

# **The World Social Forum under Criticism:**

A literature study of its role

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## **Abstract**

Global social injustice and inequalities remain deeply embedded in our globalized world, often explained as a consequence of the current economic structures and institutions. Therefore, there has been an increase in arenas that attracts mobilization of the global civil society to oppose the neoliberal economic globalization and combat social injustices and inequalities. The World Social Forum (WSF) is an example of an arena that emerged with these purposes. However, research shows that there are criticism regarding the character and function of the WSF. This literature study examines the reasons behind the criticism and compares them with the WSF's charter of principles to see if the WSF is living up to its ideals. It also analyzes if the WSF's principles are reflected in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda. This is done through a content analysis and within the framework of social justice and transnational public sphere. The study concludes that the WSF does not live up to its ideals because of a lack in organizational structure, exclusive and elitist character, and also the inequalities and inequities that are reinforced within the WSF. Moreover, the study shows that the WSF's principles can be found among the 17 SDGs in the 2030 Agenda which can indicate that the WSF has had an indirect role in influencing global development policies.

*Key Words: World Social Forum, global civil society, social justice, transnational public sphere, the 2030 Agenda, the 17 SDGs, development policies*

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	5
1.1. Problem Formulation	6
1.2. Purpose and Aim	6
1.3. Research Questions	7
1.4. Demarcation	7
1.5. Disposition	8
<b>2. Background</b>	9
2.1. Definition of Civil Society and Global Civil Society	9
2.2. The WSF's Emergence and Organizational Structure	10
2.3. The WSF's Charter of Principles	12
2.4. The 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	13
2.5. Research on the WSF	15
<b>3. Theory</b>	17
3.1. Theory of Social Justice	17
3.2. Theory of the Transnational Public Sphere	18
<b>4. Methodology</b>	21
4.1. Literature review	21
4.2. Selection of Empirical Data	21
4.3. Content Analysis and Conceptual Analysis	22
4.4. Self-Critical Methodological Reflections	24
<b>5. Result</b>	26
5.1. Criticism toward the WSF	26
5.1.1. Organizational Structure	31
5.1.2. Exclusion	33
5.1.3. Inequity and Inequality	35
5.2. The WSF's Principles and the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda	36
<b>6. Analysis and Discussion</b>	40
6.1. The Fulfillment of the WSF's Principles	40
6.2. Common Concepts between the WSF's Principles and the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda	41
6.3. The Lessons Learned from the WSF Applied in a Global Perspective	43
<b>7. Conclusion</b>	44
<b>8. References</b>	45
<b>9. Appendix</b>	50

# 1. Introduction

*In this chapter, the context of global social injustice and neoliberal economic globalization, which has led to the emergence of the WSF, is described. Further, the problem formulation is presented that leads to the purpose and aim, and the research questions of this study. Thereafter, demarcation is presented.*

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The concept of social justice has become more prominent in the development policy discourse during the last years. Social justice is fairness within a society and includes the principles of human rights, equality and equity for all individuals (UN 2006, 2 & 15). It goes hand in hand with the core principle in the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind. For example, the first sustainable development goal, SDG 1 (No poverty), is fundamental for people to be able to exercise their human rights. Other examples of social justice are the SDG 2 (Zero hunger) and the SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation) that are connected to the human right that all individuals should have access to food (Article 25) as well as water and sanitation (Resolution 64/292) (UN 2020). Nonetheless, social injustices and inequalities in redistribution of resources remain deeply embedded in our globalized world, primarily in the Global South. In 2015, the global percentage of people living in extreme poverty conditions with \$1,90 per day was 10 percent (The World Bank 2019). In 2017, around 785 million people did not have access to safe water and 811,7 million people did not have access to food and were undernourished (WHO 2019; FAO 2019).

The WSF emerged as a part of the global social justice movement in 2001 in Brazil. It emerged as a counterweight to the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos (Switzerland) which is an annual meeting for the foremost political, business, and other leaders of society to shape industry, regional, and global agendas with the aim of improving the state of the world (Caruso 2017, 505; WEF 2020). However, the WEF is described as a forum for the powerful global elite with minor input from the global civil society (Yanshen 2012, 262). Instead of addressing social injustice and its underlying causes, such as economic growth promoted by the current economic structures and institutions (the World Bank, World Trade Organization (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), etc.) which also causes environmental degradation, the WEF reframes the issue and focuses on continued green growth (Schlosberg 2013, 44; WEF 2020). Economic growth has been seen as synonymous with human well-being for the most part of the 20th century because increased incomes meant satisfied basic needs and better living conditions. Economic growth is still prevalent in the Global North and has become a development model for countries in the Global South (OECD 2011, 38).

After the protests against the WTO in Seattle in 1999, there has been an increase in arenas that attracts mobilization of social movements and other groups in the global civil society to oppose the economic globalization and combat social injustices and inequalities (Milani & Landiado 2007, 12). The arenas vary in organizational design and political orientation (Álvarez et al 2008, 391; Teivainen 2003, 122). One example is the WSF that emerged as an arena for the global civil society, located in the Global South, to deliberate and oppose the Western neoliberal economic

globalization and capitalism. The WSF's aim is to develop alternative strategies for the future as well as to increase social justice and equality while valuing the relationship between humans and the environment (WSF 2016).

## 1.1. Problem Formulation

Chico Whitaker, one of the founders, describes the WSF as unique in the world in the sense that it is the first open horizontal forum where different groups of the global civil society can meet and discuss resistance to neoliberal economic globalization and develop alternative strategies to achieve social justice and equality. It is argued that it shows the way for the global justice movement (Whitaker 2020, 183). The WSF has, thus, expanded to international, national, regional, local, and thematic forums all around the world (Grzybowski 2006, 7). It has attracted hundreds of thousands participants, for instance, the WSF 2004 in Mumbai (India) with 120,000 participants and the WSF 2009 in Belem (Brazil) with 150,000 participants (Whitaker 2020, 184).

However, 20 years after its emergence in 2001, the power of attraction of participants has diminished and research shows that there is uncertainty regarding the character and function of the WSF among the global civil society. There are debates whether the WSF's practices are living up to its ideals. For example, even if the WSF is described as an open space, some argue that the WSF has become exclusionary (Worth & Buckley 2009, 655). Second, the WSF is criticized for having insufficient transparency in its structure and organization (Mac Lorin 2020, 253). Third, the WSF is considered to be ineffective in achieving political outcomes (Kerswell 2012, 90). These criticism lead to the questions of the character and function of WSF - if the WSF is fulfilling its original purposes and its potential to influence global development policies in order to create another world as it promotes (WSF 2016).

## 1.2. Purpose and Aim

The purpose of this study is to achieve a deeper understanding of the existing criticism toward the WSF through a literature review and content analysis of scientific sources. I will, thus, examine and thematically organize the arguments behind the criticism, comparing them with the WSF's charter of principles, to see if the WSF is living up to its ideals. In addition, I will analyze the WSF's principles against the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda, aiming to see this way if the WSF has contributed to influence global development policies. This study will hopefully contribute to the discussion of whether the WSF, after almost two decades of existence, is fulfilling its original purposes.

### 1.3. Research Questions

- What are the main criticism toward the WSF since its emergence in 2001 and what are the reasons behind them?
- Are the WSF's principles reflected in the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda? If yes, do they indicate that the WSF has been influencing global development policies?

### 1.4. Demarcation

After reading several sources, I realized that the WSF is a limited and a loose phenomenon which is difficult to capture as a research topic and study empirically without participating myself in the WSF. In the beginning, my plan was to examine the WSF as a platform for the global civil society and analyze the role of the WSF in influencing global development policies through analysis of the themes discussed in the WSFs since its emergence. However, as mentioned in the charter of principles, it is an open space and not an actor, meaning no one can speak in the name of the WSF. Due to this fact, it is difficult to define the WSF in time and space and it is difficult to trace since it is an ongoing horizontal world process. Therefore, there are limited official sources such as websites, concluding documents and reports from the WSFs which made it difficult for me to operationalize my planned research. In addition, since there is no actor that is responsible for the WSF, I could not find any specific contact information to conduct an interview nor did I have the time to investigate this further since the time period of this study is one month. Instead, I had to shift focus and do a literature study with a content analysis based on existing research. I will not examine the WSF in itself, rather what scientific sources have concluded about the social forum. This is also interesting because it will show a small sequence of what a certain part of the global civil society thinks about the WSF which is a step to achieve deeper understanding of the WSF as a phenomenon. My refocused study will, however, indirectly indicate the role of the WSF in the development policy arena.

Moreover, the WSF has also expanded into international, national, regional, local, and thematic forums such as the Latin-American Social Forum which I will not include in my research. My study and conclusions will, thus, only concern the annual WSF.

## 1.5. Disposition

Chapter 1	Introduction of the WSF as a phenomena and presentation of the problem formulation, purpose and aim, research questions, and demarcation.
Chapter 2	Background to this study which includes definitions of civil society and global civil society, the history of the WSF's emergence and organizational structure, the WSF's charter of principles, the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda, and existing research on the WSF.
Chapter 3	Research design and the methodological approach - primary and secondary literature review and content analysis with a conceptual analysis.
Chapter 4	The theoretical framework: theory of social justice and theory of the transnational public sphere. These theories will be the lenses in order to analyze the WSF and answer the research questions.
Chapter 5	Empirical findings regarding criticism toward the WSF and identified common concepts in the WSF's principles and in the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda.
Chapter 6	Analysis of the empirical findings. A critical discussion of the chosen methods is also presented.
Chapter 7	Conclusions of the analysis and suggestions for future research.
Chapter 8	References.



## 2. Background

*In this chapter, necessary background information is presented in order to answer the research questions. It includes definitions of civil society and global civil society, the history of the WSF's emergence and organizational structure, the WSF's charter of principles, the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda, and existing research on the WSF which will include ten articles that will be examined further in this study.*

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### 2.1. Definition of Civil Society and Global Civil Society

It is important to first understand the concept of civil society before explaining the meaning of global civil society. There are diverse versions and understandings of the concepts of civil society and global civil society but I have chosen to provide general definitions that describe the biggest features of the concepts.

Civil society refers to the capacity of collective action based on mutual interests and values in the public sphere, distinct from the business and government sectors, although, the boundaries can be blurred at times (WHO 2020). It includes civil society organizations (CSOs) based on diverse cultural, ethical, philanthropic, religious, and scientific considerations (World Bank 2020). For example, actors included in the civil society are advocacy groups, coalitions, charities, community groups, faith-based organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), professional associations, social movements, trade unions, and women's organizations. The inclusion of civil society in policy decision-making is important because it gives voice to marginalized groups and enhances communities' political participation through advocacy, debates, and non-violent struggles (WHO 2020). Another definition is that it is a space of conflicts and struggles over norms and values, the state's legitimacy, and the control over institutions and material resources (Thörn 2011, 236-237).

