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# National Commissions in Action

Information Bulletin  
by the National  
Commissions Section,  
Sector for External  
Relations and Cooperation,  
UNESCO

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## Editorial

**T**he National Commissions are a precious institutional asset for UNESCO, but a significant number of them suffer from the lack of resources and instability in their staffing policy. The Director-General's letter addressed to the Member States last April sent a strong political message in that regard. In recognizing the unique value of National Commissions in the UN Delivering One process, it boldly outlined the minimum requirements for their efficient performance and urged governments to assume their responsibilities.

While the 181<sup>st</sup> session of the Executive Board reiterated the significant contribution of National Commissions in the elaboration and implementation of UNESCO's programme, the Secretariat has made progress in emphasising the Commissions' positioning in the One UN reform process. The new partnership agreement between UNESCO and the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) is indeed an additional opportunity for National Commissions to prove their relevance within the UN Country Team.

It is heartening that innovative efforts have been deployed to strengthen the bonds of inter-regional partnership among the National Commissions. With the generous financial support of the Spanish, German and Bulgarian governments, several capacity-building initiatives have been planned and undertaken, notably in the Africa and Latin America/Caribbean regions.

Over the last four months, the National Commissions Section focused its energy and resources on advocacy and capacity-building activities. More than 100 officials of National Commissions were provided with training opportunities. Priority was also given to the preparation of various publications and reference tools for National Commissions, which will be presented at the General Conference.

The present issue of the Information Bulletin, full of noteworthy events, covers the period from February to May 2009. It carries also a plain message, heralding that UNESCO is determined, more than ever, to support National Commissions and to promote their key role within the larger UNESCO family. I hope that this message will be heard clearly.

Ahmed Sayyad  
Assistant Director-General for  
External Relations and Cooperation

## Director-General urges governments to strengthen their Commissions

The Director-General called upon all governments to strengthen their National Commissions, by specifying three fundamental areas where they need most support. In his circular letter of 24 April 2009 (CL 3870) addressed to ministers responsible for relations with UNESCO, the Director-General urged that the Commissions need enhanced status and structure, sustained stability in the leadership, and solid human resources.

Mr Matsuura stressed that a good balance should be struck between the volume and complexity of tasks entrusted to the National Commissions and the actual status and resources placed at their disposal, underscoring that not all Commissions have been adequately equipped to assume their expanding duties.

Stressing that UNESCO offers training opportunities to hundreds of officials of National Commissions every biennium, the Director-General deplored that nearly one third of Secretaries-General change their jobs every biennium. He asked, therefore, that governments take urgent action and inform UNESCO of the measures taken or envisaged.

This is the fifth circular letter of the Director-General since 2001, reminding governments of their shared responsibilities towards National Commissions.

Copies of the letter can be obtained at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001821/182199e.pdf>

## The 196th UNESCO National Commission launched

On 23 April 2009, the Timor-Leste National Commission for UNESCO was officially launched, to become the youngest and 196<sup>th</sup> member of the global family. President Jose Ramos Horta of Timor Leste personally sworn-in 20 new members of the National Commission in a 3-day public cultural and educational event held in the capital Dili. Ms Kirsty Sword Gusmao, the President of the Alola Foundation and the wife of the Prime Minister, will chair the new Commission.



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The launching ceremony was attended by Dr Hubert Gijzen, Director of UNESCO Jakarta Office and Representative to Timor-Leste, Mr Atul Khare, Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in Timor-Leste, the UN Country Team members, Government Ministers, diplomatic corps, NGOs and civil society partners and students.

Timor-Leste joined the Organization in June 2003. The establishment of its Commission for UNESCO marks a truly historic moment for this small nation as well as for the global network of National Commissions. As of now, all 193 Member States as well as three Associate Members (Aruba, British Virgin Islands and the Netherlands Antilles) have set up their Commissions for UNESCO.

Prior to the official launching, the Hon Margaret Austin, former Chair of the New Zealand National Commission, visited Dili at the request of the Director-General, in order to organize a capacity-building workshop and provide expert advice on the Constitution of the new Commission and its activities.

