Finn Tschudi, 13.3.2007

Reflections on World Parliament Experiment, WPE, at *isfit*[1] 2007

In order to share these reflections with some one not familiar with the idea of World Parliament, I start with some introductory remarks on the procedure, and then turn to discussion of my *isfit* experience. The topic chosen to illustrate the procedure was the situation in Sudan. It was, however, made explicit that the main aim was not actually influence current events, but to get maximal attention to the idea of WP. Put otherwise there was an ultimate focus on structure rather than content. While I recognize and like this idea, I do not believe in any strict separation between structure and content. An intrinsically fascinating and provoking conflict area is likely to provide more interest for the general idea than a less exciting one.

In the last part I propose a larger perspective for the conflict Israel/ Palestine. This is an area which really caught my attention after a conference in Bar Ilan, Tel Aviv a year ago, and I have done some spadework here.

When I put forth some critical reflections on the WPE this is because I found the experience of potentially tremendous importance, and thus hope to be one of many voices working further on the idea, concentrating on how the next *isfit* may be an improvement on the present one.

The major point is that I see an undue Westernized structure in the *isfit* WPE.
I want to celebrate the social form *communal sharing, CS,* I see this as a more global form than the Western archetypical form *equality matching, EM*[2], and I hope the latter will be less dominating. While CS emphasizes *consensus* (or "rough consensus"), EM epitomizes '*one person, one vote*'. Carried to its extreme this may amount to a 'fetish of democracy'.[3] In CS *dialogue* and concomitant *creativity* are central while EM is more likely to veer towards *debate*. Finally CS implies a more relaxed attitude towards time, perhaps closer to an Eastern circular conception of time. EM, however, reflects a Western linear conception of time. and in extreme form may warrant the label *time fetishism.* This is a structure characterized by strict schedules and formalized rules for turn-taking. The survey in the conclusion puts the above in tabular form.

Description of the *isfit* WPE

isfit had a bold experiment at the recent student festival in Trondheim (www.isfit.org), where Monbiot's (2003) "The age of Consent" provided a major source of inspiration There were roughly 400 invited students from about 100 countries. In the WPE this was taken to simulate the more than 600 billion people on earth. Monbiot conceives of about 600 constituencies, each then comprising about 10 millions and each constituency then elects one representative to the WP, World Parliament. In Trondheim the students were divided in 18 groups (20-25 in each group), and each group then selected its representative to the WP and agreed on the policy its elected representative whould carry forth to the WP. In addition there were observers who

did not participate in the discussions. As one of the observers I chose to stay with just one group in all group discussions.

There were thus discussions on two levels, mostly in the separate constituencies, and then all the groups listened to the WP discussions among the 18 representatives.

I learned – from Raj[4] - that there actually exist about 200 proposals for how the WP should work. In the *isfit* experiment the goal was to show how one of these proposals might work. In this version the WP should just have advisory and not decisive powers. The WP should consist of countries who voluntary had chosen to associate. There should be no compulsion to join! As the number of countries joining increased there would hopefully be "snowballing" effects, such that staying outside would prove increasingly difficult (embarrassing). Imagine for instance US in its isolationistic vein being sceptical and thus keeping well outside WP, but one day finding itself mainly in the company of countries as North Korea and Myanmar (Burma)! Hopefully a productive shaming experience!

When *isfit* focused on the situation in Sudan there was a major emphasis on the terrible conditions for most people living in the area around Darfur. Two contrasting resolutions were put forth, a 'radical' one favouring international forces even if the government did not agree, a more 'conservative' one which would accept international forces only if the government agreed. The group discussions revolved around merits and shortcomings of these proposals and how the wording might be changed (improved), also on various amendments to the radical proposal.

Before the group discussions there were two general introductions, one giving a survey on the situation in Sudan, the other a pep talk on WP. The last one was put forth with great fervour and enthusiasm. Since the WP idea at this time is not generally well known I found this very appropriate.

Social form: communal sharing, CS vs. equality matching, EM.