The concept of civil society was revived and became omnipresent in political thinking in the 1970-80. Nevertheless, global civil society is relatively new even if some argue that the concept of civil society has always had a global character (Kumar 2007, 414 & 431). It is argued that it emerged in one aspect as a part of the globalization of the discourse of civil society when the civil society ideas spread beyond the places of origin and into new contexts. Global issues, thus, became of greater importance (Keane 2003, 35-36).

Global civil society has a global character and includes the same but transnational actors as in the civil society that can be a part of transnational social networks (Peña & Davies 2013, 259). The global civil society plays an essential role in, for instance, challenging neoliberal economic globalization, opposing global governance and pressuring global governance institutions with peaceful civil methods (Buckley 2013, 231; Brassett & Smith 2010, 424). It addresses these issues in various ways, for example, through different strategies, movements, and formats such as the WSF, the Zapatistas, and the North American Occupy movements. For that reason, global civil society is often theorized under the concept of global resistance (Buckley 2013, 231-32). Yet, the

claim is confusing because of the recognition that global civil society is not necessarily a resistance to globalization even if certain actors see it as an opportunity (Robinson 2003, 169).

There are two common ways to conceptualize the global civil society. The global civil society can be seen as an agent that impacts global governance in order to achieve more reception between institutions and the citizens who they affect, nevertheless, there is a risk that not all people are included in the deliberations. Another way of describing the global civil society is as an arena, in other words, an emerging global political space, due to conflicting transnational forces, for activity and debate. It is an arena that is not limited to contestation and reason but includes diverse modes of expression that appeal to both the mind and the heart (Thörn 2011, 237; Brassett & Smith 2010, 419-424).

Moreover, the literature concerning global civil society often emphasizes the “bottom-up” approach with common civic activism in the Global South in order to achieve emancipation from the hegemonic power, instead of a “top-down” approach by NGOs in the Global North. The WSF has, for example, been described as a key example of the “bottom-up” approach as well as “globalization from below” where the actors within the global civil society cooperate to develop alternatives to the neoliberal strategies for world order (Peña & Davies 2013, 259).

## 2.2. The WSF’s Emergence and Organizational Structure

The roots of the WSF lie in the emergence of the Mexican Zapatista movement opposing neoliberalism in the 1990s (Milani & Laniado 2007, 28). The founders of the WSF are Oded Grajew, also founder of the Brazilian Business Association for Citizenship (CIVES), and Chico Whitaker of the Brazilian Justice and Peace Commission (CBJP), who presented their idea in 2000 and was supported and funded by organizations in transnational activist networks, such as Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and Aid to Citizens (ATTAC). In addition, the municipal government of Porto Alegre and the state government of Rio Grande do Sul, which were controlled by the Brazilian Workers Party, also decided to support and fund the initiative. Consequently, the WSF emerged in Porto Alegre (Brazil) in 2001 by a coalition of eight Brazilian organizations<sup>1</sup> that formed the Brazilian Organizing Committee (Teivainen 2003, 122-123). The WSF was a counter-event to the World Economic Forum in order to oppose the neoliberal economic globalization and seek other alternative strategies. The WSF has its roots in anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist, peace, and pro-democracy movements (Caruso 2017, 505). Instead, the WSF suggests that “*another world is possible*”. The WSF describes themselves as the largest and most diverse non-hierarchical congregation of global civil society in order to discuss solutions

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<sup>1</sup> The Brazilian Organizing Committee consists of Brazilian Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (ABONG); Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and Aid to Citizens (ATTAC); Brazilian Justice & Peace Commission (CBJP); Brazilian Business Association for Citizenship (CIVES); Central Trade Union Federation; Brazilian Institute for Social and Economic Studies (IBASE); Centre for Global Justice; and Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) (Kerswell 2012, 74).

to today's current world problems with both international, national, regional, local, and thematic forums (WSF 2016).

Even if the WSF is non-hierarchical and no one can deliberate on behalf of the WSF according to the charter of principles, there still exists an organizational structure which includes the International Council (IC) and the Local Organizing Committees (LOC) (WSF 2016; Desai 2016, 880). The IC is a private decision-making space that decides about the place for the next WSF, invites speakers, and has the responsibility to address the WSF's internal power structures (Mac Lorin 2020, 251). In the beginning, the IC consisted of representatives from more than 150 organizations, however, the number has decreased and now it's just over 50 (Whitaker 2020, 184). Further, every edition of the WSF has its own LOC, for instance, the Brazilian Organizing Committee in 2001 (today known as the Secretariat) which approves the themes discussed during the WSF amongst other things (Teivainen 2003, 124; Desai 2016, 877).

Each edition of the WSF displays a strong mobilization force by attracting hundreds of thousands of participants, in contrast to the 10 000 participants in the first edition. It also attracts thousands of social movements and civil society organizations to different activities, such as conferences, workshops, etc. regarding different issues (human rights, environment, social, solidarity economy, democratization, etc.) (Smith 2004, 414; WSF 2016). The annual meeting of the WSF, hence, consists of large, medium and small meetings. The large meetings are called plenaries and are organized by the IC and the LOC. The medium and small meetings are often self-organized by individuals or organizations (Desai 2016, 877). The activities of the WSF are spread over several days and are parallel with each other which means that the participants cannot attend all activities, instead, they have to choose the most interesting in their perspectives (Smith & Smythe 2017, 1145).

Since the start of the annual WSF in 2001, there have been some irregularities and exceptions of how often the WSF has taken place. In the following page in *Table 2.2.*, a list over the years and places where the WSFs have taken place will be presented. There were no centralized WSFs during the years: 2008, 2010, 2014, 2017, and 2018. It does not mean that there were no WSF at all, rather it was held on other levels, such as national, regional, or local. On the other hand, the WSF took place three times in 2006 in different locations and was described as polycentric. This year, the WSF 2020 in Barcelona was cancelled because of the Coronavirus pandemic. In total, there have been 15 social forums (including the three forums in 2006). In addition, the initial place of origin was in Porto Alegre (Brazil) in the Global South, nonetheless, the WSF has now also traveled to the Global North (WSF 2016). The WSF 2016 took place in Montreal (Canada) with the argument that the WSF has to address the division between the Global South and Global North. Solidarities need to transcend borders to be able to address the neoliberal economic globalization (Lorin & Schall 2018, 59).

*Table 2.2. A list over the years and places where the WSFs have taken place.*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Place</b>
2001	Porto Alegre (Brazil)
2002	Porto Alegre (Brazil)
2003	Porto Alegre (Brazil)
2004	Mumbai (India)
2005	Porto Alegre (Brazil)
2006	Bamako (Mali) Caracas (Venezuela) Karachi (Pakistan)
2007	Nairobi (Kenya)
2009	Belem (Brazil)
2011	Dakar (Senegal)
2013	Tunis (Tunisia)
2015	Tunis (Tunisia)
2016	Montreal (QC-Canada)
2018	Salvador (Brazil)

Based on (WSF 2016).

### 2.3. The WSF's Charter of Principles

After the evaluation of the first WSF in 2001, the committee of Brazilian organization found it necessary and legitimate to implement a charter of principles for the WSF in order to provide guidance for future successful forums such as principles to steer the process, operation rules, goals, and values of WSF. In other words, the principles define the direction and are, consequently, based on the flow from the logic of the first WSF. The charter of principles was approved and adopted by the Secretariat in São Paulo on April 9th, 2001. The same year, on June 10th, it was approved with some modifications by the IC. The official WSF's charter of principles consists of 14

principles that are to be respected by individuals and actors who are involved in the process and in the organization of new editions of the WSF (WSF 2016).

In summary, the WSF's principles state that the WSF is an open meeting space. It proposes that another world is possible in contrast to the dominant neoliberal economic globalization. It is a world process that aims to develop alternative development strategies. The WSF emphasizes democratic participation and engagement in dialogues addressing global issues such as social injustices, inequality, sovereignty, and the respect of human rights and the environment. It is an open space for movements and groups of civil society promoting plurality and unity. Still, groups from a violent and political context are not allowed. Although, members of legislatures and government leaders who also share the same interests may be invited to dialogue in the social forum. Further, the WSF is horizontal, non-hierarchical, and does not intend to have a representative role, hence, no one can deliberate in the name of the social forum (for the complete charter of principles, see 9. *Appendix*) (WSF 2016).

## 2.4. The 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda was adopted in 2015 by all United Nations Member States. It is built on the former Millennium Development Goals in order to complete what was not achieved. The 2030 Agenda is a plan of action that emphasizes people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership. It includes 17 SDGs and 169 targets. These goals are aiming at eradicating poverty, protecting the planet, realizing human rights, and achieving gender equality in a collaborative partnership with all countries. For this reason, transformative and bold steps are needed in order to achieve a sustainable development which includes economic, environmental, and social dimensions. The principle core in the 2030 Agenda is to leave no one behind. In the following page in *Table 2.4.*, the 17 SDGs will be presented (for the complete 2030 Agenda, see 70/1. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* by the UN 2015) (UN 2015).

Table 2.4. The 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda.

Goal	Description
SDG 1.	End poverty in all its forms everywhere
SDG 2.	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
SDG 3.	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
SDG 4.	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
SDG 5.	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
SDG 6.	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
SDG 7.	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
SDG 8.	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
SDG 9.	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
SDG 10.	Reduce inequality within and among countries
SDG 11.	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
SDG 12.	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
SDG 13.	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
SDG 14.	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
SDG 15.	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
SDG 16.	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
SDG 17.	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Based on (UN 2015)

## 2.5. Research on the WSF

Research has showed that there is uncertainty regarding the character and function of the WSF among the global civil society which has caused debates whether the WSF's practices are living up to its ideals. There are several studies made from various theoretical standpoints and methods on this regard. Here I will shortly present the ten chosen articles for my empirical study in chronological order, highlighting only the main criticism toward the social forum and leaving a deeper analysis of these criticism to the result.

Teivainen (2003) mainly discusses the debate whether the WSF should remain an arena or become an actor. He argues that there is a rising pressure for the WSF to become a political entity. Despite the pressure, there is also a resistance because it is argued that the WSF does not have the procedures for democratic formation of the collective will (Teivainen 2003, 126).

