Principles of Transnational Action
- an attempt at a set of guidelines

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Introduction

To avoid confusion, repetition, and **sterile debate** in governmental or nongovern-mental assemblies, **some clear** statement describing the **open society into** which we **see ourselves** moving is required, **together with** some **description of** the nature, **functioning** and interrelationship of **the social** entities which are-seen as having their place in it.

The following propositions **were, in their original** form, distributed to the Milan **Seminar participants as an** attempt to bring **together various** insights, some of which **derived** from other working **papers or from** views expressed by the particip-ants in **other contexts. The intention was to** provide a starting point from **which** some **form** of statement could be **built up** to provide a first **set of guidelines to the desirable « style » of** voluntary and **nongovernmental action** in the future. In its present **form, the** text has been **restructured** and clarified in the light of comments **made. In** addition, a set **of action proposals has** been related to each paragraph.

A. Range of organizational styles

1. Different **styles of organization may be used in different cultures and political** systems to **accomplish the same ends.** Such **organizations may be either** governmental **or nongovernmental, profit-making or nonprofit, per-manent or ad** hoc, **etc.** They may even **be replaced in some** societies **by periodical readerships, radio audiences, demonstrations, « invisible** col-leges » **legally-binding agreements,** information **systems, or informal movements of opinion.**

    > action : — *improved and more comprehensive organizational* ***typologies*** *are required,* ***sensitive to*** *organizational* ***styles in different cultures.***
    > — *study* ***required of the manner in which*** *organization* ***styles can substitute for*** *one another* ***in different*** *settings.*

2. Different **organizational styles at the national level** give **rise** to equivalent styles **at the** transnational **level. Transnational** organizations of different **cultures may therefore be organizationally incompatible,** although **having equivalent functions with respect to** their **own cultural** systems.

    > action : — *study* ***required of new organizational forms which could link currently incompatible styles of organi-zation***
    > — ***it may well be time to abandon the misleading term*** ** international nongovernmental (nonprofit) organ-ization » (INGO). « International - has increasingly the sense of « inter-governmental »; « organization » is associated with formal legally-constituted, and, in-creasingly, with heavily bureacratized bodies.* ***« Nongovernmental » needs to be dropped, because many varieties of mixed or « Intersect » organizat-ions are increasingly important, particularly in dev-eloping or socialist countries — also in some cul-tures or language systems, « non- » may well mean something very close to « anti- ». In addition, to***

define « X » as « not-Y » is a plain confession of inability to conceptualize « X ». The abbreviation « NGO » is meaningless to the uninitiated and particularly to the many bodies in that category at the national level. A term such as « transnational association networks » has a more positive, dynamic connotation and takes the socially unrealistic stress off organizations as independent units.

B. Implications of the use of «transnational »

3. A transnational context avoids the need to structure thinking about all activity crossing national boundaries in terms of the governments responsible for those boundaries. There is less emphasis on monolithic or even monopolistic government and more emphasis on the many different central, regional, or urban administrative boundaries independent of any central control, or at least without the need for it. Furthermore, in this more complex environment, less emphasis is placed on the conventional categories (governmental, business, nonprofit, etc.) so that the many blends of organization types do not have to be forced into artificial categories. More emphasis is then placed on the patterns of interaction of organizations — of which the governmental component may or may not be of major importance with respect to a particular question over a given period.

— *action : statistics on different types of social action at different levels need to be considered within the same context, rather than separated on the assumption that local and intergovernmental actors do not interact.*

C. Organizational network

4. No organization exists in isolation. It may have formal relations and collaborative agreements with other bodies. It has regular information exchange with some bodies and informal relations with others. The pattern of these many types of relationship constitutes a network which is a major feature of social organization.

action : — *greater effort should be made to map out organizational relationships as networks so that organizations can see their direct and indirect relationships to one another. (Inter- organizational maps should have the same status and accessibility as road maps in order that people can move more effectively through the social system.)*
— *computer-based information systems should be designed to facilitate and reflect the growth of inter-organizational links.*

5. The interorganizational network is constantly evolving in response to new insights, values, possibilities, problems, and developmental needs. It is therefore less the pattern at any one moment which should be the focus of concern and much more the pattern-forming potential of organizational sub-units and active individuals. It is this pattern-forming potential which enables the individuals and organizational sub-units to generate new groupings appropriate to new crises.

action : research is required into the manner in which organizational ecosystems evolve over time and in response to new concepts, technologies and problems.

6. The system of organizations can be viewed as a switching network which transfers communications along complex paths through society, filtering, colouring, amplifying or reinforcing the information in unforseen ways, which change over time as the network adapts to new situations. The time taken by these social communication processes, even if technically rapid, ensures that groups are maintained in relative isolation and therefore adapt differently to information as it filters through to them.

action : study is required to establish the degree of relative isolation and privacy necessary for organizations to provide participative, creative environments and guarantee optimum variety and response to crisis.

