

Global Citizens Movement

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In most discussions, the global citizens movement is a socio-political process rather than a political organization or party structure. The term is often used synonymously with the anti-globalization movement or the global justice movement. Colloquially the term is also used in this imprecise manner.

Global citizens movement has been used by activists to refer to a number of organized and overlapping citizens groups who seek to influence public policy often with the hope of establishing global solidarity on an issue. Such efforts include advocacy on ecological sustainability, corporate responsibility, social justice and similar progressive issues.

In theoretical discussions of social movements, global citizens movement refers to a complex and unprecedented phenomena made possible by the unique subjective and objective conditions of the planetary phase of civilization. The term is used to distinguish the latent potential for a profound shift in values among an aware and engaged citizenry from existing transnational citizens movements which tend to focus on specific issues (such as the anti-war movement).

Background

The concept of global citizenship first emerged among the Greek Cynics in the 4th Century BCE (9.6 ky), who coined the term "cosmopolitan" - meaning citizen of the world. The Roman Stoics later elaborated on the concept. The contemporary concept of cosmopolitanism, which proposes that all individuals belong to a single moral community, has gained a new salience as scholars examine the ethical requirements of the planetary phase of civilization.

The idea that today's objective and subjective conditions have increased the latency for an emergent global civic identity has been argued by the authors of the Global Scenario Group's final report *Great Transition: the Promise and Lure of the Times Ahead*. Similar arguments for the existence of a latent pool of tens of millions of people ready to identify around new values of earth consciousness have been put forth by such authors as Paul Raskin (see *World Lines: Pathways, Pivots, and the Global Future*), Paul H. Ray (see *Cultural Creatives*), and David Korten (see *Great Turning*). Organizations, such as Oxfam International believe that a global citizens movement rooted in social and economic justice is emerging and is necessary for ending global poverty.

Visions of a Global Citizens Movement

In the last chapter of his book, *Red Sky at Morning*, Gus Speth describes the potential for a new type of social movement composed of "we the people, as citizens" rooted in the principles of the Earth Charter to lead the transition in consciousness and values necessary for the emergence of a new planetary civilization.

Orion Kriegman, author of *Dawn of the Cosmopolitan: The Hope of a Global Citizens Movement*,

states, "Transnational corporations, governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) remain powerful global actors, but all of these would be deeply influenced by a coherent, worldwide association of millions of people who call for priority to be placed on new values of quality of life, human solidarity, and environmental sustainability."

Kriegman distinguishes this "coherent, worldwide association of millions" from the existing fragmented social movements active in the World Social Forum. These movements tend to be issue-specific - focused on labor, environment, human rights, feminist issues, indigenous struggles, poverty, AIDS, and numerous other interrelated but "siloed" efforts. Coherence among these movements would require a reframing of their work under the rubric of the struggle for a socially just and ecologically sustainable global society and the establishment of an institutional structure to defend the rights of humanity, future generations, and the biosphere. Kriegman asserts, "The upsurge of civil society activity, in the form of NGOs and social movements, over the past few decades can be understood as an early manifestation of the latency in the global system, and at the same time this transnational activity helps deepen the latency. However, existing social movements have not found a way to effectively balance the creative tension between pluralism and coherence to provide a collective framework for theory and action. Without a shared framework, it is hard to imagine how the latent potential would coalesce into a global systemic movement. The development of a shared framework will depend on new forms of leadership to facilitate engaged dialogue inclusive of diverse voices."

Critiques of a Global Citizens Movement

The major critique of the notion of a global citizens movement centers on the potential for the emergence of solidarity on issues at the global level. Nationalism, racism, and the dominance of the Westphalian state system are considered antithetical to the adoption of a global civic identity. However, some scholars point out that the historical emergence of nationalism must have felt just as improbable in a time of warring city-states, and yet in retrospect it appears inevitable.

A more radical critique stems from the arguments put forth by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their book *Multitude* and enshrines Foucault's notion of a "plurality of resistance" as the only legitimate path forward. This argument asserts that an organized movement among the vast multitude is both undesirable and impossible. Instead of leadership and organizational structures, Hardt and Negri put faith in the emergence of spontaneous coherence due to increasing self-organized networks among various autonomous resistance movements. They critique the notion that there could be legitimate leaders, democratically chosen through a formal network of grassroots structures, acting on behalf of a big-tent pluralistic association of global citizens to directly confront the entrenched power of transnational corporations and state governments. However, it remains unclear how a network of autonomous movements would differ in practice from the vision of an authentic global citizens movement.