

Are Social Forums Withering Away ? ¹

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Abstract

This study focuses on the Social Forums which were created in 2001 aiming to be the voice of anti-globalisation movement in a time of globalisation process against international organisations such as the WEF, the WTO, the IMF, the WB, and G7/G8 which are thought to be as pioneers, advocates and representatives of neo-liberal philosophy and understanding. After the existence of the World Social Forum-WSF, thematic forums, regional forums, and national and local forums were also created accordingly. All of the Social Forums have been developed as global action platforms that mobilize the masses around the world and reveal social principles against the globalisation order. This study aims to analyse and evaluate the effectiveness and transformation of social forums, especially the WSF taking the 21 years into account. This article argues that Social Forums formed a discourse, action and policy in their founding years, and nowadays they have lost their effectiveness and weakened especially in terms of mass participation, creating excitement and offering an alternative suitable to the motto "another world is possible". The method of this research consists of a literature review, conceptual analysis and the author's observations by participation in some of the Social Forums. This study compiles many non-academic elements such as the documents and statements published as a result of the social forums and the views of the leading activists of the social forums and considers them from the academic perspective.

Keywords: Globalisation, Neo-Liberalism, Anti-Globalisation Movements, Social Forums, World Social Forum.

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Öz

Bu çalışma küreselleşme karşıtı hareketin öncüsü, savunucusu ve temsilcisi olduğu düşünülen DEF, DTÖ, IMF, DB ve G7/8 gibi uluslararası kuruluşlara karşı küreselleşme karşıtı hareketin sesi olmak amacıyla 2001 yılında oluşturulan Sosyal Forumlara odaklanmaktadır. Dünya Sosyal Forumu'nun-DSF varlığından sonra tematik forumlar, bölgesel forumlar, ulusal ve yerel forumlar da buna uygun olarak oluşturulmuştur. Sosyal forumların tamamı, dünya çapında kitleleri harekete geçiren ve küreselleşme düzenine karşı toplumsal ilkeleri ortaya koyan küresel eylem platformları olarak geliştirilmiştir. Bu çalışma, özellikle DSF olmak üzere sosyal forumların etkinliğini ve dönüşümünü 21 yıllık süreci dikkate alarak analiz etmeyi ve değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu makale, Sosyal Forumların kuruluş yıllarında bir söylem, eylem ve politika oluşturduğunu, günümüzde özellikle kitleler katılım, heyecan yaratma ve "başka bir dünya mümkün" mottosuna uygun bir alternatif sunması açısından etkinliğini kaybettiğini ve zayıfladığını iddia etmektedir. Bu araştırmanın yöntemi, literatür taraması, kavramsal analiz ve yazarın bazı Sosyal Forumlara katılarak yaptığı gözlemlerden oluşmaktadır. Bu çalışma, sosyal forumlar sonucunda yayımlanan belgeler ve açıklamalar gibi akademik olmayan pek çok unsuru ve sosyal forumların önde gelen aktivistlerinin görüşlerini derleyerek akademik bir bakış açısıyla ele almaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Küreselleşme, Neo-Liberalizm, Küreselleşme Karşıtı Hareketler, Sosyal Forumlar, Dünya Sosyal Forumu.

¹ This study is derived from Neşe YILDIZ's doctoral thesis titled "The Effect of New Global Policies Being Searched within the Axes of Social Forums on the Change of Trade Union Movement" completed under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Vedat BİLGİN.

Introduction

Neo-liberal policies being implemented in the globalization process have brought reactions and led to different analyses, searches, and approaches. The world witnessed anti-globalization movements like the 1994-Mexican Zapatista Movement, and 1999-Seattle WTO Protests, especially visa-a-vis the meetings of groups of international financial institutions like the WTO, the IMF, the WEF, the G7/G8 the WB. These social groups organised and came together in 2001 with the motto of “another world is possible” under the name and roof of “World Social Forum” to oppose economic globalization and combat social injustices and inequalities. The WSF was created by the mainly pioneer Brazilian organisations supporting anti-globalist movements (Şensever, 2003, p.11-12). The Social Forums indeed have created a platform where neo-liberal policies are targeted to tackle and the negative effects of these policies are intensely discussed and brought together by different segments ranging from the trade union and human rights movements to the women’s movements, as well as from the environmental movements to the anti-war groups.