7 The degree of interconnectedness and direct or indirect interdependence of ' organizations suggests that, where two organizational systems have common or complementary concerns, it is shortsighted and counterproductive for the first system to request the second for assistance in the accomplishment of its own objectives — and to ignore the second when it pursues the same objectives in a different manner. Both should rather seek to improve their functioning as interdependent systems and ensure that their operations mesh and reinforce each other effectively.

action : information systems are required which map problems and their interrelationships showing also the organizations concerned with each problem and their interrelationships.

D. Representativeness

8. The representativeness of an organization is a complex matter; many cannot be geographically universal because of constitutional limitations which explicitly or implicitly constrain them to regional focus; others, though universal in intent, have no counterparts outside a particular region, either because of the highly specialized or geographically limited significance of the concerns of the organization, or because there is some incompatibility in the constitutions of the potential national counterparts with the transnational body.

action : statistics on organizations should distinguish more carefully between types of organization.

E. Evaluation

9. The characteristics and performance of an organization should be judged as much by the manner and extent of its interaction with other bodies as by any quantitative evaluation of its size or programme. « Insignificant » organizations may be very important communication centres in a network.

action : weighted formula for evaluating organizations should be developed to measure more than one characteristic of an organization.

10. Improvement to the functioning of the network of organizations is achieved by focusing on the network as a whole, and not by concentrating exclusively on the performance of one body embedded in the network.

11. Evaluation of an organization, whatever the quantitative conclusions, should recognize the significance of the organization as a focus of a community of interests. It may constitute a node of (possibly direct) importance to the network of organizations in which it is embedded as a socializing force for those involved, and, through its activities, as a vehicle for social development of those participating in those activities.
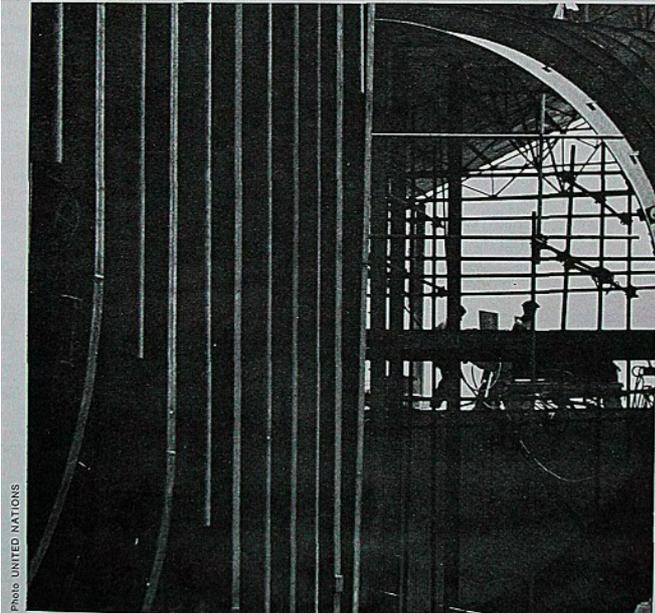

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F. Coordination and mobilization

12. There are natural limits to the extent to which nongovernmental action can be coordinated with present methods. Assemblies at which more than 6-10 bodies are represented can reach action-oriented consensus only with difficulty, since above this number of organizations, adequate dialogue and participation becomes Increasingly impracticable and without it no satisfactory consensus can be achieved.

   action ; the technique of using small organizational ad hoc task forces to handle very specific problems should be developed. Formation of task forces should be facilitated by designing participative programme information systems.

13. Transnational organizations are faced with a two-fold problem of coordination between geographical areas and of functional coordination across disciplines or modes of action. In part these may be sidestepped by regionalization and specialization, but the fundamental problem of interrelating differing fields of interest remains and must be solved in order to handle multidisciplinary, global problems adequately. *action : see 7.*

14. The interlocking complexity of the nongovernmental sector may be considered a major insurance against undetected manipulation of social processus by elite groups — provided that such bodies have sufficient freedom of action to fulfill this responsibility.

   action : techniques of analyzing organizational networks should be developed to determine their degree of flexibility and freedom.