Wallerstein (2004) argues that there are three main criticism of the WSF. First, the centrists argue that the WSF is not concrete nor practical in its orientation. Second, critics on the left-wing argue that, for instance, the WSF is inefficacious and that it is actually promoting socialism rather than another world. Anarchists argue that there is a hidden hierarchy. Third, criticism from within the WSF argue that it is leaning to undemocratic practices due to lack of transparency (Wallerstein 2004, 635).

Álvarez et al (2008) did an observation regarding the racial dynamics within the WSF 2005 in Porto Alegre (Brazil). They did a survey among the WSF's participants where one of the questions was to self-identify their race/ethnicity. Their findings showed that the majority of the participants identified themselves as white. To clarify, of the Brazilian respondents, 54,8 percent identified themselves as white. The percentage of people identifying themselves as black or African was 22.4 percent of the Brazilian respondents and bit over 18 percent of all respondents. Only 7,7 percent of Brazilian respondents and a bit over 8 percent of all respondents said they were Latino which is explained due to the fact that people in Latin America do not identify themselves as Latinos within the region (Álvarez et al 2008, 390-395).

Worth & Buckley (2009) argues that the WSF's function is to entertain the global civil society rather than achieve a transformation. It is a trade fair, also referred as an elitist postmodern playground, for NGOs and academics that speak on behalf of marginalized. As a result, the WSF does not properly represent the counter-movement to combat social injustice within neoliberal economic globalization nor contests provide any counter-position (Worth & Buckley 2009, 649-659).

Conway (2011) uses the concept of contact zone in order to analyze the character of the WSF. She argues that the social forum represents unequal power relations due to the historical colonial legacy that hinders solidarity within different groups. For instance, Dalit (lower caste members in India), feminist, and indigenous movements are often marginalized and excluded (Conway 2011, 233-234).

Kerswell (2012) evaluates the WSF from a labor perspective and concludes that the social forum, in similarity to the global trade union movement, has no vision of central organization. This

has hindered the WSF to actually achieve any transformative changes which shows its weakness. The global alternative to face the global challenges is, thus, lacking (Kerswell 2012, 90).

Scerri (2013) describes his experience of the logistical mess at WSF 2011 in Dakar (Senegal) which exposes a weak organizational capacity. In addition, the high entrance fees excluded local people and organizations from participating (Scerri 2013, 114-115).

Peña & Davis (2014) describe the historical background of the WSF's emergence and argue that elitism has always been a feature of the WSF. It is because of its close relation to the Workers Party and the Brazilian corporate movement that have played fundamental roles in the funding of the WSF (Peña and Davies 2014, 259-273).

Desai (2016) criticizes the WSF from a gender perspective. She argues that the WSF is outsourcing gender issues and that women are underrepresented in the WSF. The speakers in the plenary meetings, the IC, and the LOCs are dominated by middle-age male activists (Desai 2016, 878-881).

Mac Lorin (2020) describes her experience as the former general coordinator in the LOC in the WSF 2016 in Montreal (Canada). As the coordinator, she had to balance the urgency and deadlines on making logistical choices on the one side, and the WSF's principles of horizontality on the other side. She argues that there are internal power relations within the WSF that is unavoidable (Mac Lorin 2020, 251-253).

The criticism, described in the above-outlined research, has never been thematically structured in order to understand the reasons behind them, in relation to each other, and in relation to the WSF's charter of principles. An analytical comparison between the WSF's charter of principles and the 17 SDGs of the Agenda 2030 has also never been performed before. This study will, therefore, hopefully provide a deeper understanding of whether the WSF is fulfilling its original purposes by addressing this deficit of knowledge.



### 3. Theory

*In this chapter, the theoretical framework will be presented: the theory of social justice and the theory of the transnational public sphere. These theories will, thus, be my lenses in order to analyze the World Social Forum and answer my research questions.*

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#### 3.1. Theory of Social Justice

One of the most known works about justice is the book “*A Theory of Justice*” that was published in 1971 by the liberal philosopher John Rawls. The theory was challenged and refined several times in the decades following its original publication (Rawls & Kelly 2001, xi-xii). A follow-up book “*Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*” was published in 1985. It describes Rawls’ conception of justice which comprises two principles: liberty and equality. Liberty signifies that every individual has equal rights to basic liberties. Equality signifies that social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: fair equality of opportunity principle and difference principle - maximizing the wealth and income of those worst off (Ibid, 42-43). Another definition of justice is provided by the feminist philosopher Iris Marion Young. She criticizes the fact that the concept of social justice has reduced to distributive justice. Instead, she argues that injustice is a matter of domination and oppression (Young 2011, 17 & 39). Contemporary democratic theories often assume a homogeneous public where European middle-class men dominate and marginalized groups such as people of color (POC), women, poor people, and the working-class are excluded and oppressed (Ibid, 173-174). Social justice should signify inclusion and full participation of all individuals in society. Young continues to argue that group-conscious social policies and group presentation are also necessary to achieve social justice (Ibid, 183-184). A broader definition of social justice includes the main idea that individuals should have equal distribution of resources, rights, entitlements, wealth, and opportunities regardless of political, social or economic circumstances (Carter 2018, 59).

On the other hand, Nancy Fraser, an American critical theorist, criticizes the Keynesian-Westphalian frame of justice, including Rawls’ and Young’s theories. She argues that it is not sufficient because it focuses on the socioeconomic (Rawls) or the cultural/legal (Young) paradigm without acknowledging the relationship between socioeconomic redistribution and cultural/legal recognition. Fraser’s original theory of social justice focused on the two mentioned concepts: economic redistribution and cultural recognition. Nonetheless, she has recently expanded her theory to include a third dimension: political representation (Fraser 2012, 41-51).

First, Fraser’s concept of distribution regards goods, defined as access to paid work, education, health care, income, leisure time, and property; and burdens, defined as rates of mortality and morbidity caused by, for example, exposure to environmental pollution and toxicity, and low-calorie intake. There is, therefore, a need for redistribution that addresses social injustices in the economic order of society, including deprivation, exploitation, and economic marginalization, through economic restructuring. Second, recognition addresses social injustices in the cultural

order of society, including the social patterns of communication, evaluation, and interpretation, which includes cultural domination, disrespect, and non-recognition, through cultural or symbolic transformation. Third, representation addresses social injustices in the political order of society which is increasingly crucial when the Keynesian-Westphalian frame is no longer appropriate for social justice. The political dimension describes who can claim redistribution and recognition as well as how these claims are to be proposed and assessed (Fraser 2012, 41-51).

Fraser continues to argue that the principle of participatory parity should be applied in all dimensions of society such as the social, cultural, economic and political. Social justice requires that all individuals are permitted to participate in social life according to the principle of equal moral worth. To combat social injustice, thus, means to demolish institutionalized obstacles that hinder people from participation and social interaction on equal terms (Ibid).

In this study, I have chosen to use Fraser's theory of social justice because it is aligned with the WSF's critical attitude toward Western concepts. When analyzing the WSF, I will consider all three dimensions of her definition of social justice: redistribution, recognition, and representation. I will, therefore, compare the WSF's charter of principles and the criticism toward the WSF in relation to social injustices in the economic, cultural, and political dimensions of society. I will also compare the WSF's principles with the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda from a social justice perspective.

### 3.2. Theory of the Transnational Public Sphere

The public sphere has become a key concept in global governance because of the criticism that political decisions are taken without the participation of people (Kutay 2016, 47). The public sphere is, consequently, historically interlinked with activism where people have gradually increased their right to criticize the political system and demand changes. Within this public sphere, new political concerns and issues are constantly arising (Olesen 2011, 253-254; Steffek 2010, 56).

The most known and influential definitions of the public sphere is by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas. In his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1991), he provides a historical-sociological account of the notion of the public sphere that emerged in the 18th century through discussions in the public spaces such as coffee shops and salons. He describes it as:

*“The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason (öffentliches Raisonement).” (Habermas 1991, 27).*

Habermas' definition describes a sphere between the state and civil society where critical deliberation and debate on common concerns occurs between private individuals, open for all. The public sphere was also separated from both the economy and the State (Ibid). Nancy Fraser, however, criticizes Habermas' definition on three main bases: exclusion and hegemonic dominance, inequalities, and the notion of common concern. First, Habermas' account of the bourgeois public sphere excludes women, peoples of color, and other marginalized groups as well as it was dominated by bourgeois men defining themselves as the "universal class". Second, it fosters inequalities where dominant societal groups have advantage over the subordinates and, as a result, fails to achieve participatory parity. Third, there is no common concern because it is individual what is of concern to each person (Fraser 1990, 60-71).

Moreover, Fraser criticizes Habermas' sharp distinction between the public sphere and the state. The weak publics, within the public sphere, exclusively form opinions with no decision-making, and the strong publics in the state that both form opinions and make decisions. She argues that there is a possibility of hybrid publics as well (Ibid, 75-76). Continuously, she argues that Habermas' bourgeois public sphere fails to examine other possible non-bourgeois public spheres. Instead of one single public sphere, there are multiple public spheres that compose the overarching public sphere such as subaltern counter publics which are parallel arenas for subordinate social groups to develop counter-discourses in order to express their identities, needs, and interests. The counter publics emerge as a response due to exclusion from the dominant public sphere (Ibid, 60-67).

Fraser continues to criticize the Westphalian notion of the public sphere for being bound to national borders. Due to the post-Cold War instabilities and globalization, it has become necessary to reconstruct the public sphere in a transnational framework (Fraser 2007, 8). She argues that communication flows within the public sphere can transcend national borders even if they are based on national discourse. Consequently, she introduces the notion of transnational public spheres in a post-Westphalian frame (Ibid, 22-23).

Fraser, consequently, reconstructs the concept of the public sphere with an emphasis on normative legitimacy and political efficacy of public opinion. First, the principle of normative legitimacy signifies that only if all who are concerned can participate as equals in deliberations, the public opinion will be considered legitimate. It can be divided into two conditions: inclusiveness and participatory parity. The inclusiveness condition means that deliberation must be inclusive for all who might be affected. The Westphalian notion of public sphere, however, assumed that it only concerned the inclusiveness of people within national borders, even if people all around the world are affected by political outcomes, no matter citizenship. The parity condition means that every person should have equal opportunity to express their thoughts and views (Fraser 2007, 22). These conditions are difficult to achieve in practice because not every individual has the same possibility to influence the discourse within the transnational public sphere which might depend on inequalities such as the distribution of resources, skills, and opportunities which is reflected in the global civil society. Nevertheless, Fraser argues that it helps to expose these inequalities and exclusions in order to overcome them (Ibid, 22; Steffek 2010, 62).

