—peace, economic policies, humanitarian assistance, social work—where non-participants had higher shares. A major characteristic of these data is that civil society activism on environmental and gender issues is poorly represented. On the basis of the very large participation of CSOs in UN summits in Rio and Beijing, it would have been reasonable to expect a higher presence of such organizations. The interpretation of results would have to take this limitation into account.

Figure 6 looks at the ideas and visions that inspired activism on global issues. Organizations participating in UN conferences were classified according to a set of visions on globalization. Globalization from below represented 33 per cent of choices, humanized globalization 26 per cent, followed by 20 per cent of CSOs focusing on the national/local dimension and 15 per cent emphasized the need for a governance of globalization, and just 3 per cent declared themselves anti-globalization. The answers provided by non-participating CSOs in UN events differed only in the higher preferences for a humanized globalization (31 per cent) and in the much lower support for the governance of globalization (9 per cent). These data shed light on many aspects of the projects of globalizations discussed in section 2.3 above.

²² Networks—informal, sometimes temporary alliances of national and international groups pooling their resources, knowledge and coordinating actions—are very important; over two thirds of all organizations surveyed were linked to an international network, and those organizations that declared to be national or international networks, tend to be large coalitions, 40 per cent of them coordinating more than 26 groups, and 34 per cent with more than six.

First, this picture confirms how inappropriate the long abused term “anti-globalization” is in identifying the CSOs active on global issues, even among CSOs that were not involved in UN events. Second, a perspective of global governance—associated with a model of globalization of rights and responsibilities—had a limited appeal (15 per cent) for CSOs involved in UN summits (mainly European NGOs) and a very modest one for those active in non-UN global events. Third, the largest share of CSOs, regardless of participation status, appeared to share a perspective of change typical of global social movements—globalization from below (favoured by European and North American groups). A more moderate orientation may characterize the supporters of humanized globalization (favoured by CSOs of Asia and Africa). Fourth, the focus on national/local dimension was more relevant among CSOs of the South, where resistance to globalization is stronger.²³

Figure 7 addresses the attitude of respondents versus UN world summits. More than half of participants in UN events developed an active dialogue with the UN organizers, while 15 per cent were integrated in the UN world summit, 28 per cent voiced their criticism of policies and 5 per cent engaged in strong conflict. Surprisingly enough, the shares do not change much when non-participants are considered (in the lower part of the figure); here the share of CSOs integrated in the official summit—of non-UN international institutions—falls to 9 per cent and the supporters of a strong conflict have a minor increase to 8 per cent. Within organizations active in global issues we may therefore identify—considering the evidence of the figures—a large group of dialogue seekers, a substantial group of radical critics, a modest group supporting co-optation in the mechanisms of global power, which become sizeable among CSOs present at UN events, and a small group with rejectionist positions.²⁴

Summing up this evidence, with all due caution in avoiding unwarranted generalizations, we may argue that the survey mainly portrays global CSOs that take international institutions seriously and are interested in interacting with them on global issues. Different visions and strategies exist among them, associated with different projects of globalization, and to specific types of the transformational dynamics proposed in section 2 above—integration, grassroots–alternative and global social movements. The actual world of global civil society, however, is much more complex. Groups mainly active in social movements and less involved with UN processes may have not been captured by such a survey, and are likely to have voiced a more critical and conflict-based attitude. CSOs active in fields such as environmental and gender issues, not present enough in this evidence, have long been involved in interactions with international institutions and may fit into the picture broadly emerging here. Additional insights can be offered now by an analysis of the evolution over time of civil society participation in global events.

Participation over time

Participation in UN conferences and international civil society events, from pre-1988 to 2001, is mapped in figure 8. Among all respondents to the survey, participation in international events shows a general increase. In 2000–2001, 50 per cent of respondents took part in a global civil society meeting with no corresponding “official summit”, while before 1988 less than 10 per cent did so. After 2001,

²³ Asked about their attitude and approach on economic globalization, out of the total responding CSOs, one third declared they carried out alternative activities outside the processes of economic globalization, and equal shares—about 25 per cent—demanded radical change or reformative policies, while only 1 per cent declared a rejectionist attitude. On the other hand, less than 10 per cent were supportive of economic globalization (Pianta and Silva 2003a).

²⁴ Combining the results of the two previous questions for all of the CSOs surveyed, we find that while the supporters of a humanized globalization mostly—close to two thirds—aimed at a dialogue with global powers, a relevant share of globalizers from below—close to half of them, emphasized the criticism of official policies (Pianta and Silva 2003a).

when the World Social Forum started, participation in such events is likely to have increased drastically. A steady rise can be found in participation in UN conferences that reached 37 per cent in 2000–2001 against 12 per cent in the early 1990s.

Other types of international civil society events that attracted participation include regional conferences, American, Asian or European Union government meetings, which have involved in the last two years almost one third of the organizations surveyed. Less relevant in absolute terms, but equally growing, is participation in IMF, World Bank, WTO or G8 parallel summits, which account for almost one-third of all cases between 2000 and 2001.

If we look in figure 9 at the participation in UN conferences by vision on globalization from 1988 to 2001, we find that the earliest and largest group of participant CSOs shared a vision of globalization from below, closely followed by those that supported a humanized globalization. A view of governance of globalization found support among a rather small number of CSOs that have started their participation in UN events after 1992.

Similarly, figure 10 shows the evolution of the attitudes to UN world summits. The position of active dialogue boomed in from 1992 to 1995, characterized by the largest UN conferences. They appear to have largely shaped the dominant attitude of CSOs with respect to international official events. However, this position was not shared by most of the new CSOs starting to participate in later years. In 1996–1999 there was a strong increase in the position of criticism of policies that continued to increase in 2000–2001 when the attitudes of strong conflict also became visible. The CSOs looking for integration in the summits remained a low and stable share across the whole period.²⁵

The policy alternatives

Alongside the profile, vision and attitude of CSOs involved in global summits, it is important to also consider the policy proposals that characterize global civil society activism. The views of CSOs—both participating and non-participating in UN conferences—on the priority of a set of different policy alternatives are outlined in figure 11, showing the rank of proposals considered to be “very relevant”. The policy priorities that emerged on the basis of the most frequent answers may be grouped as follows, in order of relevance.

Make global civil society visible and established. This is the aim of the 60 per cent of respondents that considered “very relevant” a permanent Global Civil Society Assembly, modelled on the World Social Forum—in fact, they have now achieved that—and by the 55 per cent who wanted a permanent UN forum for CSOs.

Make development possible. Of respondents, 64 per cent demanded the cancellation of Third World debt—one of the longest and most successful campaigns of global movements; more than half wanted greater flows of development aid to the South, a greater role of NGOs and support to fair trade and ethical finance.

Assure peace and justice. Of respondents, 59 per cent asked for nuclear disarmament—in a period when little attention was paid to peace issues—and 54 per cent wanted to accelerate the introduction of

²⁵ A question asking the whole sample of CSOs to evaluate the impact of actions on global issues found that CSOs at the two extremes of the spectrum of attitudes—that is, open conflict with the official summit or being integrated in it—had the perception of a greater impact. One third of the organizations in strong conflict judged themselves as having had a strong or very strong impact on international media. Organizations usually integrated into the official summit considered that they have influenced national policies, as well as official summits. CSOs that pursued a dialogue with international institutions considered that they have had a strong or very strong impact on civil society organizations (Pianta and Silva 2003a).

the International Criminal Court, but only 43 per cent went as far as demanding a UN standing peacekeeping force.

Balance global capital and labour. Half of respondents asked to introduce constraints on multinational corporations and to enforce labour rights, expressing the need for a more appropriate balance in the global relations between capital and labour. Only 30 per cent, however, demanded labour contracts and wages negotiated at the international level.

Democratize international institutions. A variety of proposals aiming at reforming and democratizing international institutions were considered: 47 per cent of respondents wanted the abolition of veto power in the UN Security Council; 42 per cent wanted civil society representatives at the IMF, World Bank and WTO, but only 28 per cent considered it very relevant to bring these institutions inside the UN system, while 31 per cent favoured a Parliamentary Assembly of the UN. The resulting picture is that such reforms are not generally seen as a priority in terms of feasibility, desirability or effectiveness.

Control global finance. The economic issues that drew the least attention concerned the demands for controlling international financial flows—49 per cent of “very relevant” responses—and for introducing the Tobin Tax on currency transactions—39 per cent. The remoteness of finance from the experience of social organizations and the specificity of these proposals may explain the low priority they obtained in spite of widespread campaigns such as the one for the Tobin Tax organized in several countries by Attac.

