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**THE POPULAR UNIVERSITY OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS
TO EDUCATE ACTIVISTS AND LEADERS OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS,
AS WELL AS SOCIAL SCIENTISTS, SCHOLARS AND ARTISTS
CONCERNED WITH PROGRESSIVE SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION**

PROPOSAL FOR DISCUSSION
Second Version

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Introduction

The first version of this proposal was presented in January 2003 and published in *Democracia Viva* (IBASE), No. 14, January 2003, pp.78-83. In the months that followed it was discussed on several occasions with different people. In Madrid, on April 25, at the headquarters of ACSUR-Las Segovias, with Pedro Santana, Tomas Villasante, Juan Carlos Monedero and several other activists of Spanish and Latin-American nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); in Cartagena de Indias, in June 16-20, during the Thematic World Social Forum on Democracy, Human Rights, Wars, and Narcotraffic, in a workshop coordinated by Pedro Santana, Giampero Rasimelli, Moema Miranda and myself; and finally in Rio de Janeiro, on September 2, at the IBASE headquarters, with Candido Grzybowski, Moema Miranda, several other members of IBASE and Jorge Romano of Actionaid. The present version is the result of these discussions.

The name and the thing

There is no consensus on the name to be given to the proposed institution. Some consider the term “University” elitist. Others think that the term “Popular University” entails identification with initiatives of communist parties and other left organizations of the first decades of the twentieth century. School? Academy? Open University of the Social Movements? Global University of Social Movements? At some point the organizations that decide to take upon themselves the task of actually creating the popular university will have to come to an agreement as to its designation. Since none of the alternatives so far seems preferable, in this version I stick to the original designation.

What is and isn't PUSM?

PUSM is not a school for training cadres or leaders of NGOs and social movements. Although PUSM is clearly oriented towards action for social transformation, its aim is not to offer the kinds of skills and training that are usually provided by such schools.

Nor is PUSM a *think tank* of NGOs and Social Movements. Although it highly values strategic research and reflection, PUSM rejects the distance that one and the other usually keep vis-à-vis collective action.

The major objective of PUSM is to help make knowledge of alternative globalization as global as globalization itself, and, at the same time, to render actions for social transformation better known and more efficient, and its protagonists more competent and reflective. To meet its goals PUSM will have to be more international and intercultural than similar existent initiatives.

Rationale

The movement for an alternative globalization is a new political fact focused on the idea that the current phase of global capitalism, known as neoliberal globalization, requires new forms of resistance and new directions for social emancipation. From within this movement, made up of a large number of social movements and NGOs, new social agents and practices are emerging. They operate in an equally new framework, networking local, national, and global struggles. Present theories of social change cannot adequately deal with this political and cultural novelty.

This gap between theory and practice has negative consequences both for genuinely progressive social movements and NGOs, and the universities, where theories have traditionally been produced. Both leaders and activists of social movements and NGOs feel the lack of

theories enabling them to reflect analytically on their practice and clarify their methods and objectives. Furthermore, social scientists/scholars/artists, isolated from these new practices and agents, cannot contribute to this reflection and clarification. They can even make things more difficult by insisting on concepts and theories that are not adequate to these new realities.

The proposal for a Popular University of Social Movements is meant to contribute to filling this gap and correcting the two deficiencies it produces. Ultimately, its objective is to overcome the distinction between theory and practice by bringing the two together through systematic encounters between those who mainly devote themselves to the practice of social change and those who mainly engage themselves in theoretical production.

The kind of training envisioned by PUSM is therefore two-pronged. On the one hand, it aims to educate activists and community leaders of social movements and NGOs, by providing them with adequate analytical and theoretical frameworks. The latter will enable them to deepen their reflective understanding of their practice – their methods and objectives – enhancing their efficacy and consistency. On the other hand, it aims to educate social scientists/scholars/artists interested in studying the new processes of social transformation, by offering them the opportunity of a direct dialogue with their protagonists. This will make it possible to identify, and whenever possible to eliminate, the discrepancy between the analytical and theoretical frameworks in which they were trained and the concrete needs and aspirations emerging from new transformational practices.

In this two-pronged educational approach lies the novelty of PUSM. To achieve this objective, PUSM must overcome the conventional distinction between teaching and learning – based on the distinction

between teacher and pupil – thus creating contexts and moments for reciprocal learning. Recognition of reciprocal ignorance is its starting point. Its final point is the shared production of knowledges as global and diverse as the globalization processes themselves.

Beyond the gap between theory and practice, PUSM intends to tackle two problems that currently permeate all movements for an alternative globalization. First, the scarcity of reciprocal knowledge that still exists between movements and organizations active in the same thematic area and operating in different parts of the globe. Social forums have been powerful instruments in arousing this need and showing the importance of reciprocal knowledge. However, given their sporadic nature and short duration, they have been unable to fulfill this need. Without this reciprocal knowledge, it is impossible to increase the density and complexity of movement networks. Without this expansion it is not possible to augment significantly the efficacy and consistency of transformational actions beyond what has been achieved so far.