Taking the strong globalisation tide into consideration, the foundations of the Social Forums were built on the opposition to neo-liberal globalization policies and its main actors such as the WEF (World Economic Forum), the WTO (World Trade Organisation), the IMF (International Monetary Fund), the WB (World Bank), and G7/G8 (Group 7/Group 8). The name of the “World Social Forums” duplicates the World Economic Forum in social terms. The WEF engages the foremost world political and business leaders to shape the world agenda. Social Forums have blamed Davos (the WEF) as a symbol of richness and wealth. In the meetings of the WEF in Davos-Switzerland, economic issues are prioritised, and social issues are ignored from the perspective of the Social Forums. The first years of the World Social Forums were held in Porto Alegre of Brazil as a symbol of inequalities and unfairness placing sole social concerns at the center of its agenda. On behalf of inequalities, the Social Forums wished to

be heard of its voice from Porto Alegre, claiming “another world is possible” (Şensever, p.27-30).

As time goes by, thematic, regional, and national forums have been established to focus on social issues widely across the globe. In the beginning years of the Social Forums, there was a big wave of expectation, hope, excitement, energy, and dynamism about them in stopping neo-liberal policies with the motto of “another world is possible”. Activists and representatives from various civil society organisations such as trade unions, women’s organisations, environmental movements, anti-war groups, and youths as well as academicians have been coming together in the forums where the issue and problem of inequalities are the main agenda.

The Social Forums created a big wave and bought hundreds of thousands of people in the beginning. But nowadays, Social Forums have difficulties in bringing crowds together and holding meetings with less participation.

This article analyses and evaluates the effectiveness and transformation of the Social Forums from their establishment till today in terms of their power concerning their participation, organization, and agenda arguing that the WSF is weakening. In this context, this study focuses on the question “are social forums withering away?” to find an answer.

The purpose of this study is to to analyse and evaluate the effectiveness and transformation of social forums, especially the WSF taking the 21 years into account. The activities of regional, thematic and national forums are mainly ignored.

The first originality of this study is that it compiles many non-academic elements such as the documents published as a result of the social forums, statements and the views of the leading activists of the social forums. Second, it considers them from the academic point of view. Third, it opens social forums, which are not discussed enough in the academic community, to discussion on an academic basis and provides a basis for further studies.

The Concept of Globalization: Definition and Dimensions

The concept of globalization has been discussed for years in terms of its definition, development, structure, dimensions, actors and effects. Many definitions of globalisation have been made by philosophers.

According to Bozkurt (2000), globalization has become a "magic" word used to express a change in almost every area of the world, from economy to politics, from social policy to culture, and has turned into a "cliche" used in a wide area. Giddens (2000), argues that the spread of the term globalization all over the world is a fact that proves the developments that are meant to be explained with it.

For Held & McGrew (2008), globalization refers to the expanding space, increasing volume, accelerating and deepening effect of interregional flow and social interaction patterns of social interaction. Similarly, Steger (2006) states that globalization creates, increases, expands, and intensifies social interdependencies and changes on a world scale and this process also creates social awareness. Munck (2003), who argues that globalization has become the common sense of our age, calls what happened as we enter the twenty-first century, the globalization revolution and describes this situation as a great shock in the lives of ordinary people around the world. In this direction, he thinks that the globalization project has replaced the modernization project by creating a paradigm change with economic, political, social, and cultural effects and paved the way for neoliberal globalization as the new dominant discourse.

While Falk (2002) states that globalization has become the label that describes the current era, good or bad, but most satisfactorily, Stiglitz (2002) highlights the economic aspect of globalization and defines globalization as the removal of barriers to free trade and greater integration of national economies.

These definitions show that globalisation has been attributed to many features like a "cliche" of everything, a revolution, a shock, a paradigm, awareness, a label of removing barriers, and the integration of countries.

The issue of when the globalization process started is frequently discussed in the literature.

Yılmaz (2004) states that globalization is not a new phenomenon, but a process that started in the 14th century but draws attention to the fact that today's globalization debate is a development that gained momentum with the collapse of the Soviet Union. He argues that the United States is the main actor in today's globalization era and that the driving force of globalization is the developments in the communication and information sector. Koray (2003), on the other hand, thinks that although being a process with various and complex aspects, it is necessary and inevitable to examine globalization from the point of view of the globalization of capitalism, and in this respect, globalization is a new phase of capitalism.

Stating that there are different models of globalization in the historical process, Amin (2007) states that globalization is not a new thing and argues that the world has always been global and that there are many successive models that lead to inequalities and polarizations at the global level and that constantly deepen them. According to him, in today's globalization model, very low development rates are experienced, poverty, inequality, unemployment, insecurity, and informalization are increasing, and this process constantly produces terrorism, racism, and wars, creating perhaps the most destructive and bloodiest globalization model in history.