Protect the environment. Of respondents, 45 per cent demanded strict respect of the Kyoto protocol and the creation of a World Environmental Organization. These rather low figures are somewhat surprising and again may be explained by the small number of environmental CSOs responding to the survey, as well as by the specificity of the proposals advanced on environmental problems.

Grant rights to immigrants. Of respondents, 43 per cent demanded that immigrants be granted citizenship rights, and less than 30 per cent considered it “very relevant” to open the door to immigration flows. While migrations may not be a relevant issue in all countries, these low figures point to the complex and contradictory nature of the immigration problem, especially in the countries of the North, and at the weak mobilization of immigrants and their organizations in global civil society activities.²⁶

The findings of the GLOBI survey of global CSOs provide some empirical evidence that integrates the analysis of previous sections on the contexts, dynamics and history of the interactions between UN world summits and global civil society. The relevance of such a relationship is clearly supported by the

²⁶ The survey also asked questions on the way global civil society events could be made more democratic and effective. More than 40 per cent of respondents recommended increasing the number of organizations and countries involved in global events, a better balance between Northern and Southern organizations, and developing 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 20–27 per cent of preferences, deals with the practicalities of global meetings and the search for effectiveness, including the need for more inclusive discussion on 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 per cent of respondents, while only 14 per cent argued 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 in global issues and to stimulate their participation and involvement. The strong support for developing a common agenda and common proposals shows that there is more interest in democratizing the content of civil society actions through consensus-building than by procedures—such as voting—which may become important in formally established institutions.

available evidence, and is consistent with the findings of previous analyses of CSOs active on global issues (Benchmark Environmental Consulting 1996 and Smith et al. 1998). As the period under investigation included more recent years, marked by a disillusionment on the outcomes of UN conferences and by the emergence of major global social movements challenging the global order, the survey was able to identify the links between global CSOs and global movements. They are rooted in an increasingly influential perspective of globalization from below, but a wide variety of attitudes and activities are present within global civil society. A further source of evidence on developments within global civil society comes from the growth of the international events organized by CSOs, discussed in the next section.

4.3 The growth of global civil society events

The evidence from the GLOBI survey of CSOs can be integrated with the documentation of the growth of international civil society events and parallel summits.²⁷ Figure 12 shows their rapid and uneven increase from 1988 to the first three months of 2003. Six per cent of all parallel summits examined took place from 1988 to 1991. A major increase is found in the period characterized by the largest UN world summits—from 1992 to 1995—that accounts for 13 per cent of the total. A modest rise took place in the next three years, between 1996 and 1999, but it is only after Seattle (late 1999) that an exponential growth of parallel summits took off. The sole year 2000 accounts for 16 per cent of the total, 2001 for 19 per cent, and 2002–2003 (first three months) for close to one third of all the events registered since 1988. These events always included an international conference and, in most cases, a street demonstration, in addition to several fringe and media-oriented initiatives.²⁸

Figure 13 shows the types of events. One third of global civil society events held between 1988 and 2003 were set up independently from conferences of interstate institutions, one fifth were NGO forums at UN conferences; 14 per cent were parallel summits to IMF/WB/WTO meetings; a slightly lower share is found for regional meetings, such as EU summits, and G7/G8 summits.

What started out as parallel summits, shadowing official meetings of governments, have turned into independent global civil society meetings. In 2002–2003, 58 per cent of all events had no corresponding “official summit”—the share was 10 per cent between 1988 and 2001.

The increase in the number of events go hand in hand with their growing size: 38 per cent of all global civil society events has involved more than 10,000 people, but since January 2002, 55 per cent of events have had more than 10,000 participants; of these, half had demonstrations with more than 50,000 people, and an additional 25 per cent have had between 1,000 and 10,000 people. From 1988 to 2001, events with more than 10,000 people accounted for nearly 30 per cent of all cases, and 40 per cent had less than 1,000 people. As they moved from “parallel summits”, organized in coincidence with meetings of governments or international organizations, to independent global civil society gatherings,

²⁷ They are defined as events organized by civil society groups drawing an international participation that may take place in parallel to official government summits or independently from them. They have been documented through an ad hoc survey, from press reports and Web site monitoring. Data are drawn from Pianta (2001b), Pianta and Silva (2003b).

²⁸ The geographical distribution of all parallel summits shows that 45 per cent of cases were from Europe, while North America accounted for 19 per cent and the South for 38 per cent. In recent years the picture has changed, and in 2002–2003 the majority of global civil society meetings have taken place in the South, with 38 per cent of events in Latin America, close to a third in Europe, 12 per cent in North America, 9 per cent in Asia and in Oceania. This is clearly a result of the spread of world social forums in the South, and is consistent with the importance of South-based CSOs responding to the GLOBI survey.

such events are becoming larger and more coordinated across the globe, and with a larger political agenda and increasingly integrating economic and development issues with demands for democracy and peace (Pianta and Silva 2003b).

Both the evidence from the survey on CSOs and that from the documentation of global civil society events could be used in further analyses in order to identify more carefully the interaction with UN world summits and the impact they have had on the emergence of global civil society and on specific developments at the country level.

4.4 Additional sources of evidence

Empirical evidence on the organizations, events and individuals active in global civil society, across countries and over time, can be drawn from a few additional sources, including the archives of the Union of International Associations, the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, and data from national official statistical sources that increasingly document—although with problems of international comparability—voluntary activities, nonprofit organizations and international exchanges. The World Values Survey, Globescan and other sources conduct ad hoc surveys on these themes. Many of these data are collected and organized in an effective way by the Global Civil Society Yearbook published since 2001 (for the last edition see Anheier et al. 2005). In the previous sections the more specific surveys on global CSOs have already been discussed.

This variety of non-systematic—and sometimes not very focused—general evidence may contribute to chart the evolution of civil society activities on global issues, and the possible links to UN world summits. More specific sources of evidence include case studies, focus groups and interviews to key actors; the main available studies are reviewed in the next section.

The key dimensions proposed in section 2 for investigating the actors and actions of global civil society involved in UN summits—their aims, organizations, strategies, etc.—can provide a useful way for organizing the scattered quantitative evidence available. Such a methodology may account for the different ways in which UN world summits have directly or indirectly affected civil society activism and for differences in the way local civil society has taken up global issues.

5. Assessing the Impact of UN World Summits on Civil Society

The combination of the conceptual analysis of section 2 with the historical overview of section 3 and the empirical evidence of section 4 can guide the investigation of the impact of UN world summits on national and global civil societies. A possible way to organize such different elements is to develop a typology of the impacts of UN world summits on civil society, where the various dimensions of the analysis can be drawn together.

Building on both the conceptual analysis and the several sources of empirical evidence, a tentative classification of the types of impact UN summits have had on civil society can now be proposed in the form of a sequence of interactions with an evolutionary perspective. They concern first of all the effect on individual CSOs involved in global issues, making it possible to chart the development of their involvement. On the other hand, such types of impact may be more or less characteristic of individual UN summits. Still, one particular summit may have more than one type of impact on civil society in a particular country—differing, for instance, between groups that are newcomers to international events,

and experienced international CSOs. It may also have different effects in different countries, depending on the evolution of civil society and its maturity of involvement in global issues.

The opening door

The simpler, more immediate effect of a UN summit on civil society, and on individual CSOs, in a country may be the opening of the door to the rest of world. Bringing the world—state officials, business, experts and civil society activists—to a particular country and creating an opportunity for organized interactions has the effect of connecting previously detached worlds. Facing common global issues, CSOs in all countries have generally chosen to enter the door, and start, or expand, their cross-border activities. The early UN meetings with a limited civil society participation in the 1970s and 1980s have played this role. But even a major UN event could have this effect on a newcomer CSO. Indicators of such an impact may be the growing participation of CSOs to UN events and the rise of international activities of national CSOs.

The deepening effort

Global issues are complex, require specialized knowledge and are not easy to translate into accessible terms for a broad public. The access to expertise at UN summits, and the media attention around them, has often led to a next step: the building up of competences by CSOs to address global issues. Learning about and accessing reliable sources of independent, sympathetic expertise has been a major reason newcomer CSOs had for attending UN events. Deepening their understanding was a necessary condition for developing their ability to address global issues and their legitimacy in front of both their base and policy makers. An increased participation by CSOs in PrepComs, specialized conferences, or technical sessions in large UN summits, and the production of more detailed and competent material for public information by CSOs may indicate the extent to which CSOs have made this deepening effort.