CS is the typical form between friends and in intimate relation. Informality is a key mark of such relations. Help and support is given without concern for reciprocity, i.e. 'getting something back'. For EM help will typically be provided with the more or less explicit assumption that 'you owe me something'. When a group feel close together and are about to make a decision the group will typically strive for consensus, and reach an agreement which is satisfying to all of them. Voting is mainly resorted to if the decision is not of major importance (which cinema to go to), or if there is a deep split in opinions.

On the other hand a key feature of most conceptions of democracy is that voting is the ideal way of solving major problems when opinions differ. Usually it is taken for granted that CS is not relevant since most discussions of "democracy" deal with problems which concern a large number of people. Direct communication between all who might be concerned is not taken to be feasible. Put otherwise CS is conceived to be restricted to a *private* part of life whereas democracy primarily is relevant for the *public* sphere. In order to secure a "just" outcome strict precautions are advised, and

the ideal is equality, 'one person – one vote': In other words a preference for formal EM.

A major point in these reflections is to question such a sharp division   I do of course recognize that voting and formality can not be dispensed with. I will, however, make some concrete suggestions as to how to give more space (at least a bit) to CS, and argue for the possible advantages of these suggestions.

Before turning to concrete suggestions I want to sketch some guiding considerations in this venture. First of all there is the (present utopian?) dream of 'global ubuntu'. Ubuntu is the African philosophy of deep interconnection between all of us[5], and this implies a much higher emphasis on communal sharing than in the West. From this background many African states chose a one party system when they gained independence (Why this sadly often went wrong is another question.)

It may also be noted that what for Marx marked the 'end of politics' – the utopian 'communist' stage appears similar to 'global ubuntu'[6]. Furthermore there are experiences from non-Western world, e.g. Brazil where large community meetings have taken place to decide on problems of joint concern. For me, however, the primary background for optimism about CS has been experiences in conferencing, ('restorative justice' way of approaching deep conflicts). Perhaps after a stage of experiencing 'collective vulnerability' the participants may have a remarkable way of gettting at constructive solutions about what should be done in the wake of serious harm. Such deliberations are a strong testimony that previously antagonistic groups can get to a stage which bears the marks of CS,[7]

When opinions differ I will question whether the Western EM, 'one person, one vote' is superior to consensus which characterizes CS. It will also be noted that some forms of Western democracy are closer to CS than others.

Communication: Dialogue (CS) vs. debate (EM)

It is to the credit of the organizers of *isfit* that the distinction between 'dialogue' - going through the word, emphatic listening, and suspension of own beliefs - and 'debate' - smashing apart - has been explored[8] Yet from my experience as observer more could be achieved in approaching a 'pure' dialogue'.

One point of pervasive importance is the reaction to points of view which one disagrees with, *contrary* views. Usually reactions to such views are either to muster counterarguments ('debate') or perhaps even more common, simply to ignore contrary views. From the point of view of *dialogue,* however, a more fruitful approach is to see a contrary argument as an opportunity for learning, and understanding another person better. When A meets disagreement from B she may tell him: 'Tell me more about that', 'I have always thought otherwise, eager to hear how you have come to your opinion', etc. The non-verbal behaviour should here get across a message of wanting to come closer to the other (whereas debate will usually signal distancing oneself).

This may give rise to new ideas for A, and lead her to recognize a dilemma which may inspire a creative synthesis. This synthesis may both nod to her original position

and at the same time incorporate B's view. A general positive mood is important for creativity to take place, while negative emotions are more likely to lead to 'tunnel vision' and debate[9]. An underlying background is that the dialogue may be a learning experience. It is basically not a question of aggregating preformed preferences[10] but rather to see the meetings as creative group problem solving.

Avoid demonizing one of the parties

A factor which may impede dialogue is to present one party in a thoroughly unfavorable way. In this respect the background information on Sudan left much to be desired. I could not but read the information in the background leaflet as demonizing the government. As far as I know no attempt had been made to ask the government in Sudan wha they really felt about a possible intervention. This could have been done by actually talking to government representatives in Sudan or at least representatives in the embassy in Norway. What if they completelyh refused to make any comment on the issue? It would then be pointed out to the Sudanese that their refusal would be communicated to the *isfit* participants: "We tried to get the point of view of the government but they refused to say anything".   This would be in line with a shaming mechanism as hinted at above on choosing not to join WP (when most others have joined.). If the Sudanese did make some statements, *isfit* representatives could of course not promise that such governmental information would just be passed on. Hopefully, however, such information could contribute to a maximally palatable formulation of the major proposal.