This brings a line of anti-thinking in the following order such as worries about neo-liberal policies in the globalisation process, anti-globalisation movements against neo-liberalism, Social Forums as anti-globalisation movement, and further questioning the neo-liberalism in the Social Forums for a social agenda

Dimensions of Globalisation with Positive and Negative Concerns

It is generally discussed that dimensions of globalisation are in four points economic, political, cultural, and social field. It is accepted that one of the most important developments in the field of economic globalization is related to space and time. In today's globally competitive environment, geographical distance has relatively lost its importance in the production process by increasing the mobility of capital. Capital can shift

its investments without difficulty to countries with low production costs, the production process can be easily divided into parts and goes beyond defined places, it is difficult to reveal the true origin of a product, mergers of companies are in common, e-trade is increasing. In this process, it is seen that all kinds of goods and services are subject to global trade, and economic and financial activities are carried out without borders.

Political globalization, on the other hand, includes basic issues and dimensions such as democratization, regionalization, the effectiveness of international institutions and the influence of NGOs on the nation-state under the concept of the capacity and limits of the nation-state.

In this context, the problem-solving capacity of states and the debates on whether the nation-state has come to an end are very popular topics. Held (2008), while addressing the issue of sovereign legitimacy, points out that the legitimate state is now defined within the framework of issues such as human rights, democratic norms, international standards, new responsibilities and the development of governance systems. Keyman (2005) argues that the capacity of the state to solve problems has entered a crisis, it has lost its autonomy, especially within the global economic system, and has entered a certain crisis of legitimacy within the society. Similarly, according to Hall (1998), with globalization, the age of the nation-state is receding and national identities are returning to a very defensive and very dangerous form driven by aggressive racism. Against these approaches, which claim that nation states are facing great difficulties and their power has come to an end, there are also completely opposite approaches. Steger (2006), on the other hand rejects the approach that the nation-state has come to an end, although he states that in the globalization process, the nation-state faces difficulties while performing some of its traditional functions. Beyond that, Fukuyama (2005) who takes a very clear stance, calls on those who claim that nation-states are weakened to reveal what exactly will replace sovereign states, and states that if there is no clear answer to this, it is necessary to return to the sovereign nation-state and seek ways to

strengthen it. In the middle of these two extreme debates, there are more moderate approaches. For example, Munck (2003) argues that it is necessary to avoid the discussion of opposition or support for the nation-state and that it is necessary to see how complex and interdependent policies at all levels are today.

The cultural dimension constitutes another discussed dimension of globalization. Steger (2006), emphasizing cultural globalization, defines cultural globalization as the worldwide increase and spread of cultural flows, and states that today's cultural flows are largely created and directed by global media empires with powerful communication technologies.

There are very important debates and criticisms in the social dimension of globalization, and many contrasts are emphasized. Koray (2003) draws attention to the fact that many opposite elements coexist in the globalization process and highlights the social dimension of globalization. For her, globalizing capitalism produces ever-increasing wealth, on the one hand, and constantly increasing unemployment and poverty on the other. Despite the incredible increase in production and consumption, it cannot meet even the most basic needs of many people. It causes many inequalities at the global, regional and social levels. Munck (2003) draws attention to the paradoxical fact that even among those who benefit from globalization, concerns about the uncontrolled development of developments.

Buğra & Keyder (2006) state that globalization threatens the capacity of especially rich countries to maintain their established social security programs and pushes the gains of the welfare state into crisis. In this process, they draw attention to the emergence of a growing category of "new poverty" with the insecurity of employment and the elimination of old sectors with globalization, a social layer that tends to grow and consists of people who cannot find a permanent job, who are constantly in poverty.

Based on the classifications made by philosophers who try to explain globalization (Bozkurt, 2000; Giddens, 2000; Held and McGrew, 2008; Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, and Perraton,

2009), we see some theoretical approaches are put forward in the form of radicals, skeptics and transformationalists on the definition of globalization.