The other problem is the lack of shared knowledge among movements and organizations active in different thematic areas and their respective struggles. This gap is even wider than the previous one, and bridging it is equally important. Because it is impossible and undesirable to have a general theory globally encompassing all movements and practices in all thematic areas, we need to create conditions for reciprocal intelligibility among movements through methodologies akin to translation. Methodologies, that is, capable of detecting what is common and what is different among different themes, movements, and practices, in order to identify the points and modes of articulation where links can be made – without any of these movements and practices losing their identity or autonomy. What is at stake, in a word, is to find out what is common and what is different between the indigenous and the ecological

movements, between any of them and the feminist and labor movements, between any of the previous movements and the peace and human rights movements, or finally between any of the above-mentioned and the movements and associations dedicated to popular education through the arts - dance, drama, literature, the plastic arts, and so on and so forth.

This knowledge and the articulations that it can be translated into are the essential condition further to enhance the density and complexity of the movements' network for an alternative globalization.

Activities

PUSM is constituted of three principal activities: pedagogical activities, activities of research-action for social transformation, and activities for spreading capabilities and tools for inter-thematic, international, and intercultural translation.

Pedagogical Activities

PUSM will be structured on the basis of workshops, attended by a limited number of activists/movement leaders, and social scientists/scholars/artists. Each workshop will last two weeks on a full-time basis, alternating periods for discussion, study and reflection, and leisure.

Each workshop will have about 10 sessions for discussions. Activists/movement leaders and social scientists/scholars/artists will take turns in preparing and running these sessions. Study materials will be of various kinds: oral narratives and documents presented by movements and organizations, and theoretical and analytical texts proposed by social scientists/scholars, dramatic plays (for example, *The Theater of the Oppressed*, the methodology proposed by Augusto Boal and used today in 70 countries) and art objects and activities proposed by artists.

Each workshop will have 2 coordinators, one an activist/leader and the other a scientist/scholar /artist.

Both activist/leaders and artists/scholars/artists will work as consecutive translators, whenever needed and feasible.

Each workshop will consist of two phases: thematic and inter-thematic. The thematic phase will be concerned with deepening the theoretical and practical knowledge of movements and organizations working in a given area, be it labor, indigenous, feminism, environment, peace, human rights, fair trade, peasant agriculture, intellectual property rights, and so on.

The inter-thematic phase will be concerned with having experiences and knowledges shared between at least two fields of collective action and their respective movements and organizations.

To this effect, at least two workshops will be held at the same time at PUSM. The first week of each workshop will be dedicated to deepening the theme. In the second week, activists/leaders and social scientists/scholars/artists participating in two (or more) workshops will meet together.

In its thematic phase, workshop discussions will deal with the following:

1. Accounts and trajectories of organization and action;
2. Reflection on successful and unsuccessful practices;
3. Discussion of the most complex issues, the most felt wants;
4. Discussion on objectives, strategies, and methodologies.
5. Discussion of topics proposed in the ambit of the two other activities of PUSM deemed by the coordinators as having particular relevance for the NGOs and movements that participate in the workshops.

Activists/leaders in particular will discuss and reflect on the basis of their practices. In addition to their role as discussion facilitators, social scientists/scholar/artists will have the specific task of conveying the compared experience of movements and organizations that are not present, but have accumulated relevant knowledge. Participation of social scientists/scholars/artists from the South is particularly desirable, as in general they have more experience with articulating theory and practice.

At the conclusion of the thematic phase, workshop participants will define by consensus a set of issues to be discussed with the other workshop (or workshops). The two (or more) sets of issues – one set for each thematic workshop – will be the basis for the inter-thematic phase of the workshops.

At the conclusion of each workshop, a rapporteur chosen by the participants will present a detailed report on discussions and main conclusions. This report will be disseminated to all movements, associations, and social scientists/scholars/artists who have joined PUSM.

Fellowships and grants will be available for movement leaders/activists and social scientists/scholars/artists unable to pay for their participation

Activities of Research-Action for Social Transformation

Besides being a network of plural knowledges, PUSM aims to be a network for the creation of plural knowledges.

As the pedagogical activities evolve, themes and problems deemed relevant but as yet little known and understood will emerge. Workshop participants will be encouraged to identify these topics and problems, forwarding them to the Translation Coordination.

The selected topics and problems will be researched by the PUSM Network in the light of various participatory methodologies (one such

methodology could be the one developed by the Institute of Liberation Philosophy (Brazil) after Paulo Freire's pedagogy).