15. The degree of fragmentation of the nongovernmental sector in part reflects the need for sufficient organizational frameworks through which active individuals can meaningfully participate in the social process with a sense of freedom of action and opportunity for personally significant contributions. *action : the conflict between coordination and mobilization for development programmes and the inhibiting effect of such directive action on the social development of those mobilized should be examined.*

16. The network of organizations permits all the decentralization necessary to satisfy the need for autonomous organizational development and individual initiative. If supported by an adequate information system, it also provides for very rapid centralization, canalization and focusing of resources, the moment any complex problem (or natural disaster) emerges which requires the talents of a particular configuration of bodies. The centralization is only binding on the organizations concerned with the problem in question, and for the period during which they have common cause.

   action : design of rapid response, participative information systems.

17. The network of organizations is not « coordinated » or « directed » by any body or group of bodies. Organizations adjust and continually redefine their own programs as a result of interaction or in response to other bodies in the network. This is a process of « auto-coordination » which is as successful as the information system upon which it depends; the network is - self-directing » and « self-adapting ».

   action : research into the functioning of organizational networks with respect to the problems of coordination, autonomy and the preservation of adequate variety in the absence of any prime controller or any single permanent objective. .

18. Any attempt by a particular organization to mobilize all other organizations in unquestioning support of its own programs reduces the overall ability of the network of organizations to respond to unforseen problems.

   action : mobilization against problems should be converted from the old directive style (« do it our way ») to the participative style (« how can we help you to do it your way »).

19. Efforts by any one organization to coordinate other bodies or to force them into any position of dependence for needed resources, information, or recognition needs to be carefully assessed for patterns of structural violence carried over with elitst-imperialist thinking habits.

   act/on : techniques should be developed to map and analyze patterns of inter-organizational relationship and dependence to detect evidence of structural violence,

G. Relationship with governmental bodies

20. The system of transnational associations is often well-equipped to adapt rapidly to new crises, or, alternatively, to undertake or maintain long-term programs. This complements governmental concerns and reaction-times

with respect to the intermediate time period (represented by the period of office lor which it has a mandate).

> *action : the functions of different types of organization with respect to different time periods should be made better known. Government should resist the tendency to pressure other bodies into adjusting their programmes to its own timescale.*

21. The major concern of governmental bodies in relating to nongovernmental activity should be the manner and extent to which an area of nongovernmental competence can be defined without destroying the initiative, interest or commitment of the organization in question.

> *action : computer based programme information systems should be designed to map out systematically areas of problem competence and activity for all active organizational units (whether governmental or nongovernmental) so that claims to particular areas can be made and periodically assessed.*

22. In order to achieve greater application of existing resources to detected social problems *and* to develop the social structure, governmental agencies should facilitate the action of any nongovernmental body with a commitment to the problem in question, rather than demand that the body place its resources at the disposal of the governmental agency. *action : see 18.*

H. Relationship with multinational business enterprises

23. Transnational associations play an important watchdog role in responding to any harmful consequences which may arise as direct or indirect consequences of the action of economic enterprises.
action : information systems accessible to associations should be developed to map the specific areas of action of enterprises and their effects on the environment.
24. Transnational associations can usefully collaborate in some dearly-defined roles with multinational enterprises where such enterprises have definite interests in social and environmental problems and the social consequences of their activities.

> *action : models for such collaboration should be studied and developed so that its possibilities and limits become clear.*

I. Issue areas

25. The network of organizations that make up the map of society is, as it were, a sort of clear overlay against a page underneath it, which represents the reality of the social problems to be solved. The overlay is out of phase, so that there is always a mismatch between the programs of organizations and the reality of the problems that people think are worth solving. To surmount this difficulty, it is necessary to depend upon the ability of organizational sub-units within the network to recombine with a minimum lag into new configurations, better-equipped to cope with the newly-perceived problems. The network roles and functions of organizations become of major significance.

> *action : design of rapid-response participative information systems incorporating maps of the network of problems.*

J. Values

26. Many nongovernmental organizations are of major importance to society, either as generators of new values more appropriate to new conditions or through their efforts to protect old values. The nongovernmental sector may be thought of as a valuegenerating and conserving system.

> *action : study the function of associations with respect to value generation and preservation and make the conclusions widely known.*

K. Social development

27. Facilitating and stimulating the emergence of organizations at the community and provincial level leads to an overflow of organized social activity onto the national and transnational level.

> *action : studies on the facilitation of international activity should break down the artificial separation between international, national and local data, Systematic facilitation of local association activity within a country should be seen as contributing to increased international activity.*

28. The development of each organization generally has second and third order consequences harmful to its natural or social environment. These consequences can form the focus of concern and the field of action of new organ-

izations in a manner significant to social development.

> *action : — study should be made to establish a healthy range for the number of social tensions and problems as opportunities for the involvement of more people in the response process, thus contributing to their own social development*
> *— means should be developed to identify the negative consequences of particular programmes and call attention to them as action opportunities for new bodies.*

29. Society as a network of evolving organizations constitutes a learning environment in which the continuing emergence of new problems, major and minor, provides an important domain within which bodies may find the opportunity for meaningful action by organizing to resolve the tensions so created.