Radicals focuses on capitalism and technology as a driving forces of globalization, argues that global markets are destroying national borders and the age of the nation-state has ended (Held and McGrew, 2008, p.13; Giddens, 2000, p.21). According to skeptics, the concept of globalization itself is dubious. They use the concept of "internationalization" instead of globalization by asking the question "what is the global one" (Held and McGrew, 2008, p.11). Hirst and Thompson (2003) argue that the world economy is far from being truly global, trade, investment and financial movements are mostly concentrated in the triangle of Europe, Japan and North America and this dominance will continue. Transformationalists, another approach, emerge as a middle ground compared to radicals and skeptics. Giddens (2000) thinks that today's globalization has both a new and revolutionary aspect owing to the comprehensive level of world trade and more intensive level of finance and capital flows. In addition, globalization affects the private and personal aspects of life, both complex, contradictory and opposite processes coexist. Nations are losing some of the power they used to have.

From the conceptual discussions on the concept of globalization, it is seen that globalization has economic, political, cultural, and social aspects. It has many dimensions positive with benefits but it is also understood that especially neo-liberal policies have left their mark on globalization debates which refers to the risks and frustration of losing the authority of the state in many spheres, the crisis of legitimacy, crisis of national identities, increasing poverty, inequality, unemployment in security, informalisation, racism, terrorism and wars, destructive and boldest model of today's globalisation. In this context, it is very important to reveal neoliberal policies that constitute an important agenda in globalization debates.

Neo-Liberal Policies in the Globalisation Process

Across the world, there have been worries about neo-liberal policies in the globalisation process. Indeed neo-liberal policies, although their roots date back many years, emerged as a product of the developments experienced after the deepening of social state practices in Western Europe after the Second World War. The economic crisis that has been experienced since the 70s, technological innovations, demographic trends, developments in the structure of the workforce, and the change in the production paradigm as a result of these have caused the current social state practice to be questioned. In this globalisation process, neo-liberalism, which was built on the criticism of the welfare state, has become the dominant ideology in many parts of the world.

From the perspective of the neo-liberal approach, there are concerns and worries such as welfare state policies are objected to because it reduces freedoms, increase the role and powers of states and narrows the field of the individual, attaches value to concepts such as social protection and social security, neglect profitability, efficiency and competition, and increases bureaucracy.

Friedman (2008), who played an important role in the development of neo-liberalism, criticizes social policy practices because they caused the development of bureaucracy. He is against social security practices and minimum wage practices because it would cause employers to avoid employment and increase poverty, by raising wages in the sector in which they were organized. He also opposes trade unions because they reduce employment and make income unequal.

As neo-liberalism developed on this side, privatization of public enterprises; liberalization of trade and industry, tax reductions, tight control over the organized workforce, reduction of public expenditures, especially social expenditures, development of international markets, removal of controls on radical global financial flows (Steger, 2006, p.65; Falk, 2002, p.p 2-3) manifested itself in concrete steps.

These features of neo-liberalism cause many people to worry about the role and function of neo-liberalism because it harms social rights and the welfare state. For example, figures on the distribution of income in the world support these worries. UK-based international charity Oxfam

claimed that 2,153 billionaires are richer than 4.6 billion people, who make up 60 percent of the world's population. It was stated that the richest 1% of the world is twice as rich as 6.9 billion people (OXFAM International, 2020). The worries of neo-liberalism have led to the creation of anti-globalisation movements. These movements are mainly organised by Social Forums.

Anti-Globalization Movements Against Neo-Liberalism: Social Forums

In recent years, it is seen that there are searches against the neo-liberal globalization model, and alternatives are tried to be formulated. In this context; it attempted to develop approaches such as globalization from below (Brecher, Costello & Smith, 2002; Danaher, 2005; Munck, 2003 and Şensever, 2003), citizen globalization, humanitarian globalization (Amin, 2004), cosmopolitan democracy (Keane, 2005; Doğan, 2006; Falk, 2002; Held, 2008; Bohman, 2002; Murphy and Harty, 2003), third way (Giddens, 2000), global governance (Falk, 2002; Held-McGrew, 2004; Rosenau, 2004; Gallino, 2007), new global contract (Held ve McGrew, 2002; Steger, 2006), and global civil society (Kaldor, 2008).

It is seen that the approaches mentioned here are not completely independent from each other and their boundaries are clearly separated, and they are even used interchangeably from time to time. These alternative approaches reveal analyzes on addressing fundamental social problems, changing and transforming economic and political structures, scrutiny and development of social processes, and the role of social democratic actors such as trade unions and NGOs as new and important actors. Although these approaches could not completely balance and suppress neo-liberal domination, it is seen that they contain important alternative policies, principles, and elements, and at least surround, encompass and suppress neo-liberalism with the accumulation they have created.