The launching pad

Once a threshold of competences and internal resources is reached, UN summits operated as a launching pad into the sphere of global civil society. This is the time when the focus of action moves from the internal development of the organization's strengths and competences to the search for an external impact. Now CSOs join international networks and create new ones; global social movements develop, organizing their own international events; and a dialogue and confrontation with decision makers on global issues develops, with the production of detailed policy documents by civil society. UN summits become a highly important event, the theatre of such interactions. The large UN conferences of Rio, Copenhagen and Beijing have had this effect on the majority of participant CSOs that were not newcomers there.

The broadening vision

When large global networks and interactions with institutions are established, and when the resistance to change becomes clear, the limits of a deep but narrow single-issue approach by CSOs tend to emerge. One way to understand the new challenges, and to try to overcome resistance, is by broadening the terms of the debate, reformulating the issue. Often new connections are made in this perspective, larger networks and alliances are built, a broader agenda for change is agreed upon, a different language is born and new types of events are organized. The coalitions formed, the activities organized, the documents produced by civil society are likely to reflect such developments. Generally, a greater political awareness develops, moving from the need to overcome political resistance to change. The specific issue of concern that motivated the global activism of an individual CSO are often reframed, and put into a larger context of global power relations. Dialogue and confrontation at UN summits may

become more difficult and less effective in this context, and CSOs may direct more energies toward other international initiatives, such as those associated with the rise of global social movements. For some CSOs the large UN conferences of Rio, Copenhagen and Beijing were already a moment of broadening their vision; for others a similar effect has come from the Millennium Forum, or from the Monterrey Finance for Development conference.

The closed door

When the interaction between global civil society and the UN—or other economic and political power centres—concerns more controversial, sensitive and politically charged issues, almost invariably the door that opened in such a promising way, slams and remains locked. Politics stop listening to the voice of civil society, policies do not change, global institutions refuse to recognize that it may have a power to vote—or veto—decisions on global issues. Disillusionment emerges, leading to either radicalization of criticism, or to a search for alternative practices, or to a return to a local or national level where the perception of effectiveness may be greater. While civil society participation in UN events may drop, other activities may characterize the international efforts of CSOs. The development of global social movements may appear as an attractive way forward. Or, when the values and autonomy of CSOs wane, this is the time when compromises are made in order to enter a different door, that of co-optation and integration into the power system. Most of the follow-up conferences to UN world summits after five or 10 years have shown how closed the door had become on the commitments governments and supranational institutions had made in the past. It is at this stage that a mature civil society could make its choices on the direction of its efforts for change, on its objectives and the strategies needed in their pursuit.

Such a schematic narrative may be oversimplified and inadequate to account for the complexity of the impact UN summits have had on civil society. But it may offer a model of evolution of interactions against which the experience of individual CSOs, and of particular countries, can be tested.

Clearly, different CSOs, different fields of activity, different time periods and different countries are likely to tell different stories, and the contrasting streams within civil society concerning the above challenges need to be clearly identified. Strong national differences in such an evolution exist; they depend on the different (historical) role that CSOs have in different regions, political systems and cultural contexts, and in countries at varying levels of economic development. The impact on national CSOs active on specific issues also depends on the relevance that issues raised by UN world summits have at the national level, leading to different degrees of public opinion attention, social mobilizations, political emphasis and resources available.

When we examine the case studies available on the interaction between particular UN summits and civil society, we find that many of the traits suggested by this typology are present. Various works have investigated the form and content of specific UN summits, have monitored the procedures of civil society involvement, the evolution of its agendas and problems, and the emergence of dialogue and conflicts. They have analysed the actions of CSOs and identified their contribution to the summits, including the provision of information, advocacy, policy proposals and search for practical solutions. The main studies include broad overviews of the growing role of civil society,²⁹ case studies on environmental conferences (Conca 1995; Raustiala 1997; Seyfang 2003); studies on women's issues (Chen 1995; Friedman 2003; Petchesky 2000; Bunch 2001); investigations on human rights (Gaer

²⁹ See Charnovitz (1997), Krut (1997), Otto (1996), Pianta (2001b), Uvin (1995), Donini (1995) and Foster and Anand (2002).

1995; Smith et al. 1998); and on all three of the above topics (Clark et al. 1998). Other studies have addressed the UN conference on population and development (McIntosh and Finkle 1995; Girard 1999) and the UN World Food Conference (Van Rooy 1997).

A different set of studies has addressed the impact of UN–civil society interaction on the broad system of global governance. They include overviews (Gordenker and Weiss 1995) and contributions to the debate on the reform of the UN system and the role of civil society in it.³⁰ They have well documented the emergence—through the "opening door"—of civil society involvement, the trajectory that has allowed more voices of CSOs to be heard, their current and potential contribution to global governance, and the practical proposals on civil society participation in UN events and decisions that may prevent that door from closing.³¹

Finally, evidence on civil society interactions with UN events and activities can be found in studies on the dynamics of global civil society and global movements. In investigating their evolution from national to global actions, they have frequently identified UN world summits as key moments for the growth of civil society, and for its dialogue and confrontation with international institutions. The recent development of global movements is also related, in several studies, to the experience of interactions with UN summits and to the effectiveness of strategies for change.³²

6. Conclusion

The involvement of civil society in UN world summits has taken a very large number of CSOs and individuals to a long journey into the depths of world problems. What are the lessons learned for implementing change?

The analysis of concepts, history and evidence presented in this paper leads to identify four main strategies for change that combine the several dimensions of the actors and actions of civil society discussed in section 2 and documented in sections 3 and 4. While they are logically distinct, the practice of CSOs has usually combined more than one model at the time in the interest of effectiveness. Still, individual CSOs and social movements can usually be associated to one dominant pattern within the following four models.

(i) The protest model rejects present institutions and their policies, and demands radical change in both. Protest has been highly visible and effective in raising attention to global issues, but much less so in changing policies. An example is the Seattle 1999 protest against the WTO trade liberalization agenda.

(ii) The pressure model has accepted present institutions and has lobbied for achieving minor changes in arrangements and policies. Lobbying has flourished around UN summits, but with modest results—at least compared to the scale of the problems faced. An example is the effort to obtain a particular

³⁰ Commission on global governance (1995), Childers and Urquart (1994), Lotti and Giandomenico (1996), Taylor (1999), Cardoso (2003) and NGLS (2003).

³¹ A related debate is that on transnational/cosmopolitan democracy (Archibugi, Held and Koehler 1998; Anderson 2002; Bruhl 2001; Alger 2002; Held and Koenig-Archibugi 2003); other relevant studies include those on multilateral economic institutions (O'Brien et al. 2000), or on the perspective of international relations (Cooley and Ron 2002; Risse 2000).

³² Overviews on the evolution of global civil society and its organizations are in Lipschutz (1992), Shaw (1994), Cox (1999), Grzybowski (2000) and Sen et al. (2004). Analyses of a wide range of mobilizations are in Cohen and Rai (2000), Della Porta et al. (1999), Keck and Sikkink (1998) and Edwards and Gaventa (2001).

ruling of the WTO conflict resolution body concerning trade in goods whose production affects particular animal species.

(iii) The proposal model has questioned present institutions, demanded change in existing structures and developed policy alternatives. The challenge of UN summits has stimulated global civil society to build shared alternatives to current policies on global issues; a major effort continues in this direction, developing proposals to change the course of national governments and international institutions, but the success has again been modest. An example is the demand that WTO rules be amended in order to make AIDS drugs accessible to patients in poor countries.

(iv) The model of alternative practices has emphasized the ability of civil society to self-organize its cross-border activities outside the mainstream of the state and market systems. Increasing efforts are now directed to alternative practices within civil society, at the local level, but with strong global links. An example is the diffusion of "fair trade" between producers of the South and consumers of the North.³³

The first three models entail a "vertical" relation between civil society and politics; they are defined by CSOs' attitude toward global political power. The change that is looked for is generalized, as it concerns all those sharing a given problem; the extent of change clearly differs in the three models. Change is expected to result from an evolution in the exercise of political power, from different policies and/or from different people deciding on them.

The fourth model is a "horizontal" perspective that tries to achieve localized change for specific individuals and communities. The instruments for change are the direct activities and experiences of civil society; there is less "division of labour" between civil society and politics, as this strategy aims at the empowerment of civil society. Once successful, localized change could be replicated elsewhere if the new local conditions make it possible.

Many different factors influence the choice of strategies adopted by civil society on global issues—values, visions, ideologies, resources, effectiveness. In order to achieve change, effectiveness is important; civil society activity is based on the search for effective solutions to common problems. But on global issues effectiveness has been elusive, due to distance from power centres and from the mechanisms of decision-making, and to the complexity of the challenges. What is then the favourite locus of civil society action for achieving change in global issues?