Decisions when consensus proves elusive

It would be rather naive to think that all differences of opinion can be solved by creative group dialogues. In this case there are several possibilities:

i) Conclude, or start with the conviction that at present it is not possible to reach consensus. One may then present a report which attempts to formulate the differences in terms which are minimally offensive to all parties. This would be in the hope that the report may be a useful background for further work. The conflict between Israel and Palestine is a prominent example.[11].

ii) Settle for 'rough consensus' . In this case the parties will not consider possible disagreements to be of major importance[12]

iii) Have a vote. If there is close to a fifty – fifty split or the result is falling short of what has been decided is a 'qualified' majority (e.g. 2/3) one might turn to i) above.

Suppose now we have the all too frequent situation where the majority is seen as carrying the day. A true dialogue would imply that contrary views have been respected and seriously deliberated.

The greatest possible tribute to the process would be if the those in the minority turn out to be the most eager to advocate for the value of WPE! This would be a testimony to their judgement that it had been a fair procedure, and that the dissenters - in spite of

pronounced disagreement - felt that they had been treated with deep respect. The *isfit* WPE harbours the possibility of such a litmus test:

What do our two African friends (among the 18 in the simulated WP) who voted against the majority today think and feel about the WPE experiment? (The majority preferred intervention regardless of what the Sudanese government would say.)

Relation to time: Can 'time fetishism' be avoided?

Raj suggested that the Western EM scheduling is related to a *linear* conception of time whereas the contrasting CS may be more related to an Eastern *circular* view of time.

In the group where I was an observer the facilitator showed admirable flexibility. His suggestion of allowing two replies to one contribution met with opposition and he rapidly changed to three replies. In retrospect, however, this is just scratching at the surface of a more deepseated problem. There is still the dominant conception of turntaking, and this may be contrary to the CS ideals of encouraging creativity, maximal openmindedness to contrary views, and fostering group cohesiveness. Inspiration may be drawn from conferencing (ref. in note 6). Here the ideal is that the facilitator intervenes as little as possible. One of my mentors, John McDonald, pointed out that if the conference is to be seen as a learning experience, interventions might be seen as an obstacle to group learning. His ideal was that if interventions really were necessary the participants themselves should be responsible for keeping the deliberations on track.[13]

Keeping this in mind the session should encourage a maximally unconstrained exchange of views. If, however, the group fails to avoid undue domination by one or more participants, the facilitator should intervene, but be careful to do this as unobtrusive as possible and without humiliating anyone. Likewise intervention may be necessary if there are timid souls wanting to put forth a view but fail to get attention.

This ideal requires that the group gets a careful introduction. The ideals of non-domination, everyone getting a voice, and all ideas getting careful deliberation should be emphasized[14]. These ideals have been shown to work in conferences with sharp polarizations, and there is no reason why this should not work in the benign atmosphere at an *isfit* conference.

In the *isfit* context, however, there is usually a large program and thus it is simply not possible to do without time limits. Could one, however, engage in a magical exercise, and create the illusion that "we have all the time in the world" as Louis Armstrong was singing for us.   Perhaps it would be possible to create something like a flow state where time so to speak ceases to exist[15]. The facilitator could use a gentle tap to break the spell and remind the participants that now you have only got e.g. 5 minutes left.

Another way of partially getting around the problem of limited time is to have group sessions before a "natural break" as e.g. lunch time or it might be the last session of

the day. The group would then have the choice of whether to continue the group conversation or cut down "free time". Yet another possibility is to start one day and continue for instance the next day. All participants would be encouraged to more informally carry on discussions during the evening, and a glass or two of wine or beer might not detract form a good conversation. On the other hand those who wished just to be acquainted with others, relax or whatever would be under no compulsion to continue to be in an (amended) WP arena.