# UNESCO expands platforms for National Commissions to cooperate with UN Programmes



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The cooperation of National Commissions with other UN Programmes was initially foreseen in their Charter adopted at the 20<sup>th</sup> session of the General Conference in 1978. Article I, para 3 of that document stipulated that “National Commissions may participate in planning and execution of activities... undertaken with the assistance of UNDP, UNEP, and other international programmes”.

In reality, National Commissions’ cooperation with other UN Agencies has been rather sporadic, based on a few exceptional initiatives and irregular contacts. According to the latest survey, only 15% of National Commissions have some kind of partnership relation with other UN Agencies/Programmes.

In early April 2009, UNESCO signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the United Nations Environmental Programme, whereby both parties pledged to pay particular attention to joint work with relevant line ministries as well as with UNESCO National Commissions and other UNESCO networks, UNESCO Chairs or the Associated Schools Programme.

In the same spirit as with the 2008 breakthrough agreement with the United Nations Development Programme, the key body within the United Nations system in the country, this new MoU is a further recognition of National Commissions’ relevance to the One UN process.

**“National Commissions may participate in planning and execution of activities... undertaken with the assistance of UNDP, UNEP, and other international programmes”.**

There could be two main explanations for this situation. First, National Commissions are not always fully aware of the existing opportunities. Second, they have not been regularly recognized by UN Resident Coordinators or do not have sufficient capacities to expand their scope of cooperation.

As a way of addressing that issue, the Secretariat has revised its training programme, to make sure that all information seminars include sessions on the on-going One UN reform process as well as on opportunities and challenges for National Commissions to participate in that exercise.

***“The recently signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between UNESCO and UNDP ... contains both an important opportunity and a considerable challenge. The challenge is mainly for the National Commissions themselves, which need to be proactive in order to engage all relevant actors for fostering their relevance and involvement and to be prepared for their contribution to the UNCT deliberations”.***

Excerpt from the Final Report of the Meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO from “Delivering as One” Pilot Countries and UNDAF Roll-out Countries (Hanoi, Viet Nam, 11-13 November 2008)

## The Director-General receives the Coordinating Group



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**Sharing of knowledge, experience and expertise between them should be the main thrust of their capacity-building and networking.**

There should be more cooperation among National Commissions. Sharing of knowledge, experience and expertise between them should be the main thrust of their capacity-building and networking. Advocacy should be undertaken on a permanent basis, in order to keep national policy makers aware of National Commissions' unique role and relevance. These were the main conclusions of the recent meeting of the Director-General with the Coordinating Group of National Commissions.

The meeting took place on 24 April, during the 181<sup>st</sup> session of the Executive Board. Under the leadership of Luis Ramallo, the current Chair of the Group and President of the Spanish National Commission, representatives of

seven Commissions (Andorra, Flanders, Canada, Greece, Jamaica, the Netherlands and St Kitts and Nevis) had a cordial exchange of views with the Director-General, discussing key issues to be addressed in a near future.

Mr Matsuura paid tribute to the active role of the Coordinating Group in promoting inter-regional collaboration among National Commissions. He reiterated his conviction that the National Commissions had a key importance for UNESCO's decentralization policy. He therefore asked the Decentralization Review Task Force (DRTF) to examine the ways of better positioning of National Commissions in the One UN process.

***“This Organization is very proud of its network of National Commissions. They are an integral part of the overall architecture of UNESCO, as defined in Article 7 of its Constitution. Unique within the United Nations system, they serve as a vital link between governments and civil society, actively contributing to the pursuit of the Organization’s goals and the delivery of its programmes at various levels in the Member States. Their outreach capacity to expertise and knowledge networks at the national level gives the Organization a clear comparative advantage”.***

Excerpts from the speech of the Director-General at the Training Seminar for New Secretaries-General of National Commissions, Paris, 2 March 2009.

