

Multiconvergence of Global Networks: Experimental Democracy at the Planetary Level

by **Frédéric Vandenberghe**¹

New times present us with unknown challenges and demand new concepts to solve them. But until these new concepts are conceived, we'll have to make do with the ones we have—power, people, nations, states, parliaments—while we are also rethinking them. This is not easy to do since, depending on the conjuncture, the time and the latitude, the state can appear as part of the problem or part of the solution. Over the past few decades, states all around the world appear to have been captured by trans-national corporations and populist movements that abuse power to deconstruct and destroy the administrative state from within. It is hard to believe, but it wasn't so long ago that the state was considered an ally of social movements. Boaventura, for example, went as far to state that the state is a social movement.

Underneath and above the state's apparatus, by articulating the various territories, peoples and constituencies, there is space for experimentation with new forms of power, democracy, representation and participation at different levels. At the Multiconvergence of Global Networks (MRG), we are trying to set up an experiment in radical democracy at the global level. Our project is to constitute a Planetary Citizens' Parliament that would complement the organisation of the United Nations with an organisation of the United Peoples. This idea is relatively new. Since the Second World War, various projects to set up a world citizen's parliament have been proposed, but as far as we know, so far, none have really succeeded. Given the urgency to solve the world's problems and avoid the extinction of the human species and other living beings, the time is ripe to try again. At the Convivialist International, one of our constituent networks, Alain Caillé put on paper an ambitious plan for a Global Citizens' Parliament. At MRG, we have adopted this plan, but also reformulated and re-designed it.

The parliament has two functioning chambers, the first chamber is called the Council of Wisdoms of the Earth's Peoples and the second chamber is called the Assembly of Planetary Citizens. To avoid hierarchies between the mind and the body, the masculine and the feminine, the aristocrats and the plebeians, we do not use the language of upper and lower chambers. While the Council is to be comprised of people who are recognised for their wisdom, moral exemplarity or leadership of service, the second chamber will comprise of citizens who are drawn by lot—by random sampling, similar to classical Greece and contemporary popular juries. The idea is that the Council of Wisdoms becomes, as it were, the head of the Parliament that sets the agenda, while the Assembly of Planetary Citizens, which forms the heart of the Parliament, deliberates and decides on all matters. To be clear and to subvert (once again) the hierarchies, it is understood that the function of the Council is to be at the service of the Assembly.

We have maintained the bicameral design of Alain's proposed parliament, but we have altered its scope. We still see this parliament as an experiment in radical democracy which joins elements of representative and participatory democracy in a single design. But, instead of trying it out on a grand scale, we want to test its viability in a more modest experiment, i.e., within and between the networks.

On the 29th of May 2021, the Council of Wisdoms gathered for the first time on Zoom. Eight global networks that are part of the Multiconvergence sent in two delegates with gender-equal representation. As always, we worked using simultaneous translation in four different languages: English, French, Portuguese and Spanish. The delegates were introduced to each other and now, they will have to start working together to figure out the details of the Parliament: What are the responsibilities of the Council? How will it be organised? What is the relation between the Council and the Assembly? How will the Assembly function? How will the networks select the members of the Assembly? What are the themes of concern on which the parliament will reflect, deliberate and decide?

The Project of a Planetary Citizens' Parliament is an experiment in real democracy. It is modest, because at first, we want to test the viability of the project on a minor scale as an experiment within and between the global networks that are part of MRG. But, it is also an ambitious project, because if it successfully functions within the networks, we can think about scaling it up towards the realisation of a real Planetary Citizens' Parliament. This presupposes that we resolve our problem of legitimacy and representativity while investigating the statistical techniques for selecting members of the Assembly by lot.

We already have eight global processes working together to form an intentional collectivity that aims to bring about systemic change at the global level. This is a spiral of political, cultural and personal transformation. We are a prefigurative and transformative social movement. We represent the world in all its diversity and we want to change it. That's why we are here. Right now, the Parliament is only an elusive dream, but if all goes well, it may become a reality before the end of the decade.

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