While neo-liberal policies are being implemented widely and effectively without slowing down, many international organizations,

trade union movements, and the academic world draw attention to these issues and take steps to solve them in the face of social problems gaining a global dimension. While alternative globalization discussions are being carried out, the most attention is paid to this process. One of the developments that attracted attention was the "**Social Forum**" initiative, which acted with the motto "another world is possible".

The idea for the World Social Forum -WSF was initially proposed by Oded Grajew, the coordinator of the Brazilian Business Association for Citizenship (CIVES), and Francisco Whitaker of the Brazilian Justice and Peace Commission (CBJP) to Bernard Cassen, President of the Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens (ATTAC) and Director of the Le Monde Diplomatique in 2000. Cassen recommended that the Forum would be held in Porto Alegre which would represent a break with all the values that Davos represents and that would have a symbolic meaning. Then Grajew and Whitaker launched an initiative with eight civil organizations in Brasil and created the Brazilian Organisation Committee with these organizations which is the first organ of the WSF. These Committees were supported by the local and central governments. An International Council as an organ of the WSF was created after the first WSF by Brazilian Organisation Committee. The WSF also has national mobilization committees to organise national and local social forums (Şensever, 2003, p.p. 32-35; Juris, 2005, p.258).

From 2001 to till, a total of 17 WSF was organised, and regional, national and local social forums were also created. Regional forums called European Social Forum, Asian Social Forum, Mediterranean Social Forum, Meddle East Social Forums, national forums like Italian Social Forum, Liverpool Social Forum, Istanbul Social Forum, thematic forums under the WSF like Local Government Forum, World Parliamentary Forum, World Education Forum, World Forum of Judges.

For the critics of globalisation, It is noteworthy and urgent that the neo-liberal globalization process includes many contradictory elements. On the one hand, ever-increasing wealth, on the other,

ever-increasing unemployment and poverty are observed. Despite an increase in production - consumption and unlimited circulation of capital at the same time the inability to meet even the most basic needs for a large number of people and the emergence of many inequalities at the global, regional and social levels are seen, there are many problems about in front of the circulation of labor (Koray, 2003, p.p. 51-57). While fundamental rights and freedoms increase within the framework of democratization in highly industrialized countries, obstacles and problems such as difficulties in the use of the most basic rights in many regions continue to exist.

These developments caused the anti-globalists to appear and come together laying the groundwork for the emergence of a concrete establishment like social forums from this anti-globalist group.

Various social movements such as the trade union movement, environmental movement, women's movement, human rights movement, youth movement, and anti-war movements, which initially emerged as an anti-globalization movement have come together in mainly Porto-Alegro since 2001 called the World Social Forums, especially in the demonstrations against neo-liberal international organizations like the WEF, the IMF, the WTO, and G7/G8.

For such movements there are excitement, hope and motivation created World Social Forums. The WSF has been a pioneer in the thematic, regional, and national Social Forums to be created. Social forums make their voices heard in every corner of the world, from Porto Alegre to Kenya, from Venezuela to India, from Sweden to Turkey, and from Greece to Senegal, with the slogan of "another world is possible" against the neo-liberal discourse. The existence of Social Forums strengthened the discourses of globalization from below and citizen globalization by providing mass support to the alternative globalization discussions in the literature.

The Social Forums contain features that will form the basis of the social agenda and calls are made to oppose neo-liberalism and capitalism and to seek and build a new alternative. Under the WSF, initiatives such as the World Social Forum Charter of Principles, World Social Forum

Manifesto, Bamako Initiative, Social Movements Assembly Report, Women's Network, Labor Network, Water Declaration, Global Action Against Poverty, Call for Decent World-Decent Life have been created and carried actions out accordingly.

Social Forums: Questioning the Neo-Liberalism for a Social Agenda

The Social Forums have been questioning neo-liberalism for reinstating a social agenda for all. They focus on many socio-political related issues varying from union rights, social security, and deregulation, to the closure of military bases internationally, and discrimination. These can be listed as follows: focusing social issues and underlining the importance of the globalization of social justice and solidarity; the right to work and social security of every person; the provision of gender equality; struggle of the trade unions; the right to organizing, collective bargaining and strike; the Tobin Tax against speculative activities and international companies; struggling arm sales and activities that cause greenhouse gases; fighting against all kinds of discrimination; supporting fair trade methods; rejecting the free trade methods of the WTO; struggling with privatizing the common goods of humanity, especially water; radically democratizing international institutions in a way that human rights and social and cultural rights will prevail; supporting food security and peasant agriculture of each country; taking of measures against the great danger of climate change and lubrication of the environment; guaranteeing the right to information and information; closure of military bases located outside borders.