Changing global institutions

³³ On the basis of the attitude toward economic globalization, in previous works I have distinguished CSOs and social movements between:

- (i) reformists with the aim to "civilize" globalization;
- (ii) radical critics with a different project for global issues;
- (iii) alternatives who self-organize activities outside the mainstream of the state and market systems;
- (iv) resisters of neoliberal globalization.

Outside this range of perspectives typical of global movements, two other perspectives of global civil society can be found:

- (i) supporters of the current order, stressing the benefits brought by globalization;
- (ii) rejectionist of global processes, favouring a return to a national dimension (Pianta 2001a,b; 2003).

Viewed from the side of civil society, its involvement in UN summits represented an effort at the global level to change the institutions in charge of global issues and the policies they carry out. The assessment made in the previous section of the ups and downs of the UN–civil society relationship suggests that a continuing involvement of global civil society would depend on the ability of global institutions, mainly the UN system, to recognize its role, to respond to its activities and demands, and to integrate it in its decision-making. Much hope within civil society has been directed to the possibility that international institutions will be capable to reform their own rules, procedures and policies; meeting some requests of civil society and integrating and co-opting some organizations. A rethinking of the problems of global governance could give global civil society a greater role in redesigning the institutional tools for addressing global issues. This opportunity may emerge in fields where an institutional architecture at the global level is still emerging—as in the cases of the environment or the International Criminal Court—and where intergovernmental organizations and CSOs have long cooperated: UN agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and United Nations Children’s Foundation (UNICEF) rely on NGOs to carry out their mission. After a sequence of hopes and disillusionment, the future of such a course remains uncertain.

National politics

A recovery of national political processes remains a major way to affect global outcomes. Civil society could reactivate the mechanisms of democracy in national politics; its proposals could influence the positions of national governments, and in doing so, change the balance of power in international bodies. This is a ground where national politics could meet civil society anew. Especially in some countries of the South, the opportunities to influence national politics and the policies of progressive governments increasingly attract civil society energies. In countries where the political system is more remote from society, as well as in non-democratic countries, there is less hope in such a strategy.

Globally connected local actions

The model of alternative practices described above focuses on the local level, with the pursuit of more independent solutions to global problems. Local, specific questions can be addressed with the resources and energies of global connections, developing activities outside the reach—or on the fringe—of the market and the state system.

The differences in the nature and locus of the strategies pursued by civil society and social movements in addressing global issues reflect the variety of attitudes of CSOs and the complexity of the challenges. They are not necessarily a factor of weakness. Successful change in global issues requires a combination of capacity of resistance, radical visions, alternative practices, policy proposals and instruments that introduce specific reforms. Again, in order to be sustained and successful, pressure for change has to develop at all levels, local, national and global.

A weakness may emerge if sections of global movements confine themselves to a politics of resistance alone, seen as the way for affirming an antagonistic identity, independent of the objectives of change. Or, if part of civil society is co-opted in a project of global governance, legitimating particular international institutions. Or, if the practice of alternative activities leads to isolate national and local experiences from global civil society.

As different strategies emerge in civil society, the need for mediation, consensus-building and compromises among differences increases. As agendas for change become broader and more comprehensive, the difficulty of integrating diverse values, identities and strategies increases. In fact,

this has traditionally been the task of politics—mediating and organizing a consensus among citizens' interests. The question of how far civil society can substitute for political processes without losing its nature and effectiveness could be asked.

The future of civil society and social movements on global issues remains tied to their roots in society, their autonomy in asserting their values and identities, carrying out activities, proposing alternatives and achieving change. However, much will also depend on the ability of global—and national—politics to pay attention to civil society, and on the responses of the UN system, international organizations and governments to the calls for reforms and democratization.

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Appendix 1: Civil society participation in selected UN summits.

Name, year and location of the summit	Previous conferences	Preparatory meetings	Civil society representation	Follow-up activities
UN Conference on Environment and Development Rio de Janeiro, Brazil 3–14 June 1992	UN Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm, 1972	4 PrepComs: Nairobi, August 1990; Geneva, April 1990; Geneva, September 1991; New York, April 1992	2,400 representatives of NGOs participated in the formal event; 17,000 people attended the parallel NGO forum	Earth Summit II (5–year review), New York, 1997; Earth Summit 2002 or World Summit on Sustainable Development (10–year review) Johannesburg, South Africa, 2002
World Conference on Human Rights Vienna, Austria 14–25 June 1993	International Conference on Human Rights, Tehran, 1968	4 PrepComs: Geneva, September 1991; Geneva, December 1991; Geneva, 1992; Geneva, April 1993. 3 Regional Meetings: Tunis, November 1992; San José, January 1993; Bangkok, April 1993	Representatives of more than 800 NGOs attended the conference	Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-fourth session, March–April 1998; Economic and Social Council at its substantive session in 1998; General Assembly at its fifty-third session, September–December 1998
International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Cairo, Egypt 5–13 September 1994	Rome, 1954 Belgrade, 1965 Bucharest, 1974 Mexico City, 1984	3 PrepComs: New York, March 1991; New York, May 1993; New York, April 1994	1,500 NGOs from 113 countries	ICPD + 5, The Netherlands, February 1999
The World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) Copenhagen, Denmark 6–12 March 1995	None	3 PrepComs: New York, January 1994; New York, August 1994; New York, January 1995	2,315 representatives from 811 NGOs attended the conference	24th special session of the United Nations General Assembly, Geneva, 26 June–1 July 2000
The Fourth World Conference on Women Beijing, China 4–15 September 1995	The World Conference of the International Women's Year, Mexico City, 1975; World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women, Copenhagen, 1980; World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Nairobi, 1985	5 Regional PrepComs: Jakarta, January 1995; Dakar, December 1994; Mar del Plata, January 1995; Vienna, January 1995; Amman, February 1995	5,000 representatives from 2,100 NGOs attended the summit; 30,000 attended the independent NGO forum	Beijing +5, New York, 2000

Second UN Conference on Human Settlement Istanbul, Turkey 3–14 June 1996	UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat), Vancouver, 1976	3 PrepComs: Geneva, April 1994; Nairobi, April 1995; New York, February 1996	8,000 representatives from 2,400 organizations attended the NGO forum parallel to the conference	Istanbul +5, New York, June 2001
International Conference on Racism and Xenophobia Durban, South Africa 2001	None	2 PrepComs: Geneva, May 2000; Geneva, June 2001 Regional seminars: Geneva Warsaw Bangkok Addis Abeba Santiago de Chile	8,000 representatives from nearly 3,000 NGOs from all continents attended the NGO forum parallel to the conference 25 thematic commissions were created and the results of these were submitted to the Drafting Committee for the NGO Declaration and Plan of Action The work of the NGO forum resulted in the adoption of a Declaration and Plan of Action: both were presented at the plenary of the World Conference on 4 September 2001	None
World Summit on Sustainable Development Johannesburg, South Africa 2002	None	4 Global PrepComs: New York, April 2001; New York, February 2002; New York, March 2002; Bali, June 2002 Regional PrepComs: Nairobi, October 2001; Phnom Penh , Cambodia, November 2001; Geneva, September 2001; Cairo, October 2001; Rio de Janeiro, October 2001	Over 8,000 civil society participants attended the summit. In addition, there were a large number of parallel events that were organized by major group organizations, including conferences of civil society groups (including NGOs, women, indigenous people, youth, farmers, workers), business leaders, scientists, local authorities and chief justices	None

Source: <http://www.earthsummit2002.org/roadmap/conf.htm>, UNRISD (2003a), UN (2000).

Appendix 2

List of Organizations Responding to the GLOBI Survey

Africa: Adra, Angola; Larhdari, Algeria; Hana Pharmacy Organisation, Angola; c(Ja), Benin; Centres Jeunes Kamenge, Burundi; Development Association, Burundi; Mbonweh Women's Development Association Cameroon, Cameroon; Nkong Hill Top Common Initiative Group, Cameroon; Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services, Egypt; Coalition Against Privatisation of Water, Ghana; General Agric Workers Union, Ghana; Africa Peace Point, Kenya; Kenyan Coalition Against Landmines, Kenya; Social Development Network, Kenya; Development Indian Ocean Network (Dion), Mauritius; National Youth Council of Namibia, Namibia; Afanso: Action For A New Social Order, Nigeria; Centre for Constitutionalism and Demilitarisation, Nigeria; Civil Resource Development and Documentation Centre (Cirdoc), Nigeria; Grassroots Empowerment Network, Nigeria; Ibuka, Rwanda; Association pour le Development Economique Social Environnemental, Senegal; Enda Prospectives Dialogues Politiques, Senegal; Groupe d'actions pour le Developpment, Senegal; Caritas Makeni, Sierra Leone; Yeouilla Community, South Africa; Kilimanjaro Association for Community Development, Tanzania; Tanzania Media and Youth Development Association (Tameyoda), Tanzania; Women's Legal Aid Centre, Tanzania; Volontaire pour la Globalisation (Vglob), Togo; Mukono Multi-purpose Youth Organisation, Uganda; Tweyanze Development Agency, Uganda; Association Pope John 23nd, Zambia.