Second, the principle of political efficacy signifies that public opinion is efficacious only if the public opinion is mobilized as a political force in order to demand accountability of the public power so it reflects the will of the people. It can also be divided into two conditions: translation and capacity. The translation condition means that there has to be a translation flow of the civil society's communicative power to binding laws and then administrative power. The capacity condition means that the political power has to be able to implement the formed discourse of the will of the public. Today, the state has no administrative capacity to address issues of transnational character, such as the environment, economy, etc. There is, hence, a need for transnational public powers that will be accountable to transnational public spheres (Ibid, 22-23).

A third definition of a public sphere is provided by Bohman that includes three necessary conditions that have to be met. First, it is an active social space where people express their views to others who will answer and provide them with their opinion. Second, all participants must be committed to equality and freedom. Third, there must be an indefinite audience, rather than face-to-face deliberations (Bohman 2007, 60).

In this study, I have chosen to use both Fraser's theory of transnational public sphere, including her two principles, and Bohman's theory, including his three conditions, in order to analyze the WSF. I will, thus, analyze the WSF as a transnational public sphere to see whether the WSF is living up to its ideals as an open space for the global civil society.

## 4. Methodology

*In this chapter, the methodology is presented: qualitative literature review and content analysis with a conceptual analysis. Detailed descriptions of selection of empirical data and how to perform a conceptual analysis, including coding rules, are provided.*

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### 4.1. Literature review

As mentioned in the demarcation, I was not able to collect my information because of difficulties defining the WSF in space and time. In addition, I could not find contact information in order to interview people due to WSF's horizontal nature. For this reason, I chose to use the suitable qualitative methods of literature review to gather information and content analysis with a conceptual analysis to answer my research questions that allowed me to achieve a deeper understanding of the WSF as a phenomenon (Segesten 2017, 103-108). Literature review is described as:

*“The selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic, which contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfil certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed” (Hart 1998, 13).*

In my literature review of previous research, I used both primary sources and secondary sources. The primary sources included the WSF's website where the charter of principles is described as well as the United Nations website where the Agenda 2030 and the 17 SDGs are described. The secondary sources were books and previously published research articles from the scientific search databases Söder Scholar and Stockholm's university library.

### 4.2. Selection of Empirical Data

There are several studies regarding the WSF in different aspects and more in-depth analysis of specific forums held in the past. Therefore, to distinguish between the available sources, I used different combinations of the keywords: *World Social Forum, global civil society, development policies, transnational, globalization, and social justice*. The problem with an electronic bibliographic database is, however, that it requires a careful selection of these keywords in order to find relevant sources (Desai & Potter 2006, 212). In order to narrow down my selection of sources further, I used inclusion and exclusion criteria. I selected the criteria that my sources for empirical findings have to be written in English, scientific, and peer-reviewed which proves the reliability of the sources. In addition, another way of finding sources was to examine the chosen articles' reference lists. This way, I could trace back to original sources that some research has

built their foundation on and detect the major authors in this topic. The problem with the sources is, though, that the titles do not always specify that criticism toward the WSF is being addressed. Therefore, I have chosen 42 articles that I found interesting to examine closer and a book about the WSF. After reading the abstracts and skimming the body texts, I removed the ones that were not relevant in my search for criticism which left me with 19 sources. Further, I decided that my empirical findings will be based on 10 sources because of limited time, therefore, I chose sources with different publication years to reflect the whole period since the emergence of WSF (2001-2020). Further selection of sources was based on articles written by 10 different authors in order to include as many perspectives as possible, both the foremost authors on this topic as well as less known authors. The last selection was made to include as various criticism with different arguments and aspects as possible, for that reason, I chose to remove the sources that were too similar to others. Based on all these criteria, the selection resulted in 10 articles which will function as my empirical findings (Friberg 2017, 37-48).

The problematization of secondary literature is that there is a risk for the sources of being biased and manipulated by researchers with underlying errors (Repstad 2007, 13-15). For this reason, I have read numerous abstracts about the WSF in order to attain an overview of the existing information and find the most relevant information for my research. I was, yet, not able to present the whole literature base and articles, only select the sections that I believed were important. This proves a risk of both bias from me as a researcher and the fact that I could have missed relevant information by removing it. I have, as a result, selectively and critically analyzed the sources in correlation to my research questions in order to achieve high validity (Desai & Potter 2006, 123).

### 4.3. Content Analysis and Conceptual Analysis

After the selection of my sources for this research, I decided to proceed with content analysis. The method implies a methodological examination of the content in the found sources which allowed me to extract key ideas and concepts (Drisko & Maschi 2015, 82). This literature study had an inductive approach which signifies that the content analysis identified eventual connections and patterns through these observations and, thereafter, a conclusion could be drawn (Ibid, 82). Content analysis is often divided into two types: conceptual analysis and relational analysis. Conceptual analysis is useful to identify the existence and frequency of various concepts while relational analysis continues further by identifying the relationship between the concepts in the texts. I chose to use the conceptual analysis in my study where the purpose is to examine the content - the existence of various criticism in the text, rather than the frequency of the concepts. In order to perform a conceptual analysis, the text of the chosen articles had to be coded and broken down into code categories to summarize the information. I performed a selective reduction which allowed me to focus on specific codes that helped to answer my research questions. This was done by hand in order to identify implicit information and concepts as well as it allowed me to recognize errors such as typos and misspelling. On the other hand, there is always a risk for coding errors, although, it can be minimized. The reliability of this content analysis, thus, depends on the stability

of the coding process which included my ability to code the concepts in the same way during the study's time period. The validity of the conceptual analysis is, therefore, ensured with my consistency to follow the coding rules described below (Columbia University 2019).

Coding rules for my first research question: *What are the main criticism toward the WSF since its emergence in 2001 and what are the reasons behind them?*

1. The focus of analysis: words (concepts) and phrases that were divided into concepts.
2. Structure criticism according to the following already identified concepts: elitism, exclusion, ineffectiveness, and transparency.
3. Flexibility allowed to add concepts during the reading and coding process when new concepts were identified.
4. Words in different grammatical forms, such as adjectives and verbs, were converted into nouns and structured into categories, for example, "elitist (adj.)" was coded as "elitism (noun)". Synonyms and antonyms implying the same meaning were also coded in the chosen concepts, for instance, the antonym "effectiveness" was coded as "ineffectiveness".
5. Implicit concepts were used, for example, "not allowed to participate" implied the same meaning of "exclusion".

(Columbia University 2019).

The criticism and concepts that were identified in the sources were rearranged into themes and concepts and then presented in a summary record sheet (Hart 1998, 146). The chart itself included the following categories: author/publication year/journal, title, theory/methodology, main criticism, and themes/concepts, inspired by table 3 in University of Gothenburg's handbook *Riktlinjer för litteraturstudier vid IKI* (Håman et al 2005, 22). The chart allowed me to compare and identify commonalities and differences between the criticism described by the chosen sources. Thereafter, the criticism is explained and analyzed in comparison to the WSF's charter of principles and the chosen theories of social justice and the transnational public sphere. The criticism, thus, gave a perspective whether the practices of the WSF is living up to its ideals or not. Further, the content of the WSF's charter of principles and the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda is examined. Another conceptual analysis is done to identify the common concepts (Columbia University 2019).

Coding rules for my second question: *Are the WSF's principles reflected in the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda? If yes, do they indicate that the WSF has been influencing global development policies?*

1. The focus of analysis: words (concepts).
2. Structure concepts according to the following categories: economy, environment, equality & justice, gender, people, and partnership.
3. Flexibility allowed to add concepts during the reading and coding process when new concepts were identified.

4. Words in different grammatical forms, such as adjectives and verbs, were converted into nouns and structured into categories, for example, “environmentally (adj.)” was coded as “environment (noun)”. Synonyms and antonyms implying the same meaning were also coded in the chosen concepts, for instance, the antonym “injustice” was coded as “justice”.
  5. Implicit concepts were used, for example, “men and women” implied the same meaning of “gender”.
- (Columbia University 2019)

Thereafter, I made another summary record sheet to present the findings which included the categories in following order: common concepts, the WSF’s charter of principles, and the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda. This showed if the WSF’s principles could be found in the 17 SDGs in relation to my chosen theories of social justice and transnational public sphere, providing an indication on the WSF’s role in influencing global development policies (Hart 1998, 146).

#### 4.4. Self-Critical Methodological Reflections

Literature review and content analysis with a conceptual analysis were chosen as suitable methods in this study in order to answer my research questions. First of all, I chose to only use English sources for my empirical findings because it is the official scientific language. This might have excluded relevant articles on other languages such as Portuguese because of the WSF’s Brazilian origin and the possibility that more is written in Portuguese (Segesten 2017, 103-108). Moreover, the process of content analysis and conceptual analysis was time consuming because of the extensive reading of previous research. The titles did not always provide a clear understanding whether criticism toward the WSF was being discussed or not. For that reason, I had to read through a large number of abstracts and body texts carefully in order to exclude irrelevant sources as well as identify the criticism and the arguments behind them. In some cases, the whole article was the argument which I, consequently, had to read and examine several times to be able to effectively summarize and conceptualize it (Columbia University 2019).

The conceptual analysis with the coding process was also challenging at times. Even if I had specific coding rules, it was a challenge to divide the arguments into different concepts because of the fact that I chose to use both explicit and implicit words and phrases with a high level of implication. Therefore, I had to read the sources carefully in order to understand if a criticism was implied and which words or phrases (arguments) could be connected to which concepts (Ibid). In addition, the chosen themes are intertwined which made some concepts suitable in several main themes, for example, elitism can be both a part of exclusion and inequity & inequality. Also, some criticism were suitable in several concepts because of the interweaving which complicated the coding process further. In these situations, I chose to divide the arguments in order to place them under a suitable concept. Apart from this, not all criticism have been included due to limited space and time. These criticism have, though, not been the main arguments in the articles. Some criticism have been mentioned in one sentence without further elaboration which I, then, chose to exclude



in this study. Even if it was challenging, my methods are well written and detailed which increases the validity and the possibility to reproduce this study. Moreover, this study has been read, discussed and given feedback by a supervisor, a teacher and other students, which increases the validity and reliability further.