The WSF has contributed to creating awareness in the fields of social policy such as social injustice, poverty, climate change, and unchecked finance. The WSF has made cooperations and possible alliances among the social movement from different geography and different interest groups. Thus, the WSF formed a basis for the democratic discussion of ideas, the formulation of proposals, sharing and exchanging experiences, and interlinking action.

Since its inception, the WSF has been a platform for meetings and dialogues for movements, social

organizations, grassroots associations, non-governmental organizations, organized community groups, and all anti-capitalists and alternative globalists.

The WSF was visible and active in the streets especially for anti-war actions before occupying Iraq by the United States. The WSF was also active in Tunis and supported the Arap Spring actions.

Are Social Forums Withering Away?

While Social Forums are appreciated for bringing together social organizations from different parts of the world, allowing experience sharing and creating demands, there are also many criticisms of social forums. The most interesting and remarkable aspect of the criticism is that basic criticisms come from the participants and pioneers of the Social Forums from the very beginning. According to them, the future of the WSF remains uncertain.

There are discussions and criticisms that social forums have been weakened and losing bond for years owing to problems in leadership, stable position of founders, finance of the Social Forums, the transformation of structure and perspective of international institutions, the unsettling rise of the anti-globalization right, decreasing political support for social forums, ignorance of social media, the indifference of the younger generation, only talks among social movements in social forums. These reasons are discussed and analysed below:

Problems in leadership and organisations:

Leadership and organizations in the social forums are discussed from the establishment of the WSF. According to Savio (2019), one of the most important dilemmas of the world social forums is the problems experienced at the point of leadership. He is saying that the WSF has never had a democratically elected leadership. After the first gathering in Porto Alegre, the Brazilian Organizing Committee invited organizations to create an International Council that today brings together about 120 organizations, networks, and social movements from around the world. The

Council does not have hierarchies, leaders, or coordinators, decisions are made by consensus. According to Savio, there is a long list and only one-third of its members are active. Despite repeated requests from participating organizations, the Brazilian founders have refused to revisit the Charter, defending it as an immutable text rather than a document of a particular historical moment. The International Council is organised into a multitude of working groups, which do not produce any concrete results and often do not even meet.

Disruptions in organizations constitute another apparent problem of social forums. According to Merwe (2022), most of the time, events are either canceled, postponed to another day and time, and/or faced with an unannounced change of location.

Another controversial issue relating to the WSF is the content. Rahmani (2015) urges that some content of activities was in contrast to the WSF principles. Some organisations in the WSF are supporting the World Bank and policies developed by European Union. Above all, the forum program was also sponsored by enterprises. Rahmani also complains about the strong presence of religious Islamist groups in the WSF.

Stable Position of Founders: Out of a fear of division, the Brazilian founders have thwarted efforts to allow the WSF to issue political declarations, establish spokespeople, and reevaluate the principle. Founders also have resisted calls to transcend the WSF's original mission as a venue for discussion and become a space for organizing. With the WSF spokespeople forbidden, the media stopped coming, since they had no interlocutors. Even broad declarations that would not cause a schism, like a condemnation of wars or appeals for climate action, have been prohibited. In response to this stance of the founders, a group that was among the founders of the WSF, calling themselves the international renewal group, proposes that the WSF should focus on issues of concern to the global community and that the International Council should adopt a transparent structure (Savio, 2019 and 2022). In

other words, today there is a split in the mind that organizes the WSF

Finance of the WSF: The World Social Forums are criticized for receiving funds from many international institutions and multinational companies. For example, the Brazilian oil company Petrobras supported some SWFs in Porto-Alegre, and Ford Foundation supported a lot of SWFs. For example, within the framework of the Sixth European Social Forum held in Istanbul, the banner hung in the hall at the Trade Union Forum meeting included the expression "with the financial contributions of the EU Commission". It is not known how much the EU Commission contributed through whom. Although the trade unions participating in the forum paid the entrance fee, hall rent, and translation fee, it is not known why such a contribution was received from the EU Commission.