If WPE takes place over two days external journalists can be observers

Scholte's comment 3 points out that the WPE was 'disconnected from any environmental influences'. If, however, the organizers chose to let the WPE take place over two days it would be fascinating to collaborate with one (or more) college programs for journalists. Each of them would bring their own laptop. After the first day they might work through some of the night hours and next morning produce a flashing capsule description of the preceeding day. Hopefully they would beforehand get some schooling in peace journalism. This implies a focus on creative problem solving and other peace related features, and not what is just 'attention catching', and without any relevance for peace acitivites.

It would be too much to expect that the participants should read through several articles produced during the night before starting the next day. A better idea is to think in terms of a poster session. The organizers make ample wall space available, and each journalist can put up a page or two. (The journalists may of course work in groups if they prefer this option.)

After *isfit* they will presumably have the opportunity to discuss their experiences and for instance ask: What impressed the participants and why? Furthermore they would write complete articles, and try to get them published, both in Norway and other countries. This will be a good learning experience for budding journalists, and also an important way to spread information about the *isfit* WPE and at the same time provide important feedback for the organizers.

Problems of implementation

Since the *isfit* WPE worked fairly well it would not be wise to change the rather rigid setting (what I somewhat facetiously think of as *time fetishism*) completely. One possibility is to think in terms of experimental designs, e.g. let a random half of the groups go by the conventional *linear* setting, the other half the *circular* setting. The WPE might, however, be seen as a learning experience for the facilitators and it might thus be preferable to let all the facilitators use both settings. In order to explore possible sequence effects it might be an advantage if some facilitators started with the linear, while others started with the circular setting.

However, to impose a strict experimental design on all the facilitators would be contrary to the spirit of these reflections. The facilitators – together with some of the *isfit* organizers – should rather themselves decide on the procedure. For this case, however, I would hope that clear controversies will arise. The point of experimental designs is precisely to be an impartial 'arbitrator' for such cases! I would also think a variety of mixed cases might be suggested. One might for instance agree to start with

the circular type, then decide that if x happened (whatever the group would decide x to be) one should shift to the linear setting.

The background for these reflections is a feeling that the presen *isfit* is dominated by Western modes of thinking which carry marks of hubris and 'cognitive imperialism'[16]. I have learned that – due to time considerations – all facilitators were Norwegian (somewhat ironic in the present context!). For the next *isfit* it is of major importance that some of the facilitators have a none-Western background. Bearing in mind Scholtz' comment 12 on male predominance at *isfit*, I strongly suggest that *isfit* recruit women who have been active in organizing peace groups as facilitators. They may have been more resistant to co-optation by Western values, and thus be in an ideal position to obviate Western time fetishism!

Notes on zeitgeist (spirit of the time)

Quite often there is an implicit premise that serious matters can be solved in a fixed, short time. *Time fetishism* implies imposing time limits with a hard hand and having to live with concomitant unsatisfying results. A telling example is provided in Peter Reddy's excellent dissertation from 2006 (which will be available at the *isfit* website) where he contrasts the 'leisurely' years the peace corps in Bougainville were prepared for, with the US hurrying forth with a six month perspective in Sudan. This hurrying was one of the background factors for the catastrophic results of the US interventions. One of my most beloved posters at home has the simple title "Things take time".

A minor example of the hurrying at *isfit*: I first suggested (and then complained) that there was not time for Raj to speak from his extensive knowledge of WP. He told me during an enjoyable evening about the 200 proposals, a three layered conception to guard against 'majority tyranny' and much more. The organizers, however, carefully pointed out to me the extreme time pressure, the vast amount of presentations and time for discussions to take place between 9am and 4pm.

TheWestern emphasis on strict time limits may be part of a more pervasive syndrome. Max Weber had much to say about 'modernity' marked by bureaucratic efficiency and impartiality. While emphasizing advantages of such procedures vs. authoritarian and more arbitrary forms of governance, he was also deeply ambiguous about 'modernity'. A memorable Weber phrase is that in the West we may be "locked in an iron cage of rationality". Another phrase he used was that we are creating a "disenchanted" world. Flow and circular time may point to possible *re-enchantment* of the world! We do not live only in a world of *logos,* but also of *mythos*[17]

The Israel Palestine conflict: A suggested theme for the next *isfit*

A WPF report (ref. in note 11) caught my imagination when it pointed to two crucial issues (quotes below from p. 7):