## 5. Result

*In this chapter, I will present the empirical findings regarding criticism toward the WSF. I have divided them into diverse themes and concepts. The empirical findings regarding the WSF's principles and the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda are also presented.*

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### 5.1. Criticism toward the WSF

The main criticism toward the WSF since its emergence in 2001 can be categorized into three themes: organizational structure, exclusion, and inequity and inequality. First, the organizational structure has been criticized for existing power relations, ineffectiveness, lacking organizational capacity, and lacking transparency. Second, the criticism regarding exclusion concerns exclusion due to the individual's financial situation, the direct exclusion of certain actors, and elitism. Third, the WSF is criticized for inequity and inequality regarding the representation of gender, race, and ethnicity. As seen in the *summary record sheet 5.1.*, the criticism regarding exclusion has been present in all chosen articles, even though they are written from different theoretical standpoints, while criticism regarding the organizational structure and inequity and inequality has been mentioned fewer times. These criticism have, thus, followed the WSF since its emergence until current days.

Summary record sheet 5.1. An overview of the main criticism of each author and the identified common themes/concepts.

Author/ Publication Year/Book or Journal	Title	Theory/Methodology	Main criticism	Themes/Concepts
Teivainen, T. 2003, <i>World Social Forum: Challenging Empires</i>	The World Social Forum: Arena or Actor	Arena, actor/Literature review	<p>Lack of debates and action. Confusion of its nature/character whether it is an arena or an actor.</p> <p>No clarity in the functioning of the WSF: Unclear role and labor division between the IC and the Secretariat.</p> <p>Participation of presidents of countries even though political actors should be excluded.</p> <p>Its close connection to political parties.</p> <p>Predominance of men in the OC.</p> <p>Racial tensions due to the whiteness of the WSF's participants.</p>	<p>Organizational Structure/Ineffectiveness</p> <p>Organizational Structure/Transparency</p> <p>Exclusion/Political &amp; military actors</p> <p>Exclusion/Elitism</p> <p>Inequity &amp; Inequality/Gender</p> <p>Inequity &amp; Inequality/Race &amp; ethnicity</p>
Wallerstein, I. 2004, <i>International Social Science Journal</i>	The Dilemmas of Open Space: the Future of the WSF	Open space, criticism/Literature review, historical review	<p>There is a hidden hierarchy because decisions are still being made.</p> <p>The WSF is not concrete nor practical. Focused on sloganeering. Confusion of its nature/character.</p> <p>No clarity in the functioning of the WSF. Lack of transparency in the decision-making.</p> <p>Exclusion of political and military actors. Dependence on funding from NGOs.</p> <p>Not an objective counter-event by the global civil society which has led to refused participation.</p>	<p>Organizational structure/Power relations</p> <p>Organizational structure/Ineffectiveness</p> <p>Organizational structure/Transparency</p> <p>Exclusion/Political &amp; military actors</p> <p>Exclusion/Elitism</p>

Álvarez, R. et al 2008, <i>Critical Sociology</i>	The Contours of Color at the World Social Forum: Reflections on Racialized Politics, Representation, and the Global Justice Movement	Ethnicity, global justice movement, race, white privilege/Survey with open-ended questions	The high entrance fees exclude people from participating.  Overrepresentation of white privileged groups. Themes concerning racism was in minority.	Exclusion/Economy  Inequity & Inequality/Race & ethnicity
Worth, O. & Buckley, K. 2009, <i>Third World Quarterly</i>	The World Social Forum: postmodern prince or court jester?	Postmodern prince, counter-hegemonic discourse/Literature review	The WSF has failed at becoming a space for creating a counter-hegemonic movement. It has become a directionless “talk shop”.  The high entrance fees exclude people from participating.  The WSF becoming an arena for political campaigning and propaganda spreading. Dependence on funding from governments and the private sector.  LOCs consist of an elite such as activists from leading NGO and academics. Close link to political parties.	Organizational Structure/Ineffectiveness  Exclusion/Economy  Exclusion/Political & military actors  Exclusion/Elitism
Conway, J. 2011, <i>Third World Quarterly</i>	Cosmopolitan or Colonial? The World Social Forum as ‘contact Zone’	Contact zone, subaltern cosmopolitanism, colonial difference, coloniality of power, public sphere theory, translation/ Participant observation, interview, literature review	The high entrance fees exclude people from participating.  The WSF is dependent on political parties.  Women are underrepresented in the WSFs.  Unequal representation of marginalized groups, such as indigenous people, as well as their knowledge is not incorporated into the WSFs.	Exclusion/Economy  Exclusion/Elitism  Inequity & Inequality/Gender  Inequity & Inequality/Race and ethnicity
Kerswell, T. 2012, <i>Theory in Action</i>	Globalizing the Social Movements? Labour and the World Social Forum	Open space, horizontally networked politics, labor/Literature review	Old politics are discussed and there are minor outcomes.  Lack of transparency due to no central organizing vision.  The high entrance fees exclude people from participating.  Exclusion of political and military actors. Participation depends on organizations’ ability to fund the WSF.	Organizational structure/Ineffectiveness  Organizational Structure/Transparency  Exclusion/Economy  Exclusion/Political & military actors

Scerri, A. 2013, <i>Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest</i>	The World Social Forum: Another World Might Be Possible	Global justice, path of subjectivity and rationality, critical political action, non-domination/ Observation, participation research	Lack of organizational capacity.  The high entrance fees and travel costs exclude people from participating. People are denied visa.  The organizational structure is inclined to well-resourced groups than grassroots groups.	Organizational Structure/Organizational capacity  Exclusion/Economy  Exclusion/Elitism
Peña, A.M. & Davis, R.T. 2014, <i>New Political Economy</i>	Globalisation from Above? Corporate Social Responsibility, the Workers' Party and the Origins of the World Social Forum	Global governance, corporate social responsibility, civil society/Interview and literature review of previous research, documents, publications, and press media	Elitism has been a feature of the WSF since its emergence. Close relation to political parties and corporate movements.	Exclusion/Elitism
Desai, M. 2016, <i>Gender &amp; Society</i>	SWS 2015 Feminist Lecture: The Gendered Geographies of Struggle: The World Social Forum and Its Sometimes Overlapping Other Worlds	Gendered geographies, global justice, gender justice, transnational feminisms/Literature review	The high entrance fees exclude people from participating. People are denied visa.  WSF is outsourcing gender issues. Underrepresentation of women in the WSFs. Predominance of men in the IC and the LOCs.	Exclusion/Economy  Inequity & Inequality/Gender
Lorin, C. M. 2020, <i>Globalizations</i>	The World Social Forum: the paradoxical quest for strength in plurality	Open spaces, transnational activism/Reflexive study	The WSF claims to be horizontal while dynamic power relations also exist.  Lack of transparency, e.g. no single general website. The structure and organization is closed for the rest of the global civil society  Facilitation meeting – inaccessible for some local organizations.	Organizational Structure/Power relations  Organizational Structure/Transparency  Exclusions/Elitism

### 5.1.1. Organizational Structure

The organizational structure of the WSF has been criticized due to several aspects: power relation, ineffectiveness, organizational capacity, and transparency by the authors Teivainen (2003), Wallerstein (2004), Worth & Buckley (2009), Kerswell (2012), Scerri (2013), and Mac Lorin (2020).

#### *Power relations (Horizontality)*

As described in the charter of principles, the WSF is supposed to be a horizontal open meeting space for actors in the global civil society. In other words, it is decentralized without spokespersons, leaders, or hierarchies (WSF 2016). Nevertheless, criticism describes that internal power relations exist within the WSF. The WSF's ideals and practices contradict each other. For instance, as Mac Lorin describes, there is a constant need to balance the urgency of taking decisions on logistical matters on the one side, and the WSF's principles of horizontality on the other side (Mac Lorin 2020, 251-253). It is, hence, not possible to have a horizontal structure with no hierarchy because decisions still need to be made in each edition of the WSF. In conclusion, there is an undemocratic hidden hierarchy within the WSF (Wallerstein 2004, 635). As a result of this contradiction, it might discourage people to participate in the WSF. For that reason, Lorin argues that the WSF should be advocating the search for horizontality, rather than claiming that it already exists (Mac Lorin 2020, 254-255).

#### *Ineffectiveness*

The charter of principles explains the aim of the WSF to develop alternative strategies to neoliberal economic globalization and to solve the issues of social inequality and exclusions, including building another world (WSF 2016). Yet, the WSF is criticized for being ineffective. Hundreds of thousands of people have met during several social forums the past decade and yet the outcomes are minor (Kerswell 2012, 90). It has, thus, failed at becoming a space for creating a counter-hegemonic movement and realizing potential transformation (Worth & Buckley 2009, 649-650) because it is not concrete nor practical in its orientation. The criticism is, thus, that the WSF is more focused on sloganeering, such as the slogan "Another world is possible" with insufficient debates between different views and insufficient action (Wallerstein 2004, 634-635; Teivainen 2003, 129). It has become a directionless "talk shop" where the same discussions are taking place, also referred to as old politics. The same subjects are talked over every year while no actual outcome is provided. This is probably one reason for the loss of members (Worth & Buckley 2009, 650; Wallerstein 2004, 634-635, Kerswell 2012, 89). Without strategic objectives, the WSF and its aim to develop alternative strategies appears useless. Strategic objectives have been proposed twice, through the Manifesto of Porto Alegre and the Bamako Appeal. Nonetheless, both have been denied as violation and interfering of the principle that the WSF should be an open space (Worth

& Buckley, 653; Kerswell 2012, 82). Kerswell, hence, describes the WSF to be in a crisis phase and in decline due to loss of participants and its irregular activities (Kerswell 2012, 88).

Furthermore, the criticism regarding the ineffectiveness of the WSF has contributed to debates about the nature and character of the WSF. Some events are organized in the name of the WSF even if it has not been recognized officially. Moreover, some social movements have concluded in documents, implemented resolutions, and performed political action within the framework of the WSF which has been seen as official acts by the WSF (Teivainen 2003, 125-126; Wallerstein 2004, 635). This creates confusion whether the WSF is an actor or an arena. There is also a big pressure for the WSF to become an actor in order to make concrete political statements and act accordingly to achieve its aims stated in the charter of principles. However, criticism show that there is a need to implement democratic and transparent mechanisms that are lacking before the WSF can act as a political actor. There are also suggestions that the WSF could remain an arena but also become an actor (Teivainen 2003, 125-126).