Transformation of structure and perspective of international institutions: At the beginning of the WSF, enemies of Social Forums were the international financial institutions such as the WEF, the IMF, the WTO, and G7/G8. Therefore, international financial institutions, which created and nurtured social forums, and which the different groups under the Social Forum saw as enemies, began to differ significantly in their policies. Now, these institutions adopt and support the United Nations 2015 Sustainable Development Goals including 17 targets such as the end of poverty, zero hunger, gender equality, clean energy, sustainable cities, decent work, and life in water. As it is seen the demands and expectations of the WSF can be found among the 17 SDGs in the UN 2030 Agenda. It can be positively said the WSF has had an indirect role in influencing global development policies (Vargas, 2020, p.3).

New Movements without the Social Forums: The major denunciation and protest campaigns that have marked the last few years took place without the WSF. Occupy Wall Street, the 99% movement, the Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter, the #MeToo and even the environmentalist movement mobilized, demonstrated, denounced, demanded

and proposed, and occupied the public and media space 'in parallel' to the WSF. At each meeting of the WSF International Council, its members questioned, with a certain jealousy, the absence of the WSF in the organization of these campaigns (Brun, 2021).

The unsettling rise of the anti-globalization right: The unsettling rise of the anti-globalization right has scrambled many political assumptions and alliances. Savio (2019) sees the coming to power of right-wing governments in many parts of the world as a threat to social forums because these governments view global civil society as a competitor and an enemy, and that this approach could spell the end of social forums.

Decreasing political support for social forums: Although the concept of the Open Forum was seen as a key element by the first founders, it was emphasized that any deviation from this formula would lead to exclusions. To ensure this openness, 'party representation' and 'military organizations' are excluded according to the participation formula adopted. However, it is stated that this is not easy to achieve, because both parties and guerrilla movements participate in forums through their showcase organizations (Wallerstein, 2004). Savio (2019) put forwards that Social Forums are affected by political power in nation-states. For example, Right-wing president Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil has announced that he will forbid any support for the Forum, putting its future at grave risk. Holding a forum of such size requires significant financial support, and a government at least willing to grant visas to participants from across the globe. Because of that approach, the vibrant Brazilian civil society groups of 2001 are now struggling for survival.

Ignorance of social media and new media: In today's world, social media has become more important than conventional media. The anti-globalization movements/ social forums and the spread of the internet and social media coincide with almost the same period. Social forums used new media tools more effectively in terms of both their organizational forms and their activism in the

beginning. But Social forums couldn't continue this process as an advantage.

The WSF does not have a corporate website. The WSF's events and announcements are shared over different domains purchased every year, and different companies may purchase domains from previous years over time. Web addresses such as www.socialforum.org are used as online shopping stores today the WSF succeeded in gaining global visibility by expanding its sphere of influence and action network after the establishment lost its influence and visibility, especially in new media environments in 2007. In addition, it has been observed that the WSF does not have official social media accounts, which are regularly shared every year, and the developments about the organizations are conveyed. Although various posts were made through the social media accounts opened during the meeting times, the information flow did not continue after the meetings. Moreover, the number of followers of the aforementioned social media accounts of the WSF, which organized events with the active participation of many activists and non-governmental organizations, was limited to a few thousand people. Therefore, it can be said that the WSF does not have a continuous media usage practice (Pinar & Dağtaş, 2019, p.12, 14).

The WSF created an Internet Social Forum in the Tunis WSF in 2015. But it is seen that this website called Internet Social Forum is not enough active.

The indifference of the younger generation: Savio (2019) states that young people use social media channels and voice their problems through these platforms, but most of the young people, such as climate activists, have not even heard of the world social forums, and he recommends that the WSF develop more comprehensive concepts to include these young people.

Only talks among social movements in Social Forums: Social Forums are criticized for their working style and content. Menstruum (2022) is criticizing the Social Forums, but no one is listening to each other in the meetings, everybody is focusing on their concerns and no one cares

about the Forums. According to her, the WSF is indeed a living corpse. She urges that civil society should never be separated from the political world, the public is not only an exclusive task for the State, civil society has a responsibility to play. But she points out that 'civil society' itself has changed dramatically. Many movements have turned back to their national environment. Now it is not clear who wants a global movement, who wants a world social forum, who is still capable of thinking of the world as it is, and who wants to change it. Menstruum is refusing only talks among social movements but also demanding a good connection between political figures who are searching in the same way, some major academics and social movements. For this aim, she is recommending that Social Forums should redefine the goals of Forums.

Rahmani, (2015) puts forward that the WSF has never managed to be a forum for movements to express themselves. Only structured organisations can finance the travels of a few militants. There has been very little attention paid to the grassroots.