Asia and Oceania: Youth and Children Development Program, Afghanistan; Striving Towards Environmental Protection (Step), Bangladesh; Unnayan Shamannay, Bangladesh; Wiam Center for Conflict Resolution, Bethlehem; Amara, Cambodia; Centre for Youth and Social Development (Cysd), India; South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude, India; Bat Shalon, Israel; Iflac Pave Peace: International Forum for the Culture of Peace, Israel; National Council for Voluntarism in Israel, Israel; Israeli Communist Forum, Israel; Hunger Free World, Japan; Peace Depot., Japan; Farah Social Foundation, Lebanon; Institute for Human Rights, Lebanon; National Rehabilitation and Development Centre (Nrdc), Lebanon; Consumers Association of Penang, Malaysia; Front Siwalina of the Moluccas, Moluccas; World Environment and Peace (Wep), Mongolia; Rural Reconstruction Nepal, Nepal; Samuhik abhiyan, Nepal; Shewd, Nepal; Indus Resource Centre, Pakistan; Mehran Resource Development Foundation, Pakistan; Alram Omarbter Organisation, Palestine; Palestine National Council, Palestine; Palestinian Hidrology Group, Palestine; Palestinian Initiative for Global Dialogue and Democracy, Palestine; Action for Economic Reforms, Philippines; Centres for Alternative Development Initiatives, Philippines; Children and Youth Foundation, Philippines; Institute for Popular Democracy, Philippines; Focus on the Global South, Thailand.

Europe: Zartok-89, Armenia; Lighthouse, Azerbaijan; Youth Centre for Civil Society 'Veras', Belarus; European Network on Debt and Development – Eurodad, Belgium; Pax Christi, Belgium; Vrede, Belgium; Ngo Krajina, Bosnia; Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation, Bulgaria; Centre for Development of Non-profit Organisations, Croatia; Proutist Universal, Denmark; Attac France, France; Civilités, France; Mouvement de la Paix, France; Attac Germany, Germany; Foundation for the Rights of Future Generation, Germany; Initiative Netzwerk Dreigliederung - Initiative Network Threefolding, Germany; Attac Ireland, Ireland; Social Aid of Hellas, Greece; Associazione per la Pace, Italy; Campagna per la Riforma della Banca Mondiale, Italy; Cisl, Italy; Cuamm, Italy; Emmaus International, Italy; Fiom, Italy; Italian Consortium of Solidarity, Italy; Italian Social Forum, Italy; Lega Internazionale per i Diritti dei Popoli, Italy; Manitese, Italy; Campagne tegen Wapenhandel, Netherlands; European Center for Development Policy Management – Ecopm, Netherlands; Transnational Institute, Netherlands; International Socialists, Norway; Women and Human Rights, Norway; Foundation Children for Children - Children for Peace, Romania; Inima Pentru Inima (Foundation), Romania; Gorbacev Foundation, Russia; Siberian Civic Initiatives Support Center, Russia; Union of North Caucasian Women (Zainap Gachaeva), Russia; Observatorio de la Globalizacion, Spain; Civis, Sweden; Attac, Sweden; Action on Disability and Development, UK; Campeace (Cambridge Campaign for Peace), UK; Northern Friends Peace Board, UK; Peace Child International, UK; Undercurrents, UK; Council on Human Rights, Yugoslavia; Women in Black (Belgrade), Yugoslavia; International Federation of Tamils, Switzerland; International Metalworkers Federation, Switzerland; Swiss Coalition of Development Organisations, Switzerland.

Latin America: Attac Argentina, Argentina; Women's Issues Network of Belize (Win-Belize), Belize; Central da Pueblo Indigena de la Paz, Bolivia; Centro Andino Amazonico de Desarrollo Indigena "Caadi", Bolivia; Instituto de Filosofia de Libertad, Brazil; Prefeitura de Porto Alegre, Brazil; Solidarity in Literacy Program, Brazil; Escola Irma Giuliana Galli, Brasil; Instituto Brasileiro para o Desenvolvimento Sustentável - Instituto 21, Brasil; Comuidada de Paz de San Jose de Apartado, Colombia; Movimento de Ninos por la Paz, Colombia; Asociacion para el Desarrollo Economico y social de Puntarenas, Costa Rica; Networks and Development Foundation (Funredes), Dominican Rep; Asamblea Unidad Cantonal, Ecuador; Fundacion Yanapay, Ecuador; Fundasal, El Salvador; Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala Conaviga, Guatemala; Alternativas Pacificas, Mexico; Red por los Derechos de la Infancia en Mexico, Mexico; Ultimate Purpose, Suriname; Social Watch, Uruguay.

North America: Forum International de Montreal, Canada; Community Voices Heard, USA; Counterpart International, USA; Development GAP, USA; Institute for Policies Studies, USA; Liberation Central, USA; Peaceways/Young General Assembly, USA; Structural Adjustment Participatory Review, USA; World Federalist Movement, USA.

Figures

Fig. 1. CSO participation in UN conferences and related events

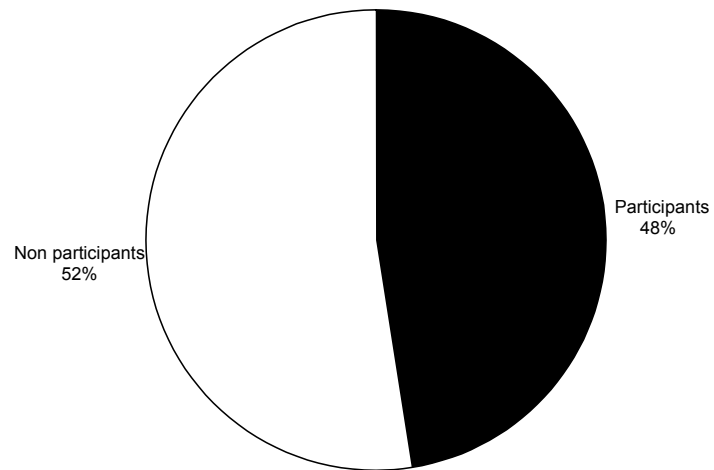


Fig. 2. CSO participation in UN conferences and related events by continent

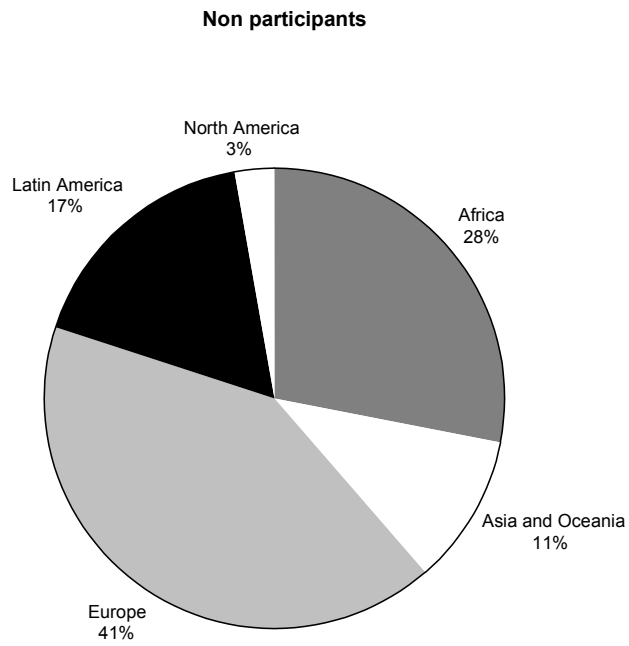
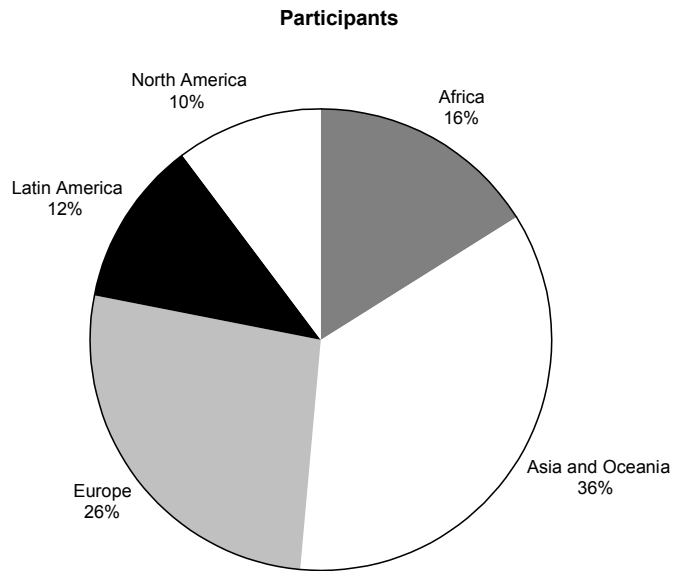