### *Organizational Capacity*

Like the criticism of ineffectiveness, the charter of principles envisions another possible world. However, Scerri argues that the WSF has a lack of organizational capacity both in general, to create alternative development strategies, and in practice. As an example, he describes the WSF 2011 in (Senegal) as a logistical failure. The university campus was occupied by classes and so the WSF took place in tents outside. Therefore, the information was lacking about different meetings and workshops. For instance, the march organized by the Egyptian Embassy had relatively few participants who had found out about the activity by chance. Furthermore, street sellers had come down, selling water in plastic bottles, Chinese goods, contradicting the WSF's charter of principles of fair trade. Well-resourced groups had installed sound systems, leaving the others in difficult sound conditions. According to Scerri, this is what can be expected from a free neoliberal market but not a WSF as a political progressive event. Every morning there were piles of garbage, including plastic waste, that were burned by the university staff. In addition, the WSF took place far from the city center where there was a lack of infrastructure and there were no charter buses either for transportation which made it difficult for people to even arrive at the location (Scerri 2013, 114-115).

### *Transparency*

One the one hand, the WSF builds on democratic principles and practices with an emphasis on transparency of the reflections and the exchange of opinions occurring during the WSF. On the other hand, the WSF is criticized for the lack of transparency. There is no single general website that shares information from the WSF except temporary websites for each edition of the WSF. This makes its structure and organization closed for the rest of the global civil society (Mac Lorin 2020, 253). There is no clarity in the functioning of the WSF: the role of the IC and the Secretariat, the

division of labor, and its process of decision-making due to lack of methodology and no central organizing vision (Wallerstein 2004, 635; Teivainen 2003, 124; Mac Lorin 2020, 253; Kerswell 2012, 73).

### 5.1.2. Exclusion

As seen in the summary record sheet, several authors, such as Teivainen (2003), Wallerstein (2004), Álvarez et al (2008), Worth & Buckley (2009), Conway (2011), Scerri (2013) and Desai (2015), agree that the WSF is not an inclusive open space. Instead, the WSF seems to widen the already existing gap while isolating people who are not able to attend due to financial, geographical, or educational limits.

#### *Economic Exclusion*

The charter of principles states that the WSF is an open space for all citizens of every nation on every level, local to international. The criticism, though, states that the WSF has become exclusionary. The WSF has a system where participants must pay an entrance fee in relation to their economic status in the region of origin. Though, the prices are often still too high for smaller local organizations and citizens which excludes them from participation (Worth & Buckley 2009, 655). For example, the WSF 2007 in Nairobi (Kenya) was held in a gated sports area with an entrance of \$7. This was problematic because 56% of the population lives on less than \$1 per day. This excluded many Kenyan citizens and smaller local grassroots movements from participating because of the inability to pay the fee (Álvarez et al 2008, 402; Desai 2016, 879; Worth & Buckley 2009, 655; Kerswell 2012, 89). Therefore, the People's Parliament (an organization) stormed the entrance gates to protest against the entrance fees. According to Conway, their spokesperson Wangui Mbatia, argues that it is unfair that 90 % of the participants at the WSF are not Kenyans. Their fight is not just regarding the entrance but to be recognized as people (Conway 2011, 223). In addition, an alternative social forum was held to protest against the segregation based on economic aspects (Álvarez et al 2008, 402; Desai 2016, 879; Worth & Buckley 2009, 655). This shows that if even the local organization is excluded from the WSF, there is minimal chance for other organizations from the Global South to participate due to participation and travel costs such as visas (Kerswell 2012, 89, Scerri 2013, 116). Another problem with visas can be seen in the WSF 2016 held in Montreal (Canada) that was criticized because activists from the Global South were denied visas by the Canadian government, which is not uncommon in general for all the WSFs (Desai 2016, 883; Scerri 2013, 116).

#### *Exclusion of Political and Military Actors*

Military organizations, both formal and informal such as FARC, and party representations are restricted from participating. This is problematic because political parties are essential societal groups. Further, the problem with excluding military groups and groups engaged in violence is that



violence can often be considered legitimate for marginalized groups with no alternatives (Wallerstein 2004, 635). From an ideological perspective, this excludes potential participants (Kerswell 2012, 77).

The charter of principles clearly states political and military actors should not participate in the WSF. The WSF has, consequently, been accused of hypocrisy. Namely, political actors such as Evo Morales, Lula da Silva, and Hugo Chavez amongst others, have participated while others, such as the prime minister from Belgium, have been denied participation. The decisions regarding political actors have, evidently, been inconsistent (Teivainen 2003, 127; Worth & Buckley 2009, 656). There is, consequently, criticism that the WSF has become an arena for political campaigning and propaganda spreading. In a lack of direction from the WSF, it has been taken over by populist leaders and parties (Worth & Buckley 2009, 656-658).

The inconsistency of decision is explained by the connection to WSF's funding. It is funded by both governments, NGOs, and the private sector. Actors that contribute with financial support are often not denied participation. For instance, the Ford Foundation has played a role in the funding which did not stop them from participating even if they do not oppose neoliberal globalization (Worth & Buckley 2009, 655; Wallerstein 2004, 634-635; Kerswell 2012, 79).

### *Elitism*

The WSF's charter of principles emphasizes that there should be a diversity of participants. Still, it is argued that the WSF has become elitist. Worth & Buckley argue that the WSFs have been organized by LOCs consisting of elite bodies such as activists from leading NGOs and academics. This has resulted in the selection of themes that align with their interests. Participants in the WSFs are from privileged backgrounds and have a higher academic level. For instance, in the WSF 2005 in Porto Alegre (Brazil), 30 % of the participants had a postgraduate qualification. The WSF has also developed into a trade fair for NGOs, government workers and academics to express their ideas and values on behalf of subaltern classes, instead of being an arena for anti-globalization expressions. It is continuously argued that the WSF is a type of court jester and a playground that serves for entertainment for the global civil society. An example brought up is the diversity of the panels and stalls in the WSF 2007 in Nairobi. Worth & Buckley mention the comment of José Fogaça when describing the WSF as an ideological Disneyland. The panels and stalls were strategically placed in relation to each other such as human right groups were placed beside the panels discussing the development of Vietnamese socialism; environmental groups beside campaigns for oil sovereignty; national liberation groups beside the international socialists; faith groups beside the eco-anarchists, and NGOs beside international and national political coalitions alongside with bookshops sponsored by the World Bank (Worth & Buckley 2009, 649-659). It is, consequently, not considered as an objective counter-event by the global civil society which has resulted in refused participation (Wallerstein 2004, 634-635).

Furthermore, in the WSF 2016, there was a facilitation meeting that was the principal decision-making structure. Although, it was perceived as exclusive for some of the local organizations (Mac

Lorin 2020, 257). The organizational structure is more inclined to well-resourced groups than grassroots groups (Scerri 2013, 118).

Peña and Davis argue that elitism has been there since the WSF's emergence. The WSF has a close link to the Workers Party, which was fundamental for the funding of the WSF, and the Brazilian corporate movement for social responsibility. This is due to existing intimate relations with businessmen and the political elite supported by the Workers Party (Peña & Davies 2014, 259-273; Teivainen 2003, 127; Worth & Buckley 2009, 654). The choice of hosting the WSFs in Porto Alegre has, hence, been tactical because of support by the Workers Party and the city is known for participatory budgeting (Conway 2011, 232).

### 5.1.3. Inequity and Inequality

There is criticism that argue that the WSF is promoting inequity and inequality in its representation regarding both gender, race and ethnicity. This includes the authors Teivainen (2003), Álvarez et al (2008), Conway (2011), and Desai (2015).

#### *Gender Inequity & Inequality*

The charter of principles states that the WSF includes all citizens – men and women – and emphasizes the diversity of genders. In contrast, Desai argues that the WSF is outsourcing gender issues and that there is a minor presence of women in the WSF as speakers in the plenary meetings which are dominated by men (Desai 2016, 879-881; Conway 2011, 226). For instance, the WSF 2009 in Belem (Brazil) addressed the indigenous' issues, including indigenous women while the majority of the speakers were men. The meetings and workshops addressing gender issues are often defined as women's issues instead of unequal gender power relations. The themes are limited to specific issues such as women trafficking, domestic violence, etc., instead of being integral to all social justice issues. In addition, these sessions are usually organized and attended by women in the self-organized sessions rather than as a part of the plenaries. Therefore, it is the responsibility of women to raise their issues of marginalization rather than being a concern for the whole WSF. The most gender-equal WSF was in 2004 in Mumbai (India). There was almost equal representation of women and men speakers in the plenaries and the number of self-organized sessions and workshops addressing gender issues. This is a consequence of the high women participation in the Indian LOC (Desai 2016, 870-881). Otherwise, the IC and the LOC in various sites have been dominated by middle-age male activists (Desai 2016, 878; Teivainen 2003, 127). As a result of this insufficient women representation in the WSF, the Feminist Dialogues was created, although, it dissolved due to lack of funding. In conclusion, there is no equal gender representation in the WSF (Desai 2016, 870-880).

### *Racial and Ethnic Inequity and Inequality*

The charter of principles states that the WSF includes citizens of all nations with an emphasis on the diversity of ethnicities and cultures. Conway, on the other hand, argues that there are unequal and asymmetrical power relations among the global civil society, especially due to legacies of colonialism that hinder communicability and solidarity across different groups. Dynamics of domination and subordination still exist. This has led to an unequal representation of marginalized groups such as POC and indigenous people in the WSF. Due to lacking affirmative action to ensure equal representation, these inequalities reproduce themselves in the open space. Their voices have been muted in the deliberation processes in the WSFs (Conway 2011, 226).

As earlier described in the section of research on the WSF, Álvarez and his research team did a survey in the WSF 2005 and their findings showed that the majority of the participants identified themselves as white. (Álvarez et al 2008, 390-395). Therefore, they argue that the majority of the participants in the Brazilian editions of the WSFs in Porto Alegre were of racially privileged groups within Latin America, and Brazil in particular. In comparison to other Brazilian cities, Porto Alegre is located in the relatively prosperous region of Brazil and has a high population of local white people with European origins and less proportion of people of color. Álvarez et al, additionally, argue that the WSF is excluding people of color by strategically choosing locations that are disadvantageous for them (Álvarez et al 2008, 395; Teivainen 2003, 127, Conway 2011, 232). In addition, it was evident that white people had higher social status and class, while POC seemed to have lower social status and class. These patterns were particularly seen in the WSF. The panels consisted of white males while the cleaning and service teams consisted of POC (Álvarez et al 2008, 397). Tevainen also describes this as racial tensions within the WSF (Teivainen 2003, 126).