Decrease in the number of participants: Since its creation till date, a total of 17 WSF was organised from 2001 to 2022. In 2006, WSF was held in three centers in Caracas-Venezuela, Bamako-Mali, and Karachi- Pakistan. There wasn't any organised event of WSF in the years 2007, 2009, 2011, 2014, 2017, and 2019, but some decentralised affairs and activities supported by the WSF were held.

It is observed that the number of participants is decreasing. The WSF, in its founding years, held meetings with approximately 100 thousand participants each year – for example, this figure reached 150 thousand in 2005. But participation has been decreasing for many years. The last WSF included 10,000 registered participants, more than half of them from Brazil alone (Savio, 2022). The reduction in figures is not only in the WSF but also in the regional forums. Moreover, after 2010, European Social Forum as a regional forum almost stopped until 2022.

The decrease in the number of participants is the most concrete reflection of the indicators such as the decrease in the initial excitement, the

depletion of energy, the weakening of hope, and the fading of the expectation.

As it is seen, although Social Forums initially created a wave of expectation, glorious hope, and grand meetings under the motto of "another world is possible", as of today, Social Forums contain many problems, difficulties, and dilemmas such as its structure, financing, number of participants, ineffective meetings, ineffective use of social media, and decrease in political support.

Conclusion

This study aimed to analyse whether the social forums are losing the power. In this concept, the study evaluated the social forums, focusing on WSF, established in 2001 after the anti-globalization demonstrations in the 1990s achieving to bring hundred thousand participants.

After the existence of the social forums, the eighteen WSFs were held from 2001 to 2022. Within the six-year break, decentralised affairs and events were held. The WSF 2020 in Barcelona was canceled because of the coronavirus pandemic. After the first three meetings were held in Porto Alegre, the meetings moved out of Porto Alegre, to Mumbai, Bamako, Caracas, Karachi, Nairobi, Belem, Dakar, Tunis, Montreal, and Mexico.

In addition to the World Social Forums, thematic, regional, national, and local social forums were created as complementary and supportive. These kinds of forums almost did not exist in the period between 2010-2022. In 2022, small ripples began to appear to revive regional forums. It is understood that Social Forums aim to reach more people by spreading to different geographies, sharing the experiences of the participants, and motivating people all over the world to "another world is possible". Thus, people who did not participate in the WSF in a single center due to financial difficulties had the opportunity to make their words and voices heard at a more local and regional level.

On the agenda of all participatory groups of the WSF, primarily social issues and problems take place, social movements come together to form common platforms, and each social movement goes beyond its routine roles and activities and carries the interaction to a higher level.

NGOs participating in Social Forums try to raise awareness to the international public by revealing the dimensions of social problems with high-participation actions, and reactions, sometimes with anger, sometimes with colorful demonstrations and protest language, reminding political authorities of their responsibilities based on human rights and social rights, and in this way, it tries to influence the process of creating social policies. The fact that the Social Forums take place all over the world, that they do not confine themselves to only one geography, and that there are intense participants from both developed, developing, and poor countries, reveals the need for a "global social model" and "social world" all over the world and reflects the common demand of different social segments. At the beginning of the Social Forum process, Social Forum participants followed social issues with the energy and motivation, they got from the forums and showed sensitivity to the "social world".

With the innovative approach, positive atmosphere, and high participation figures of the Social Forums in their founding years, it would not be an exaggeration to say that social forums are losing their visibility today. Today, the number of participants has decreased from 100-150 thousand people to 10 thousand people.

It is discussed that social forums have been weakening, withering, and losing bonds for years owing to problems in leadership, stable position of founders, finance of the Social Forums, transformation of structure and perspective of international institutions, new movements without the Social Forums, the unsettling rise of the anti-globalization right, decreasing political support for social forums, ignorance of social media, indifference of the younger generation, only talks among social movements in the social forums, decrease in the number of participant.

Although each group participating in the Social Forums has a clear stance against neo-liberal globalization, it is difficult to say the Forums created alternative common solutions and consensus against problems. Today, it can be said that the popularity, excitement, and hope of Social Forums are decreasing.

Most of the criticism comes from the participants and pioneers of the Social Forums

from the very beginning. It seems that the shortcomings from the beginning have killed the excitement of the social forums over time. There are also many problems in information flows. In parallel, shared information by participant organization of Social Forums are very limited and insufficient. All these developments make the Social Forums invisible and out of sight. As a result of these reasons, it is clear that the popularity of Social Forums is reducing, Social Forums are withering away and the future of Social Forums remains uncertain.

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