# Informal Meeting of National Commissions during the Executive Board



**... there was a lot of potential among Commissions from different regions to work together bilaterally and multilaterally. In addition to training seminars, innovative means should be considered, such as staff exchange and joint activities.**

Participants of the 24 April meeting

It has now become a tradition that the Chairpersons and Secretaries-General of National Commissions attending sessions of the Executive Board get together to exchange views and information on recent developments and upcoming activities. This informal and constructive practice was repeated at the last 181<sup>st</sup> session of the Board, when representatives of 30 National Commissions met in the morning of 24 April 2009.

The discussions at the meeting were frank and informative. Tangible progress in the strengthening of cooperation among National Commissions was recognized. As capacity building remained a top priority, it was said, that there was a lot of potential among Commissions from different regions to work together bilaterally and multilaterally. In addition to training seminars, innovative means should be considered, such as staff exchanges and joint activities.

According to Mr Ahmed Sayyad, ADG/ERC, who welcomed the participants, UNESCO would be spending US\$ 3 million 2008-2009 for the training and capacity-building of more than 200 officials of National Commissions. He encouraged North-South cooperation among the Commissions and

thanked donor countries, notably Germany, Spain, Kuwait and Bulgaria for their generous support.

The meeting offered opportunities to the participants to exchange information on best practices in various domains. The financial support of the German National Commission to the capacity-building in Africa was highly appreciated. Portugal spoke about the growing cooperation among the Portuguese-speaking National Commissions. The United Kingdom informed on the preparations for the next consultation on the draft 36 C/5 in 2010. Benelux countries announced the publication of "Vademecum," a guidebook for the organization of National Commissions' meetings through a New Approach.

The coordinating role of National Commissions at country level, as focal points for the broader UNESCO family (UNESCO Clubs, ASPnet, UNESCO Chairs, Parliamentarians, NGOs, UNESCO category 2 Institutes, etc.) was also highlighted. Participants welcomed UNESCO's initiative to develop a mapping of these networks and partners in each country.

# IN FOCUS: Investment in capacity-building through training

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**The Paris Seminar was conceived to be an interactive exercise whereby each participant had a chance to share his/her experience with other fellow Secretaries-General.**

From February to May 2009, the National Commissions Section has organized a series of information seminars and workshops to train over 100 officials.

**The Interregional Information Seminar for New Secretaries-General took place at UNESCO Headquarters from 2 to 6 March 2009.**

35 newly-appointed Secretaries-General of National Commissions from all regions attended that event which was held under the common theme "Learning Together – Learning from Each Other". The participants had an opportunity to deepen their knowledge of UNESCO. The Paris Seminar was conceived to

be an interactive exercise whereby each participant had a chance to share his/her experience with other fellow Secretaries-General. In addition to Luis Ramallo, Chair of the Coordinating Group, experienced Secretaries-General from five countries (France, Germany, Namibia, Netherlands and Uzbekistan) participated as moderators and resource persons.

**Two Capacity Building Workshops for African National Commissions for UNESCO were organized in Bamako, Mali (18-20 February) and in Yaoundé, Cameroon (26-29 May).** Around 50 representatives of 18 African National Commissions as well as officials from UNESCO HQs and Field Offices in Bamako, Yaoundé, Dakar, Accra and Libreville participated in these events. Jointly organized by the host countries, UNESCO Secretariat and the German



Commission, these workshops were part of a series of training seminars organized within the "Partnership Programme with African National Commissions for UNESCO" project funded by the German Government. Similar workshops were already held with success in Kigali, Rwanda (October 2008), Maseru, Lesotho (December 2008), and Antananarivo, Madagascar (December 2008).

**The Training Seminar for Officials of Latin American National Commissions for UNESCO was held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, from 31 March to 2 April 2009.** 19 representatives of thirteen National Commissions attended this three-day training workshop organized by the Section of National Commissions in cooperation with the Dominican National Commission and the UNESCO Havana Office. The workshop focused

on National Commissions' role and functions vis-à-vis UNESCO's programmes and on-going reform as well as on developing partnerships with civil society and programme networks. Special attention was paid to the modalities of enhancing networking among the National Commissions in the Latin America sub-region.