Moreover, the research team noticed that only a minority of themes brought up the racial dimensions of issues in the WSF:s meetings, even if the majority of the issues discussed, such as poverty, are related to people of color. Negritude, a movement for racial equality, protested on the last day of the WSF 2005 in order to demand more attention to the issues concerning racism at the WSFs where the majority of the protesters were POC. Another protest took place in the WSF 2006 in Caracas (Venezuela) by indigenous people for similar concerns about lacking coverage of their issues (Álvarez et al 2008, 398-402). Many marginalized groups have also noticed that their knowledge has not been incorporated into the WSF even if they have been actively engaged (Conway 2011, 226).

The research team also noticed that some participants expressed racist thoughts. For example, an audience member at the workshop “right to work” showed anti-immigrant sentiments (Álvarez et al 2008, 399). Simple co-presence will, hence, not generate dialogues and mutual understanding, even if all participants oppose neoliberal globalization, and especially not address the inequality (Conway 2011, 226).

## 5.2. The WSF:s Principles and the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda

The identified common concepts are: democratic participation, economy, environment, equality and justice, gender, peace, and partnership. The *summary record sheet 5.2.* shows that all 17 SDGs

of the 2030 Agenda can be connected to the WSF:s charter of principles, even though not all fourteen principles are connected to the SDGs. This depends on the fact that some principles focuses on the organizational structure of the WSF rather than its values and aims. The summary record sheet shows that most of the WSF:s principles are related to democratic participation and equality and justice while most SDGs also are related to equality and justice as well as environment. Both of the principles and the SDGs, thus, emphasizes the importance to achieve equality and justice. Regarding the largest differences, eight principles emphasizes democratic participation while only one SDG deals with that concern, eight principles emphasizes partnership while only one SDG does, and only three principles emphasizes environment while eight SDGs do.

Summary record sheet 5.2. A comparative chart with identified common concepts in the WSF's charter of principles and the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda.

Concepts	WSF's Charter of Principles	17 SDGs of the Agenda 2030
Democratic participation	<p><u>Principle 1:</u> Democratic debate of ideas ... free exchange of experiences</p> <p><u>Principle 4:</u> Rest on democratic international systems and institutions. Sovereignty of peoples.</p> <p><u>Principle 7:</u> Assured the right, during such meetings, to deliberate ... without directing, hierarchizing, censoring or restricting them</p> <p><u>Principle 8:</u> Decentralized fashion</p> <p><u>Principle 10:</u> Practices of real democracy, participatory democracy</p> <p><u>Principle 11:</u> Movement if ideas</p> <p><u>Principle 12:</u> Places special value on the exchange among them</p> <p><u>Principle 14:</u> Active participation</p>	Goal 16: Strong Institutions
Economy	<p><u>Principle 1:</u> Opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism</p> <p><u>Principles 4:</u> Stand in opposition to a process of globalization</p> <p><u>Principles 11:</u> Domination by capital, on means and actions to resist and overcome that domination. capitalist globalization with its ... destructive dimensions</p> <p><u>Principle 12:</u> Centre economic activity</p>	Goal 8: Sustainable Economic Growth Goal 9: Innovation and Sustainable Industrialization
Environment	<p><u>Principle 1:</u> Fruitful relationships among Humankind and between it and the Earth.</p> <p><u>Principle 4:</u> Respect ... the environment</p> <p><u>Principle 12:</u> Respecting nature, in the present and for future generations</p>	Goal 6: sustainable management of water and sanitation Goal 7: Sustainable Energy Goal 8: Sustainable Economic Growth Goal 11: Sustainable cities Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production Goal 13: Climate Action Goal 14: Life Below Water Goal 15: Life on Land
Equality and Justice	<p><u>Principle 4:</u> Respect universal human rights, and those of all citizens ... of all nations. Rest on ... social justice, equality.</p> <p><u>Principle 5:</u> From all the countries in the world</p> <p><u>Principle 8:</u> The World Social Forum is a plural, diversified ... context.</p>	Goal 1: No poverty Goal 2: Zero hunger Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being Goal 4: Quality Education

	<p><u>Principle 9:</u> Open to pluralism ... diversity of genders, ethnicities, cultures, generations and physical capacities.</p> <p><u>Principle 10:</u> Respect for Human Rights. Equality ... among people, ethnicities, genders and people, and condemns all forms of domination and all subjection of one person by another.</p> <p><u>Principle 11:</u> Solve the problems of exclusion and social inequality.</p> <p><u>Principle 12:</u> Meeting the needs of people.</p>	<p>Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation</p> <p>Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy</p> <p>Goal 8: Decent Work</p> <p>Goal 9: Infrastructure</p> <p>Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities</p> <p>Goal 11: Opportunities for All</p> <p>Goal 16: Access to Justice</p>
Gender	<p><u>Principle 4:</u> Respect... men and women.</p> <p><u>Principle 8:</u> The World Social Forum is a ... diversified ... context</p> <p><u>Principle 9:</u> Open to ... diversity of genders.</p> <p><u>Principles 10:</u> Equality ... among ... genders.</p>	Goal 5: Gender Equality
Peace	<p><u>Principle 10:</u> Opposed to ... the use of violence as a means of social control by the State. Peaceful relations.</p>	Goal 16: Peaceful societies
Partnership	<p><u>Principle 1:</u> Interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society.</p> <p><u>Principle 5:</u> Brings together and interlinks ... organizations and movements of civil society from all the countries in the world.</p> <p><u>Principle 12:</u> Encourages understanding and mutual recognition</p> <p><u>Principle 13:</u> Strengthen and create new national and international links</p> <p>Principle 14: Building a new world in solidarity</p>	Goal 17: Partnerships

Based on (WSF 2016; UN 2015).

## 6. Analysis and Discussion

*In this chapter, an analysis and discussion of the empirical findings is done through the theoretical framework: the theories of social justice and the transnational public sphere, in order to answer the research questions.*

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### 6.1. The Fulfillment of the WSF's Principles

The WSF is described as an open space meeting for the global civil society to develop alternative strategies. It can, hence, be seen as a transnational public sphere, specifically a transnational counter public, because it encourages people opposing the dominant public sphere of neoliberal economic globalization to meet and discuss the current social and political problems from a new perspective (WSF 2016; Olesen 254). This allows actors to create new relationships and build their identities. The WSF can also be divided into smaller transnational subaltern counter publics that participate in the meetings as subordinate social groups (Olesen 254-255; Fraser 1990, 60-67).

Following Fraser's definition of a transnational public sphere, I could conclude that the WSF is not completely fulfilling the two conditions. First, not all participants are equal in the deliberations due to the WSF's exclusiveness, elitist character, and underrepresentation of marginalized groups which results in low normative legitimacy. The location of the WSF is, for instance, an important factor of who will and can participate and whose issues are brought up (Teivainen 2003, 126-127; Wallerstein 2004, 634-635; Álvarez et al 2008, 390-402; Worth & Buckley 2009, 649-659; Conway 2011, 223-232; and Desai 2015, 870-883). On the other hand, the inequalities within the WSF are exposed and can be addressed in order for all actors to have the same possibility to influence the development discourse (Fraser 1990, 22; Steffek 2010, 62). Moreover, the WSF is not considered to be effective enough and lacks the organizational capacity to mobilize public opinion as a political force to demand a change and accountability of the public power. The controversies of power relations/horizontality, exclusion of political and military actors/participation of political and military actors as well as the lack of transparency, weakens the participants view on the WSF's legitimacy which has led to fewer participants (Teivainen 2003, 124-129; Wallerstein 2004, 634-635; Worth & Buckley 2009, 649-653; Kerswell 2012, 73-90; Scerri 2013, 114-115; Mac Lorin 2020, 251-255). Second, there is no direct translation from the global civil society to the administrative power because the WSF is only supposed to be an arena and not an actor. Therefore, the capacity condition becomes irrelevant in this case of the WSF as a transnational sphere (WSF 2016; Fraser 1990, 22). According to Bohmann's definition, the WSF is more successful. The WSF is a space where people exchange views and opinions. Nevertheless, as seen in the criticism, the opinions are not always in commitment to equality and freedom due to present racist thoughts. There is an indefinite audience, even though not all have equal conditions to participate and be heard (Bohman 2007, 60; Álvarez et al 2008, 399). The WSF is, thus, not living up to its' ideal as an open space meeting for the global civil society to develop alternative strategies.

The WSF is also described to combat social injustice and inequality that is explained as a matter of domination and oppression in the world (Young 2011, 39). Even so, the WSF is criticized for practices of inequity and inequality based on gender, race, and ethnicity. This is due to overrepresentation of some voices such as the domination of men (patriarchy) and people with racially privileged backgrounds (white supremacy) as well as exclusion due to economic conditions and levels of education. However, gender, racism, and ethnocentrism issues are important perspectives to achieve social justice and equality. In a vision of finding another possible world, the WSF actually reinforces the existing social injustices and segregation, thus, becoming ineffective in its aim to develop alternative strategies to neoliberal economic globalization (Young 2011, 39). Even if themes regarding economic redistribution are addressed, some groups are left behind. To clarify, the criticism shows that the issues of marginalized groups, including economic redistribution, are not fully represented, rather underrepresented in the WSF's meetings. Economic restructuring is difficult to implement when the old economic structures are embedded in the WSF which means people are excluded due to their economic circumstances. Further, the recognition of marginalized groups is also lacking in the WSF. Racially privileged people are in domination which undermines other groups and disrespects the importance of their struggles. This goes hand in hand with political representation. If marginalized groups are not equally represented, it provides signals that they have less right to claim economic redistribution and cultural recognition. The WSF is, therefore, in lack of participatory parity because all actors in the global civil society are not participating on equal terms in the social forum. These structures need to be demolished in order to combat global social injustices because the participants are an important factor in shaping another world (Fraser 2012, 41-51). Based on these arguments, it can be concluded that the WSF does not live up to its' ideal as an open space to combat social injustices and inequalities.

## 6.2. Common Concepts between the WSF's Principles and the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda

The WSF's charter of principles emphasizes democratic participation, economy, environment, equality and justice, gender, peace, and partnership. Principles regarding democratic participation (1, 4, 7, 8, 10-12 and 14) signify that the WSF should be a democratic decentralized space where the participants have the right to participate, represent, deliberate, and exchange ideas and experiences freely. The proposed alternative strategies to neoliberal economic globalization should rest on democratic international systems and institutions (WSF 2016). These principles are reflected in the SDG 16 where the aim is to develop accountable, effective, and transparent institutions at all levels (local to global) as well as to strengthen the already existing democratic institutions. There is, for instance, a need to substantially reduce corruption. The decision-making should also be inclusive, participatory, responsive, and representative in similarity to the WSF's principles (UN 2020). The WSF's principles and the 17 SDGs, thus, acknowledge that democratic political participation and representation is necessary to achieve social justice (Young 2011, 173-174; Fraser 2012, 41-51). One way is to focus on the importance and need for partnership which



several of the WSF's principles (1, 5 and 12-14) address. It will interlink actors in the global civil society from different levels and all over the world which will encourage mutual recognition, understanding, and solidarity as well as to achieve effective action in order to build a new world based on justice and equality (WSF 2016). Likewise, the SDG 17 states that partnerships are necessary to achieve sustainable development. Partnerships between different actors, built on shared goals, visions, principles, values, and actions, are needed on all levels, local to global (UN 2020). For instance, there is a need to enhance the South-South, the North-South, and triangular cooperation, which signifies that the Global North facilitates the South-South initiatives through support, management, and funding (UNOSSC 2018).