- New settlements and terrorist acts must stop immediately, and
- concrete issues of where Palestinian refugees could return must be resolved. They will not be resolved for every refugee given that some land cannot easily be returned, but finding acceptable land to which Palestinians would go would

be a positive breakthrough. ..the number who should return should neither offend the Palestinians nor frighten the Israelis.[18]

'Neither offend.. nor frighten' seemed to be an excellent point of departure for a creative compromise. Further thought and discussion, however, quickly revealed that this would just be a part of the problem. Most likely there would be a large number who could not return. Anyway, there would be the question of compensation for imposed hardship.   A strong argument can be made that Western countries have dumped the problem of finding a home for jews on an arabic population. Today it is not possible to believe the previous slogan 'a people without a land, and a land without a people'[19]

At this point it became clear to me that in order to solve these problems the international community must enter the stage since it does not seem reasonable that israel should supply all the necessary compensation. Much work is required to work out in what form compensation should be given. Help to return to Israel and other suitable places must be provided, and also help to get settled. Economic compensation must be considerd. Furthermore one might in addition suggest memorials, e.g. museums, support for conciliatory conferences, and celebrations as for instance great concerts.

 Another consideration is that the refugee problem does not just involve palestinians who have been displaced by israeli settlers. Some palestinian refugees in Gaza have been forced to leave Kuwait. Furthermore a number of jews have been expelled from arabic countries.

It may be all too easy to ignore some important issues like these additional problems (which have been pointed out to me by friends). The consequence is likely to be that some important parties may use such omissions as an excuse to avoid considering the proposal!

Obviously this is just an incomplete sketch of a possible plan.

Here are some of the issues which require great creativity:

> In large sections of Europe there is an increasingly sceptical attitude towards Israel. Some people even feel that the present government is the worst enemy of peaceful prospects for Isarael.   This makes it a real challenge to avoid demonizing Israel!

> For Israel a primary concern is safety. How should the currounding countries and important organizations be persuaded to give sufficient garantuees.[20]

> How to avoid omissions which would make the plan completely objectionable to some of the concerned parties.

> Great skill is required to put the proposal in an inviting form to avoid 'knee jerk' negative reactions.

> How should one best entice the international community to chip in?

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How concretely should the compensation plan be worked out? It would obviously take years to work out all the details. If, however, the plan is stated to generally it could be rejected for lack of concreteness.

If the *isfit* organizers at all find the present suggestion to be worth while the project will require a huge amount of creative work. A Norwegian based project has succeeded in creating strong personal bonds and concrete plans for the long range goal of a peaceful Middle East. Young prospective leaders from Israel, Palestine, Jordan and Norway have been working together for more than three years, see mep.abildso.org

I have discussed the present proposal with the Norwegian project leaders at Abildsø farm which is just a few minutes away from the center of Oslo. As for *isfit* the project leaders do not decide which projects the participants should engage in. They would, however, be willing to suggest that mep participants could participate in the project here suggested. From my knowledge of mep and isfit participants I am convinced that meetings between mep and isfit would prove rich mutual inspiration!

Survey of two modes which must be combined:

	Celebrate informality and **Embrace a world-wide form**	**Minimize formality** **Western archetype**
social form	'communal sharing', CS Ultimate aim: 'global ubuntu'	'equality matching', EM
communication	dialogue avoid demonizing one part	debate
decision by	consensus also 'rough consensus'	one person, one vote
relation to time	circular 'all the time in the world'	linear, 'time fetishism' strict schedules, formal rules for turn-taking
external influences on process	WPE take place over (at least) two days	?

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[1] isfit is an acronym for International Student Festival In Trondheim

[2] These reflections are deeply inspired by Alan Fiske's (1992) monumental work: 'The four elementary forms of sociality: Framework for a unified theory of social relations' *Psychological Review, 99*, 689-723. The forms are 'communal sharing', CS, 'authority ranking', AR, ' equality matching', EM, and 'market pricing', MP. A general 'dimension' running through the four forms can be called 'intimacy, closeness, informality' (CS being highest here) vs. 'impersonal, distant, formal'. For present purposes only the first and third forms are of main interest. It should be emphasized that Fiske claims that all four forms are found in all societies. The contrast I draw between CS and EM is thus not absolute but a question of relative emphasis. Furthermore Fiske emphasizes that a given situation can be seen to be a pure representative of one of the given forms, while I think that most situations will be a mixture (but one form dominating), or that there may be rapid shifts between the forms.