**The Capacity-Building Workshop and the Biennial Consultation of Pacific National Commissions took place in Nadi, Fiji, from 11 to 15 May 2009.**

18 representatives of 13 National Commissions, including six Ministers of Education, participated in the meeting which pursued double objectives. On the one hand, the meeting focused on the ways and means of strengthening the status and operational capacities of National Commissions in the Pacific. On the other, it elaborated a platform for common action at the sub-regional level. The participants also discussed and agreed upon the Pacific's joint position on key issues to be considered at the General Conference.



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## Upcoming training seminars for National Commissions in 2009

- Training Seminar for Officials of Arab National Commissions in cooperation with ISESCO, 16-18 June 2009, Kairouan, Tunisia
- Training Seminar for New Officials of Asian National Commissions, 22-24 June 2009, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- Training Seminar and Cluster Meeting of the Caribbean National Commissions, 1-3 July 2009, Roseau, Dominica
- Capacity-Building Workshop for Officials of African National Commissions, 4-6 November 2009, in Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia
- Training Seminar for Officials of European National Commissions, November 2009
- Training Seminar for Officials of Arab National Commissions, December 2009, Cairo, Egypt

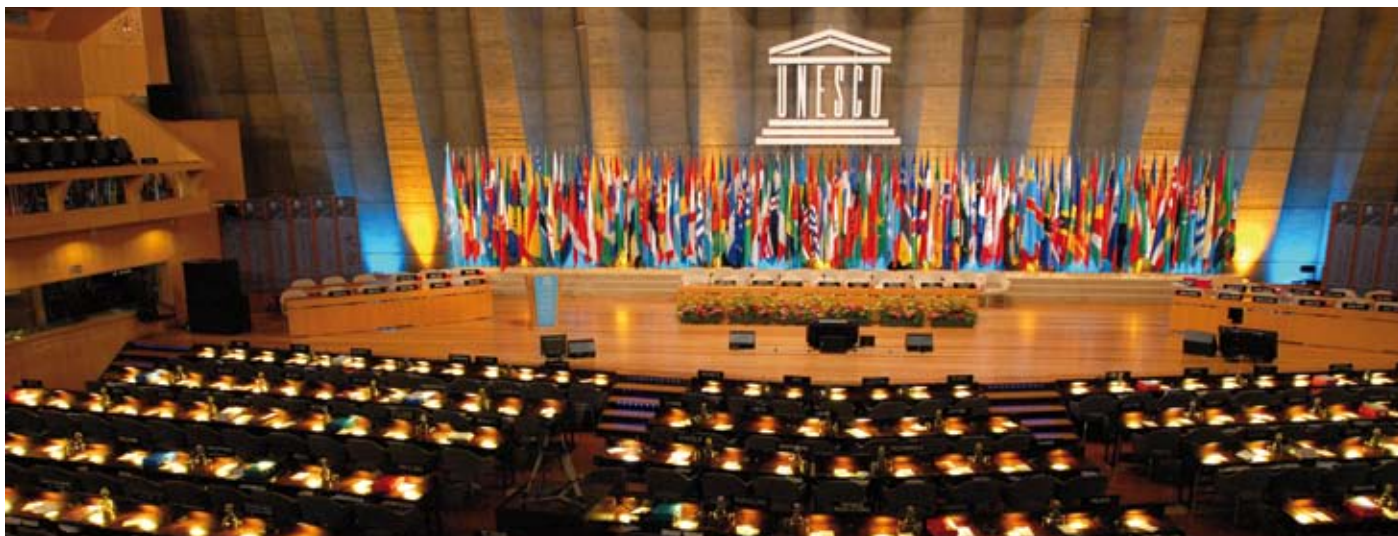
# The Timeline of key UNESCO events from January to May 2009