> *action : study should be made of the relationship between organinzation learning and development and individual learning and development as two aspects of social development. The results should be made widely known.*

30. There is an intimate relationship between the network of problems recognized by a society, the value and concept systems evolved by that society, and the network of organizations which mediate between them — integration or fragmentation in any of these domains during its evolution can propagate itself into the others and have important positive or negative effects on human beings in the society.

> *action : study should be made of these processes and their implication for social development.*

L. Participative opportunity

31. The degree of organization of a society is one measure of its degree of social development. The number and variety of organizations or office-holders per capita is a measure of the participative opportunity or socializing potential of that society. Such data should have the same status for development policy-making as that on economic units.

> *action : statistics on organization units should acquire the same status and utility as those on the individual and on countries. Much greater effort should be made to collect such data within each country and to publish it in the various international statistical yearbooks.*

32. The transnational association system provides the only nonsubversive action opportunity open to concerned young people disillusioned by (government, military, business, academic, and religious) establishments and bureaucreacies, and close to total alienation from society.

> *action : the gap between youth organizations and conventional associations should be reduced so that the latter can provide more meaningful opportunities for individual action and involvement.*

33. Transnational associations offer a means of canalizing, facilitating, and focusing the activities of committed individuals to achieve maximum contact with respect to the concern in question.

> *action : information systems on the organizational universe should be made accessible to individuals and help them in their choice of action opportunities.*

M. Communication and facilities

34. Provision of low-rent office and meeting facilities or other shared administrative services in one centre within major cities brings a variety of organizations with potentially-related concerns into fruitful informal contact. It increases their effectiveness, leads to working contacts where and when appropriate, provides the « critical mass » required for mutual encouragement and outside recognition. It ensures the conception and germination of new programs, and provides facilitative bases for newly-established bodies during their early growth period.

> *action : various formulae for such centres should be studied and proposed to facilitate local and national level action, as well as international level action in a particular country.*

35. Provision of low-cost communication facilities (telephone, telex, datalink) between organizations in centres in different countries permits organizations to regionalize more effectively, and to mesh their programs more effectively with those of other bodies. This ensures more effective and rapid response to emergencies, and increases their ability to intereact with their counterparts at the national level, and with other field-level programs.

> *action : the relationship between communication power and interorganizational effectiveness should be studied and proposals made to improve the current situation.*

N. Responsibility and rights

36. Disregard and contempt for the rights and significance of human groups have resulted in irresponsible acts which have eroded vital social structures, processes and cultures. They have opposed full participation of all concerned groups in the solution of social problems and the compensation for inadequacies in each body's activities. They have caused the creation of an impenetrable maze of non-interacting social organs.

    action : an essential part of any new programme should be consultation and contact with organizations with competence in the area in question prior to finalization of the programme.

37. *Provision of status in international law for transnational associations would considerably facilitate their activities and increase their effectiveness. Such recognition should however avoid the imposition of artificial constraints upon the network of organizations to give rise to a select class of isolated unchanging entities which would obscure the presence of excluded bodies and interrelationships of social significance.*

    action : attention should be given to the legal aspects of international association activity, particularly when the absence of legal status hinders effective cooperation.

38. Organizations, as participants in the social process, have responsibilities for the well-being of individuals, other bodies, and society as a whole, in the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The principal responsibility is to make every effort to call attention to, or to counteract any, errors of omission or commission in society which special expertise enables them to detect.

    action : social groups should have right of access to sophisticated information systems to communicate warning messages • to responsible bodies concerning new problems which they detect.

39. The program of an organization, whether intended or not, affects a wider sector of the organization's environment than it believes to be within its domain of interests. Organizations that wish to deal responsibly with their social surrounds must be capable of eliciting and evaluating responses from those who realize they are affected but who are ordinarily silent, and from those who are affected but may not realize it.

    action : computer-based program information systems should be participative.

40. Organizations should have certain rights to protect them in the exercise of their responsibilities. These include : right to be informed of matters affecting its area of special comptence: right to exercise activities in other countries; right to negotiate and be represented at governmental meetings in its special field of competence; right of participation in the formulation of programs to combat social problems in its special field of competence; right of its member bodies to participate fully in international programs; right to inviolability of offices, correspondence, and telephone conversations; right to protection of funds and assets against intervention by public authority; right of access to media of mass communications; right to protection against any discrimination in matters of affiliation and activities; right to access to voluntary conciliation and arbitration procedures; right of members to further education and training.

    action; further-study should be made of the rights and responsibilities of international associations, possibly in conjunction with work on their legal status.