Fig. 3. CSO participation in UN conferences and related events by type of organization

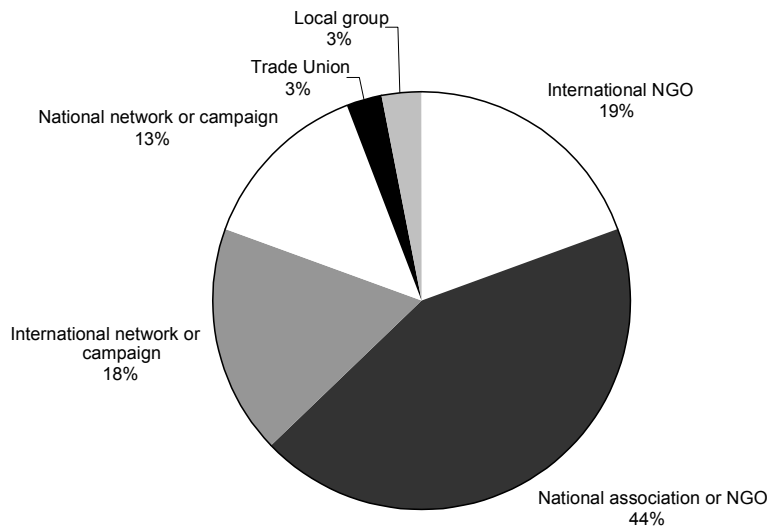


Fig. 4. CSO participation in UN conferences and related events by membership size

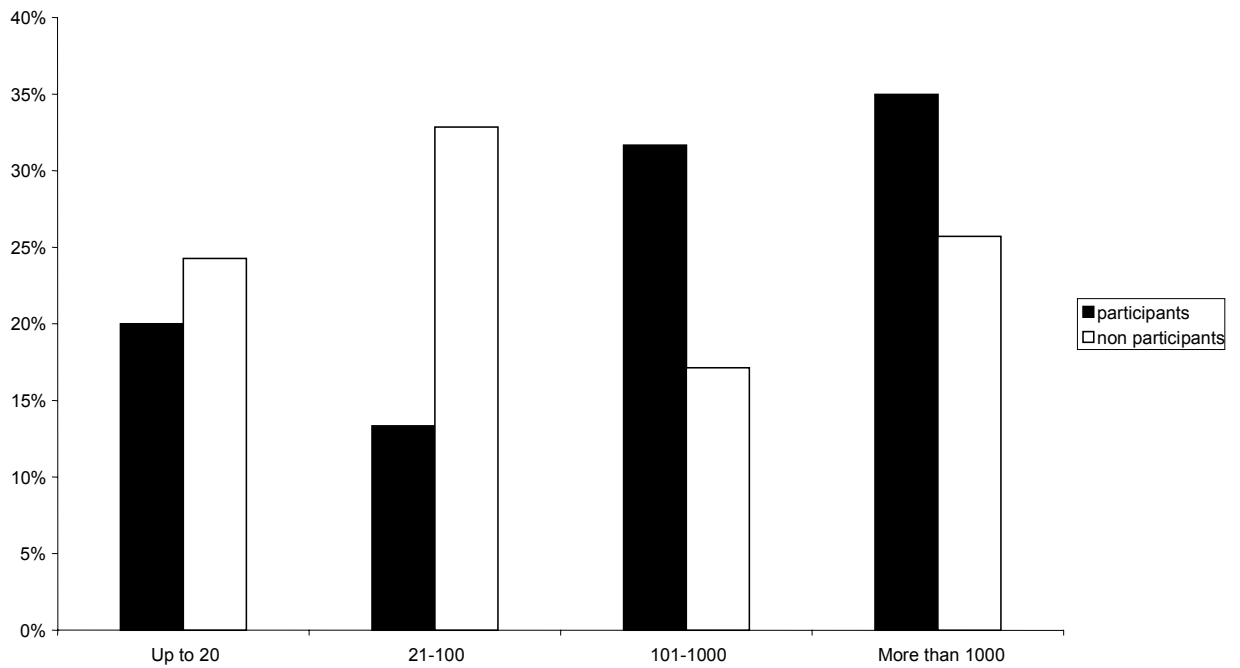


Fig. 5. Organisations by fields of activity, participants and non participants

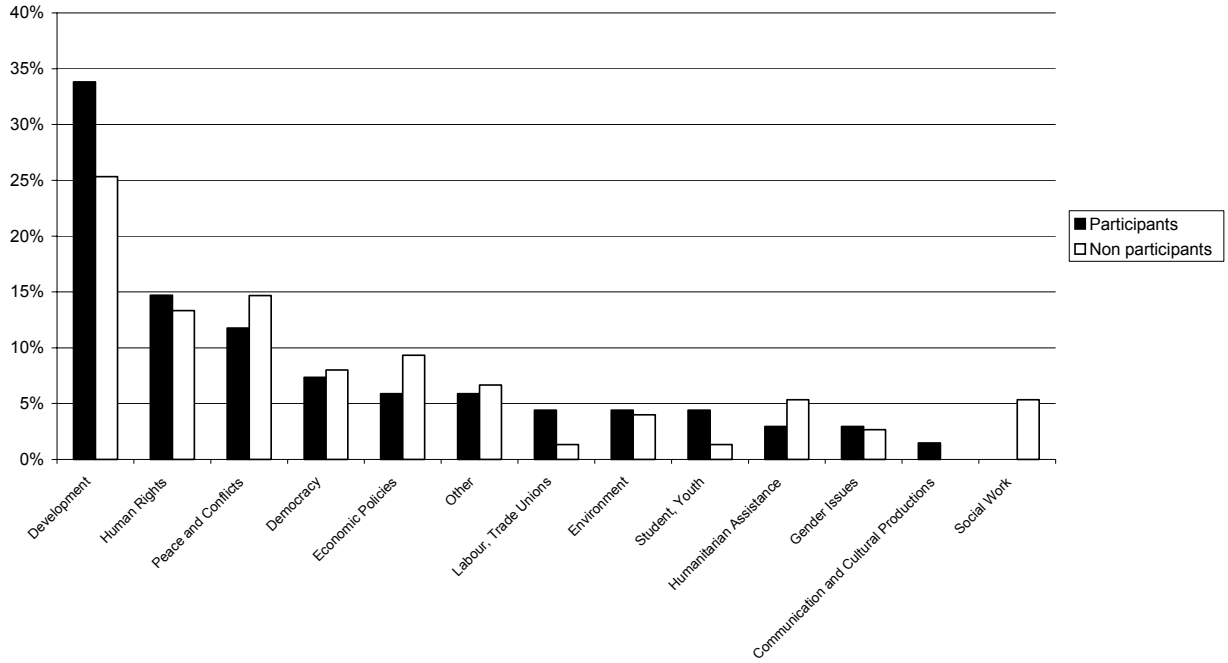


Fig. 6. CSO participation in UN conferences and related events by vision of globalization