Activities for Diffusion of Translation Capabilities and Tools

These activities consist in the divulgation of the translation or capability value of all the items of inter-knowledge and articulation developed by the other two activities: knowledges, designations, concepts, principles and methods of collective action, etc. For example, the concepts of democracy, direct action, social emancipation, socialism, nonviolence, sagacity, *Satyagraha*, *swaraj*, multiculturalism, strike, hunger, revolution, and so on, and so forth. Every one of these items is less global than alternative globalization. Some are of current usage within a given regional or thematic ambit, but totally unknown within others. Some are valorized positively by given movements or ONGs, but rejected by others. Different items are adequate in different ways for different scales of action (local, national, global).

Based on the analysis of the final reports of the workshops, the Translation Coordination will propose criteria to assess the limits and potentialities of each item for inter-thematic, international, and intercultural usage.

Such proposals will be organized according to two large groups: the Lexicons and the Manifestos.

The *Lexicons* concern items that are mainly discursive: designations, concepts, knowledges, classifications, etc.

The *Manifestos* concern items that are predominantly performative: principles and methodologies of action, instances of successful articulations among practices, etc.

The proposals will be refined through the PUSM Network as well as through the set of networks that make up alternative globalization, namely those participating in the World Social Forum.

Organization

PUSM comprises two operative units: *PUSM-Headquarters* and *PUSM-Network*.

PUSM-Headquarters

PUSM-Headquarters will operate in a country of intermediate development (Brazil, India, South Africa, Mexico, etc.). It includes the Coordinating Committee, the Translation Coordination, and the Executive Committee. The first workshops will take place at the headquarters. *PUSM-Network* will be managed here as well.

The Coordinating Committee is constituted of representatives of all the movements and NGOs that are part of *PUSM-Network*. Its job is to coordinate the activities of PUSM and select the Translation Coordination and the Executive Committee.

The functions of the Translation Coordination are:

1. select workshops and its participants;
2. supervise the activities, both pedagogical and of research-action for change;
3. fulfill activities for diffusion of translation capabilities and tools;
4. grant scholarships to activists/leaders and social scientists/scholars/artists that are not self-funded.

Any one of these tasks may be managed by sub-committees.

The Executive Committee handles the administration of PUSM-Headquarters, prepares and manages the budget, and takes care of fund raising.

PUSM-Headquarters will establish a relationship of privileged collaboration (namely as concerns training and rendering of services) with the organizations and movements of the city or region of its location.

PUSM-Network

PUSM-Network is comprised of the set of organizations and movements that adhere to PUSM's Charter of Principles and Commitments, and engage significantly in any one of the three large kinds of activities that constitute PUSM. The Charter will be drafted by the NGOs/social movements that take responsibility for the foundation of the PUSM.

Experimental Phase

PUSM will have an experimental phase for the period of a year, at the term of which there will be an evaluation concerning its future. During this phase, PUSM will focus mainly on pedagogical activities.

An estimate of the budget for this experimental phase is as follows:

BUDGET

Framework: The project's first phase should be structured around two sets of workshop sessions. Each one of them should comprise two weeks. These two meetings should be separated by a period of three months during which participants would go back to their respective regions with specific tasks to fulfill.

Venue of first phase: Brazil

Number of participants: 60, 20 from Brazil, 10 from other countries of Latin America Caribbean and North America, 10 from Asia and Oceania, 10 from Africa e 10 from Europe.

Budget for 2 meetings of 14 days each, 3 months of activities in the participants' locality of origin between the 2 meetings, and 6 months of coordination

Activity	Description	Cost US (1US\$=2,9R\$)
Travel	2 x 10 LAC e AN x US\$ 1.200 2 x 10 Asia x US\$ 3.000 2 x 10 Africa x US\$ 3.000 2 x 10 Europa x US\$ 1.300 2 x 20 Brazil x US\$ 400	186.000
Bed and Board	2 x 60 people x 14 days x US\$ 40	67.200
Meeting rooms (in the same location as accommodation)	2 x 1 lecture hall for 60 people + 3 working rooms for 20 people + 1 support room x 14 days	5.000
Ground transportation in country of origin and in the country where the course takes place	2 x 60 people x 4 rides x US\$ 10	4.800
Per Diem (extras)	2 x 60 people x 14 days x US\$ 10	16.800
Didactic material	Preparation of manuals, selection of texts, photos, plays, installations, etc.	5.000
Diffusion of results	Set up web page for diffusion of texts elaborated in the workshops, etc.	5.000
Administration	Communication, administrative expenses, accounting	5.000
Secretariat/Staff	1 full-time secretary for 6 months x US\$ 1.000	6.000
Coordination / Staff	1 full-time coordinator for 6 months x US\$ 2.000	12.000
Consultants / Staff	2 part-time consultants for general advice, and on selection of topics and texts for 6 months x US\$ 1.000	12.000
Facilitators/Staff	10 Facilitators/instructors to organize the debates during the 28 days of the meeting x US\$ 3.000	30.000
Scholarships	To support the 50 participants in activities linked to the University during the 3 months between the 2 meetings x US\$ 300	45.000
Total		399.800