- 15 Jan.** The Global Launch ceremony of the International Year of Astronomy (2009) takes place at UNESCO Headquarters.
- 16 Jan.** Information Meeting of the UNESCO Executive Board discusses UNESCO's participation in UN reform process.
- 2 March** UNESCO convenes the first Future Forum on the theme, "The Global Financial and Economic Crisis: What Impact on Multilateralism and UNESCO?"
- 2 March** The Director-General inaugurates the Interregional Training Seminar for New Secretaries-General of National Commissions at UNESCO HQs.
- 5 March** L'Oreal UNESCO Women in Science Prize is awarded to five eminent female scientists at the official ceremony.
- 16 March** The Director-General launches the World Water Development Report at the 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul, Turkey.
- 26 March** The first meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage opens at UNESCO HQs, which was adopted in November 2001 and entered into force in January 2009, opens at UNESCO.
- 31 March** A three-day World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) opens in Bonn, Germany.
- 3 April** Mr Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General, pays his first visit to UNESCO HQs, within the framework of the spring 2009 session of the UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination, and addressed the Permanent Delegates and staff members.
- 20 April** The 181st session of UNESCO's Executive Board opens to discuss the proposed programme and budget for 2010-2011 (35 C/5).
- 3 May** The Director-General awards the 2009 World Press Freedom Prize posthumously to the Sri Lankan journalist Lasantha Wickrematunge at a ceremony in Doha, Qatar.
- 25 May** The celebration of Africa Week starts at UNESCO HQs.



Participants of the 2009 Interregional Information Seminar

# 35<sup>th</sup> session of the General Conference: key events



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The 35<sup>th</sup> session of the UNESCO General Conference will take place in Paris from 6 to 23 October 2009. The National Commissions are expected to actively prepare for this event, which will adopt the UNESCO programme and budget for 2010-2011 (35 C/5) and elect the new Director-General.

The key events during that period, with particular relevance to National Commissions, include:

- |                 |  |                   |   |
|-----------------|--|-------------------|---|
| <b>1-3 Oct</b>  | Youth Forum "Investing out of crisis: what role for young people?" (National Commissions are invited to help designate the youth delegations of their country to attend the Forum, which is considered as an integral part of the General Conference.) | <b>7 Oct (am)</b> | Regional Informal Meeting of African National Commissions                 |
| <b>3 Oct</b>    | A Conference of Parliamentarians for UNESCO (Heads of PLM Regional Networks for Education will be invited to this first ever event at UNESCO HQs)  | <b>7 Oct (pm)</b> | Regional Informal Meeting of Asia/Pacific National Commissions            |
| <b>5 Oct</b>    | Partners Forum "UNESCO and its Partners: multiple partnerships for a common ideal" (National Commissions are to be among chief participants of this event, alongside institutional partners and members of the broader UNESCO family.)                 | <b>8 Oct (am)</b> | Regional Informal Meeting of Arab National Commissions                    |
| <b>6-10 Oct</b> | General Policy Debate  | <b>8 Oct (pm)</b> | Regional Informal Meeting of Europe/North America National Commissions    |
| <b>8-9 Oct</b>  | Plenary Ministerial Forum  | <b>9 Oct (am)</b> | Regional Informal Meeting of Latin America/Caribbean National Commissions |
|                 |  | <b>9-10 Oct</b>   | Ministerial Roundtable on Education                                       |
|                 |  | <b>12-13 Oct</b>  | Ministerial Roundtable on Oceans  |
|                 |  | <b>9-13 Oct</b>   | PRX Commission (former Commission 1)                                      |
|                 |  | <b>14 Oct</b>     | Elections for the Executive Board   |
|                 |  | <b>15 Oct</b>     | Appointment of the new Director-General                                   |
|                 |  | <b>16 Oct</b>     | Elections for Subsidiary Bodies of the General Conference                 |

**Note.** There will be one common exhibition during the General Conference under the overall theme "Cultures and Developments". National Commissions are expected to contribute, by sending in advance their publications, posters, and multimedia materials. More detailed information in this regard will be shortly communicated to the Member States and their National Commissions.

# New developments concerning ICT services

**Information diffusion through the Web has become an indispensable requirement in the modern era of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Below are a few measures taken recently to improve UNESCO's services for National Commissions in this vital domain:**



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- The National Commissions Website on the UNESCO portal is currently being reshaped to make it simpler and interactive. The new site will be operational in English, French and Spanish before the General Conference.
- Studies are under-way for an Extranet for Member States and National Commissions, in order to create a tool for them to diffuse and exchange information through a common secure space on Web.
- A circular letter to all National Commissions was sent out last April, inviting them to reserve Internet national domain name and create National

Commissions websites. The letter also announced the Help Package to provide guidelines for setting up and running websites, which can be seen at: <http://erc.unesco.org/websitetoolkit>.