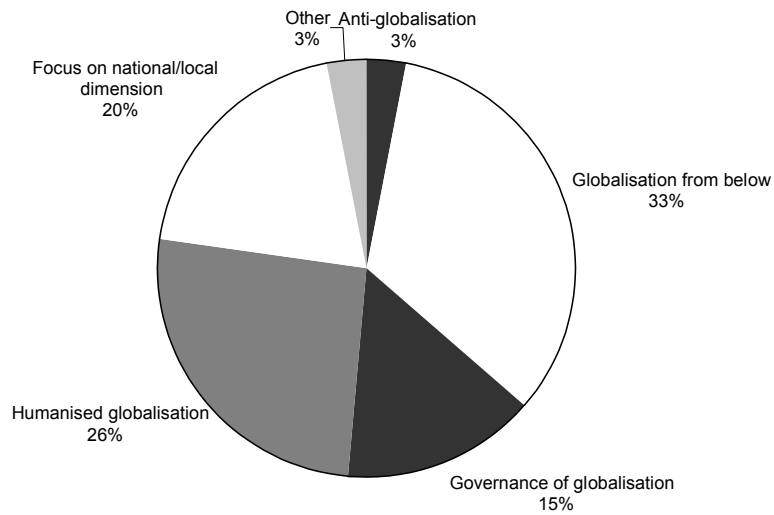


Fig. 7. CSO attitude toward UN official summits

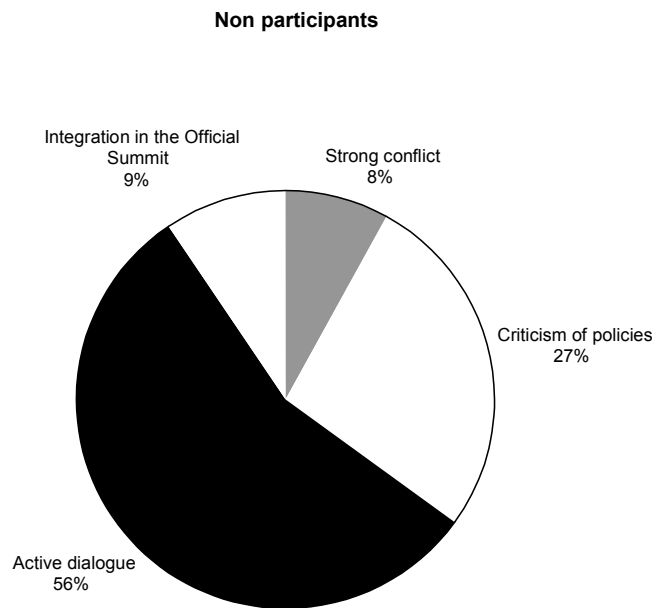
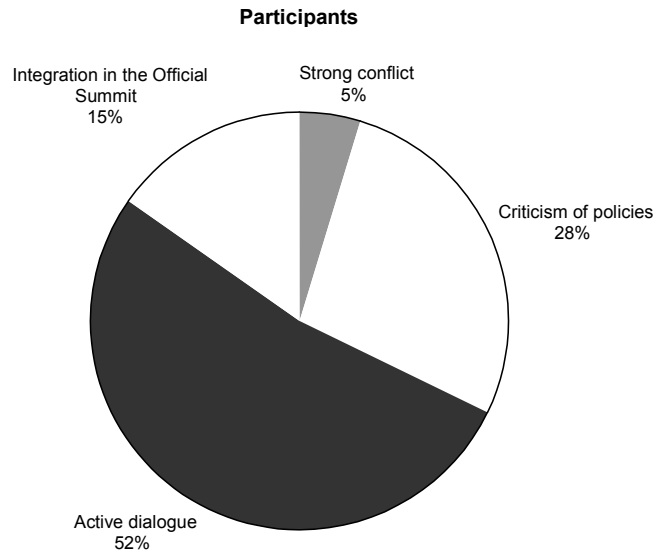


Fig. 8. CSO participation in UN conferences and related events, pre-1988 to 2001

Percentage of events, multiple responses possible

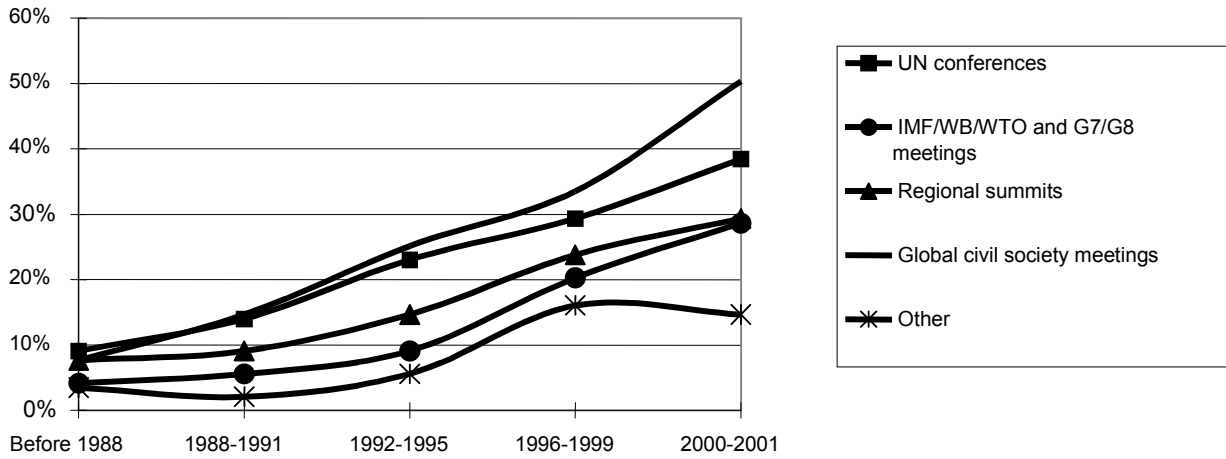


Figure 9. CSO participation in UN conferences and related events by vision on globalisation, pre-1988 to 2001