Scholte's 'Comments [13 of them] on World Parliament Experiment at ISFIT 2007' has also been of invaluable help, especially his critique of dominant Western influence on the recent WPE.

[3] This term is taken from David Held's (2006) 'Models of Democracy. Third Edition' which has influenced the present reflections. His favourite model 'cosmopolitan democracy' is very congenial with the notion of a World Parliament, WP. He chooses not to deal explicitly with various concrete proposals for a WP. This may be because his model "is very insistent .. that there needs to be a constitutional discussion about how such a parliament could be constituted" (personal communication, March 8, 2007)

[4] Raj Chandola, (Head World Unity & Peace Education Department (WUPED)
City Montessori School (CMS), Lucknow, INDIA) one of the invited experts to isfit.

[5] Ubuntu, and 'global ubuntu' is discussed in more detail in Tschudi (2007): 'Mass victimization. A human dignity approach' which will appear in 'Restoring justice after large-scale violent conflicts. Kosovo, Israel-Palestine, Congo and Northern Ireland'. This book is part of the EU project COST, COoperation on Science and Technology. My chapter is one of some general chapters The book will be published by Willan Publishers who specializes in books on Restorative Justice. [Here appended as DIGNITY3.DOC]

[6] This is discussed by Held, (ref. in note 3) in ch. 4.

[7] This is exemplified in more detail in Neimeyer & Tschudi (2003). [Here appended as NEMEIYERTSCHUDI]

[8] This distinction is further discussed in my previous writings, ref. in notes 5, 7.

[9] This is consistent with Fredericsson's "broaden and build theory of positive emotions, see further in my chapter, viz. note 5.

[10] 'Aggregating preformed preferences' is a dominant conception in many 'liberal' views of 'democracy'. Such views are typical Western conceptions of 'independent' individuals, living in an 'atomized' (fragmented) world.

[11] One example here is a WPF report: Myth and Narrative in the Israel-Palestine conflict.
http://bcsia.ksg.harvard.edu/publication.cfm?program=WPF&ctype=book&item_id=274
I will return to this report in the last section. Another example was presented at a LSE/Deutsche Bank conference on globalization in 2004 where one report outlined strong differences concerning property rights for drugs (notably indigenous tribes vs. pharmaceutical comnpanies).

[12] 'Rough consensus' was reported to be a guiding principle for a group at the above LSE/Deutsche Bank conference who worked to standardize rules for allocating names of web domains.

[13] My favorite story here is from a conference experience in Australia when a "lebanese sister" put the record straight. A group of "aussies" and "lebs" had been embroiled in a severe group fight in a high

school, see "Encouraging co-authorship: lebs vs aussies" in ref. in note 7. She strongly wanted John McDonald to intervene when an aussie father expounded a rascist and stupid theory about leb shortcomings, but John refused to take the ball and left her with the reponsibility to straighten things out.

[14] David Moore – who has done much to outline and explain conferencing has been heavily influenced by Habermas, who also has been influential in inspiring ideals for 'deliberative democracy', see Held, ref. in note 3, also ref. in note 7.

[15] This state has been extensively explored by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, e.g. his 1990 book "Flow: The psychology of optimal experience"

[16] See my DIGNITY3.DOC, cf. note 5) for a bit more on 'cognitive imperialism'

[17] Karen Armstrong (2000) in 'The battle for God' has a fascinating discussion of *mythos* and *logos*

[18] The report stated that there might probably be room for a million new immigrants to Israel. This implies that number of Palestinians allowed to return should be much more than just a token number, but would still be far below the total number of refugees.

[19] Concerning 'land without people': 418 palestinian villages were destroyed by israeli settlers, cf. Ingdal & Simonsen (2005). Mur [Wall]

[20] A major shortcoming of the Oslo processes in the 1990's was that parties with the largest stakes in the outcome were not invited because they were considered to be too 'extremist'. All relevant parties must be invited!