Principles regarding economy (1, 4, 11 and 12) state that the current neoliberal domination and economic globalization have to be opposed because it has destructive dimensions such as contributing to global social injustice (WSF 2016). These principles are partially reflected in the SDGs 8 and 9 where the aim is to achieve sustainable economic growth. The SDGs do not necessarily oppose neoliberalism but acknowledge the fact that today's economic growth is unsustainable and promotes social injustice such as high global unemployment and the large economic gap between countries in the Global North and Global South. This is the same problem of social injustice and inequality the WSF is referring to (UN 2020). Environment is also an important factor that should be taken into consideration. The WSF's principles (1, 4 and 12) describe the aim to achieve fruitful relationships between people and the environment. The environment has to be respected by the present generation and for the future (WSF 2016). This is seen in the SDGs 6-8 & 11-15 that address environmental degradation and climate change, by achieving a sustainable relationship between people, economy, and the environment that altogether will increase global justice (UN 2020).

Principles addressing equality and justice (4, 5 and 8-12) state that the proposed alternative strategies have to respect the human rights of people of all nations and rest on social justice and equality. The WSF promotes diversity of cultures, ethnicities, genders, generations, and physical capacities (WSF 2016). These values based on social justice and equality can be seen in the SDGs 1-4, 6-11 and 16 where the aim is to reduce poverty and hunger, ensure healthy lives, provide education, and clean water and sanitation, amongst others, for all people. Both the principles and the SDGs emphasize the need for recognition of different marginalized groups and the need for redistribution of resources (Fraser 2012, 41-51). For instance, gender equality is a major aspect of equality. The WSF's principles specifically addressing gender equality (4 and 8-10) describe the need for respect for men and women, and the diversity of genders where everyone is equal (WSF 2016). This is reflected in the SDG 5 that argues that gender equality is a necessary foundation for a sustainable world (UN 2020). Moreover, the 10th principle in the WSF's charter refers to the opposition of violence and instead promotes peaceful and just relations (WSF 2016). Peace is also brought up in the SDGs 16 where the aim is to achieve peaceful and just societies. Therefore, issues such as violence against children and sexual violence have to be addressed and prevented (UN 2020).

In conclusion, it is possible to identify the WSF's principles in the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda. Both are addressing social justice and can be connected to Fraser's all three concepts of redistribution, recognition, and representation as well as the principle of participatory parity (Fraser 2012, 41-51).

### 6.3. The Lessons Learned from the WSF Applied in a Global Perspective

The WSF is one example of the arenas, institutions, organizations, and social movements that fight for social justice (Milani & Landiado 2007, 12). Even if it is considered unique in its nature and character as a horizontal open meeting space for the global civil society, the WSF struggles to live up to its ideals (Whitaker 2020). Similar struggles can be found in other arenas and actors as well. The aim to contribute to global justice through diverse principles and goals, such as reduce poverty and ensure access to food and water for all people, might sound good in theory. Conversely, it is difficult to achieve in practice because of the complexity of achieving social justice in a fair way. The ambition to contribute to a better world is, thus, attractive but not always effective. Therefore, there are always positive and negative aspects with each arena or actor. On the one hand, they represent the struggle for social justice in societies. They fight for every human's right to claim redistribution of resources as well as recognition of all people no matter gender, race or ethnicity. On the other hand, these principles are not met within the global arenas or actors themselves due to lacking participatory parity, becoming the obstacles that they are trying to demolish in the first place (Fraser 2012, 41-51). Their difficulties to mobilize public opinion into a political force also leads to weak performances to achieve global social justice even if they influence global development policies in an indirect or direct way (Fraser 2007, 22-23).

## 7. Conclusion

*In this chapter, conclusions of the analysis and discussion is provided as well as suggestions for further research.*

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The purpose of this study was to get a deeper understanding of the criticism toward the WSF by examining the reasons behind the criticism and comparing them with the WSF's charter of principles in order to see if the WSF is living up to its ideals. In addition, the purpose was also to analyze whether the WSF's principles are reflected in the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda, aiming to see if the social forum has influenced global development policies.

This study shows that the WSF does not live up to its ideal as an open space for all people to develop alternative strategies for another world because of its exclusive and elitist character as well as its lacking organizational structure and ineffectiveness to mobilize a political force and demand a change. Neither does the WSF live up to its other ideal to combat social injustice and inequality, instead, it reinforces these structures within the social forum through underrepresentation of marginalized groups. I will, hence, conclude that the WSF is not living up to its ideals as mentioned in the charter of principles. However, this study is based on criticism which is only one aspect and it does not mean that the WSF has completely abandoned its principles. It is rather a question to which degree the WSF is fulfilling them which might be too complex to answer.

Moreover, the WSF's principles that were implemented in 2001 are found in the 17 SDGs in the 2030 Agenda. The identified common concepts are, thus, democratic participation, economy, environment, equality and justice, gender, peace, and partnership which altogether are an important part to achieve global social justice. In other words, the WSF might have an indirect role in influencing global development policies. On the other hand, it is not enough support in order to establish a definitive conclusion. There are too many factors and variables involved and this study just proves one aspect of it.

Transnational public spheres and actors are necessary because they represent social justice issues. They stand up for every human's equal right to redistribution of resources and recognition on a global level. In spite of this, weaknesses can be found within them. The aims can be difficult to fulfill in practice which can lead to discussions of double standards. It is, therefore, necessary to guarantee participatory parity.

Finally, to achieve deeper insights into the importance and effectiveness of the WSF, it could be relevant to use multilingual sources in order to include more perspectives on the WSF. It could also be relevant to investigate the counter publics within the WSF and its actors. For instance, specific transnational groups that have participated in the WSF and their political outcomes can be examined in order to see the social forums' influence on actors in the global civil society.

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## 9. Appendix

Citation from the WSF's charter of principles (WSF 2016):

1. The World Social Forum is an open meeting space for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among Humankind and between it and the Earth.
2. The World Social Forum at Porto Alegre was an event localized in time and place. From now on, in the certainty proclaimed at Porto Alegre that “another world is possible”, it becomes a permanent process of seeking and building alternatives, which cannot be reduced to the events supporting it.
3. The World Social Forum is a world process. All the meetings that are held as part of this process have an international dimension.
4. The alternatives proposed at the World Social Forum stand in opposition to a process of globalization commanded by the large multinational corporations and by the governments and international institutions at the service of those corporations' interests, with the complicity of national governments. They are designed to ensure that globalization in solidarity will prevail as a new stage in world history. This will respect universal human rights, and those of all citizens – men and women – of all nations and the environment and will rest on democratic international systems and institutions at the service of social justice, equality and the sovereignty of peoples.
5. The World Social Forum brings together and interlinks only organizations and movements of civil society from all the countries in the world, but it does not intend to be a body representing world civil society.
6. The meetings of the World Social Forum do not deliberate on behalf of the World Social Forum as a body. No-one, therefore, will be authorized, on behalf of any of the editions of the Forum, to express positions claiming to be those of all its participants. The participants in the Forum shall not be called on to take decisions as a body, whether by vote or acclamation, on declarations or proposals for action that would commit all, or the majority, of them and that propose to be taken as establishing positions of the Forum as a body. It thus does not constitute a locus of power to be disputed by the participants in its meetings, nor does it intend to constitute the only option for interrelation and action by the organizations and movements that participate in it.
7. Nonetheless, organizations or groups of organizations that participate in the Forums meetings must be assured the right, during such meetings, to deliberate on declarations or actions they may decide on, whether singly or in coordination with other participants. The World Social Forum undertakes to circulate such decisions widely by the means at its

- disposal, without directing, hierarchizing, censoring or restricting them, but as deliberations of the organizations or groups of organizations that made the decisions.
8. The World Social Forum is a plural, diversified, non-confessional, non-governmental and non-party context that, in a decentralized fashion, interrelates organizations and movements engaged in concrete action at levels from the local to the international to build another world.
  9. The World Social Forum will always be a forum open to pluralism and to the diversity of activities and ways of engaging of the organizations and movements that decide to participate in it, as well as the diversity of genders, ethnicities, cultures, generations and physical capacities, providing they abide by this charter of principles. Neither party representations nor military organizations shall participate in the Forum. Government leaders and members of legislatures who accept the commitments of this Charter may be invited to participate in a personal capacity.
  10. The World Social Forum is opposed to all totalitarian and reductionist views of economy, development and history and to the use of violence as a means of social control by the State. It upholds respect for Human Rights, the practices of real democracy, participatory democracy, peaceful relations, in equality and solidarity, among people, ethnicities, genders and peoples, and condemns all forms of domination and all subjection of one person by another.
  11. As a forum for debate, the World Social Forum is a movement of ideas that prompts reflection, and the transparent circulation of the results of that reflection, on the mechanisms and instruments of domination by capital, on means and actions to resist and overcome that domination, and on the alternatives proposed to solve the problems of exclusion and social inequality that the process of capitalist globalization with its racist, sexist and environmentally destructive dimensions is creating internationally and within countries.
  12. As a framework for the exchange of experiences, the World Social Forum encourages understanding and mutual recognition among its participant organizations and movements, and places special value on the exchange among them, particularly on all that society is building to centre economic activity and political action on meeting the needs of people and respecting nature, in the present and for future generations.
  13. As a context for interrelations, the World Social Forum seeks to strengthen and create new national and international links among organizations and movements of society, that – in both public and private life – will increase the capacity for non-violent social resistance to the process of dehumanization the world is undergoing and to the violence used by the State, and reinforce the humanizing measures being taken by the action of these movements and organizations.
  14. The World Social Forum is a process that encourages its participant organizations and movements to situate their actions, from the local level to the national level and seeking active participation in international contexts, as issues of planetary citizenship, and to introduce onto the global agenda the change-inducing practices that they are experimenting in building a new world in solidarity (World Social Forum 2016).