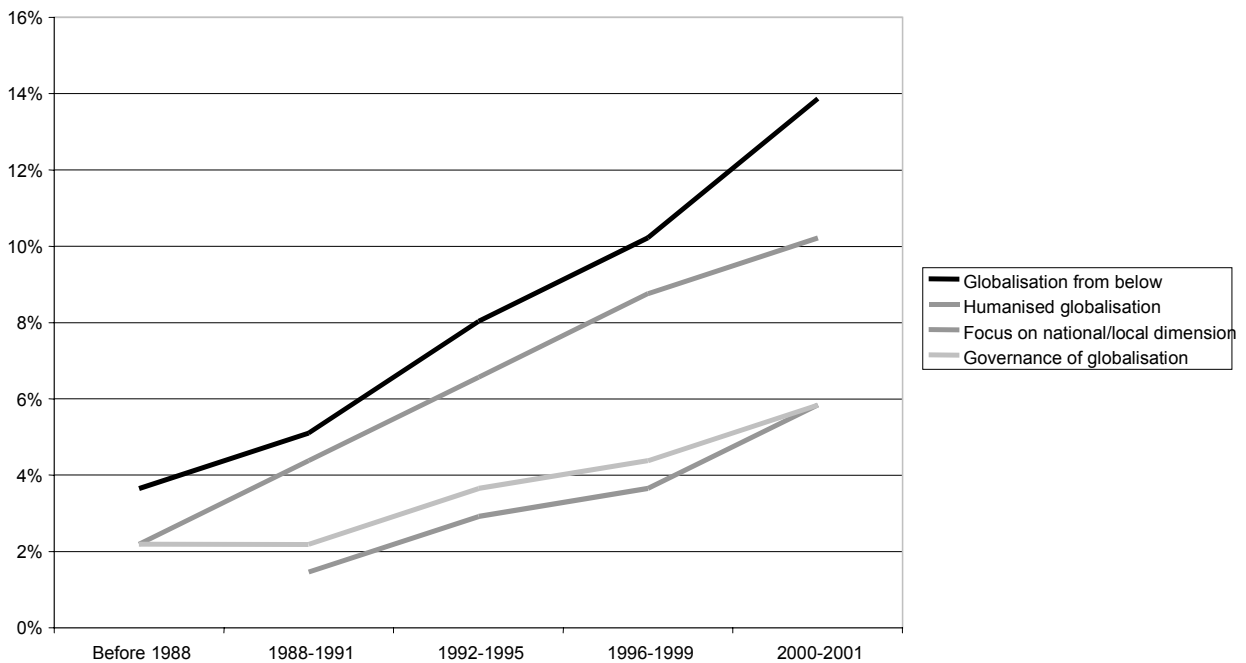


Fig. 10. Evolution of CSO attitude to UN summits, pre-1988 to 2001

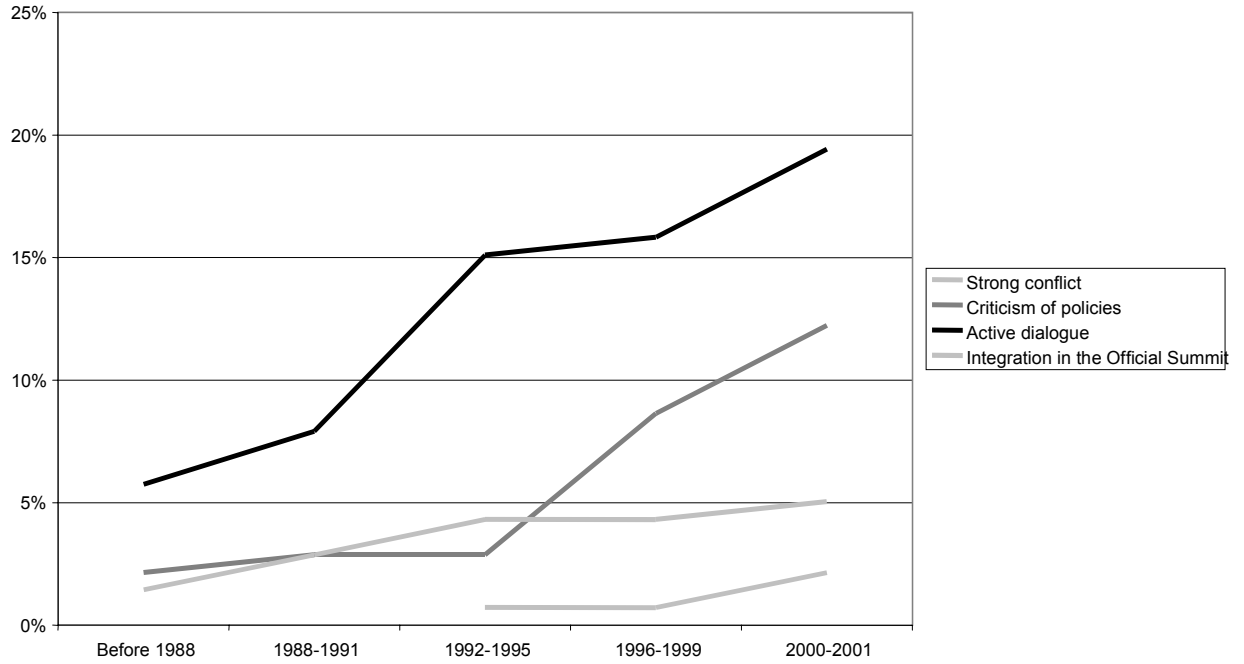


Fig. 11. Alternative policy proposals of global CSOs (% of "very relevant" answers)

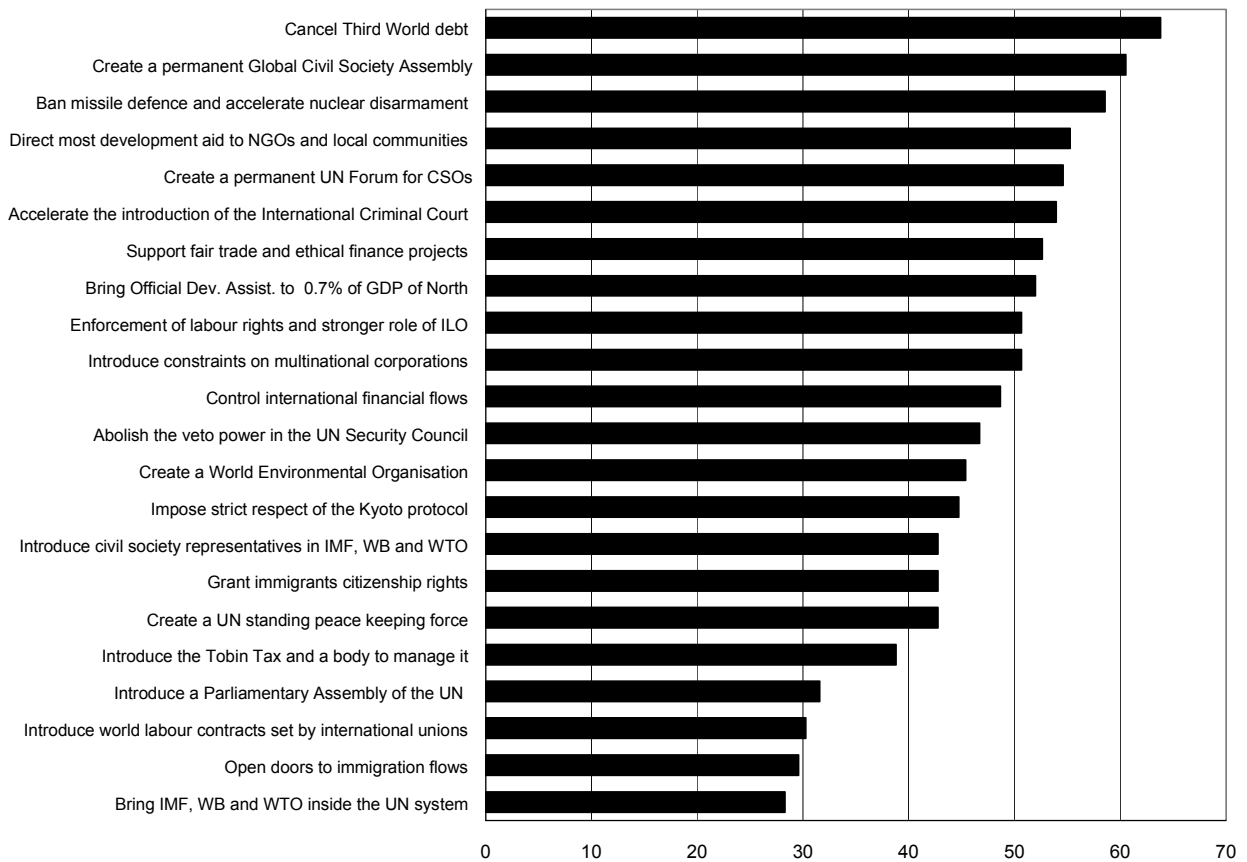


Fig. 12. Growth of parallel summits

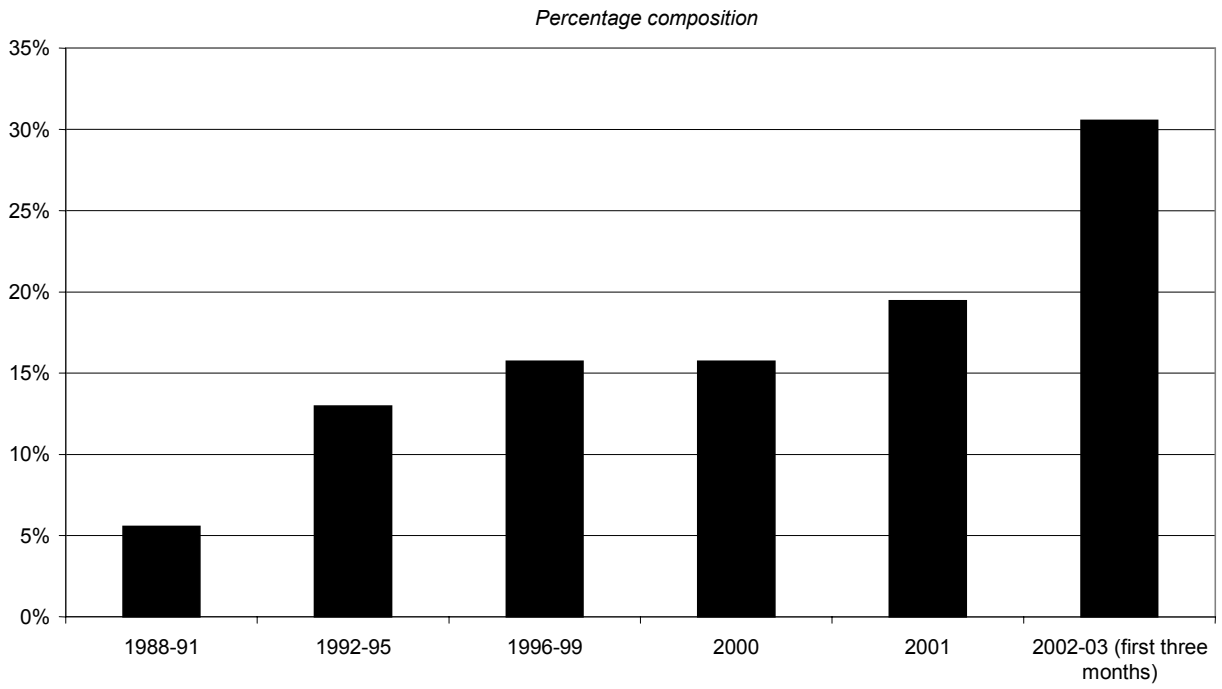


Fig. 13. Types of parallel summits