- For legal and technical reasons as well as in accordance with the Directives concerning the use of the name, acronym, logo and Internet domain names of UNESCO, the UNESCO Secretariat will no longer be able to host Websites of National Commissions and Permanent Delegations. The maintenance of the National Commissions' sites at UNESCO Portal will cease on 31 December 2009.

## The new "Architecture" will be presented at the General Conference

The National Commissions Section is finalizing the second edition of Architecture of National Commissions for UNESCO, which is to be presented at the General Conference. Prepared on the basis of a global survey, this document will contain an updated analysis of the status, composition and resources of National Commissions

worldwide. It will provide practical recommendations to improve the structure and functioning of Commissions on the basis of best practices and international experiences. The document will also include the latest figures and statistics as well as detailed info-sheets.

# How National Commissions can help increase UNESCO's visibility



Participants of the Vienna Seminar

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One of the key functions of National Commissions is to raise UNESCO's visibility at the country level, so that decision makers and the public at large have solid knowledge of the Organization and its mission. How this goal can be achieved efficiently? What are the ways and means of assuring UNESCO's active "presence" at the national level?

These questions were discussed at the Inter-regional Workshop on "UNESCO Public Information Plan at international and national levels," which was hosted by the Austrian National Commission in Vienna on 13-16 May 2009.

The representatives of 16 National Commissions from the Africa and Europe regions as well as several officials from UNESCO HQs examined cooperation modalities between the Secretariat and National Commissions in the planning, implementation and evaluation of Public Information activities.

**Particular attention was given to determining basic needs, target audiences and evaluation modalities for press and communication materials, as well as UNESCO's printed materials.**

The workshop helped to identify major events, activities and key publications relevant to national contexts. Particular attention was given to determining basic needs, target audiences and evaluation modalities for press and communication materials, as well as UNESCO's printed materials. The meeting adopted a number of recommendations for the joint follow up by the UNESCO Secretariat and National Commissions.

## Study visit of the NatCom members to UNESCO (Norway)

The Norwegian National Commission has decided to undertake an innovative initiative – it brought all its recently-designated members, Commissioners, to UNESCO HQs for a two-day information visit. On 12 and 13 February, a 17-member delegation was introduced to the work of

different sectors and services of UNESCO, meeting key officials and programme specialists and discussing key issues which are linked to Norwegian priorities. This "study visit" was organized in close collaboration with the Permanent Delegation of the Kingdom of Norway to UNESCO.

# New Approach in holding DG Consultations



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**“New Approach” is based on the “World Café” method [...]. It implies to group participants into several small groups and organize discussions at progressive rounds of conversations around small tables.**

In recent years, discussions have been going on, especially among European National Commissions, to explore new ways for organizing regional consultations on the preparation of Draft C/4 and C/5. The intention is to turn these encounters into interactive forums of dialogue. With this in mind, the Benelux National Commissions elaborated a New Approach method, which was used at the last DG Consultation on the draft 34 C/5 in The Hague and Antwerp in June 2008.

The European National Commissions were satisfied with the “New Approach”, intending to repeat the experience at their 2010 Consultation. Encouraged by that success, the Flanders, Luxembourg and Netherlands National Commissions hosted the Information Seminar *“A New Approach to the Director-General’s Consultation of National*

*Commissions”* in Brussels, Belgium, on 14-16 April 2009. The representatives of twenty National Commissions from all five regions attended the Seminar, in order to learn about the “New Approach” and explore the feasibility of its application in other regions.

The core of the “New Approach” is based on the “World Café” method to be applied during debates for setting up priorities. It implies to group participants into several small groups and organize discussions at progressive rounds of conversations around small tables. The Brussels Seminar was itself held in the form of the “World Café” where the participants experienced themselves the “New Approach”, acting simultaneously as the learners of the new method and as the participants of its simulation.

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