

The Genesis of the G8-UNESCO World Forum in Trieste, and its Goals

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The organization of the Forum has involved several ministries of the Italian Government including the Office of the Prime Minister, the office of the Director-General of UNESCO, the Italian Permanent Mission at UNESCO, the G8 mechanisms, as well as several educational, research and governmental institutions in Trieste and the Region of Friuli-Venzia-Giulia. This complex interaction has meant that many people have worked for it and had to be consulted. I shall provide a personal perspective here on ICTP's involvement and how the Forum came to be held in Trieste in the first place.

A little over a year ago, I wrote an article on the permanent migration of scientists from the poorer parts of the world to its richer parts. The main point of the article was that the permanent migration away from developing countries would diminish if one could devise proper means to support short-term mobility of scientists throughout the world, in such a way that their access to their peers and new ideas becomes easier: most of the time, scientists want to do the best science of which they are capable. I sent the article to Mr. Antonio Bernardini, who was then working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was entrusted with the coordination of international institutions in Trieste. He and his colleagues at the Ministry apparently thought well enough of the article that they expressed an interest in organizing a meeting at ICTP on the topic of migration of scientists.

Some time later, preparations for the latest G8 meeting in St. Petersburg were proceeding and a document for joint declaration was being prepared by the G8 Sherpa. The focus of the document was the role of education and research in innovation societies. Having been primed of my interest in such matters, Mr. Bernardini asked for my comments on the draft document. Claudio Tuniz and I studied the document and made two major suggestions (and a number of minor ones). First, the outcome of the so-called knowledge triangle (involving education, research and innovation) must be connected to global sustainability – this being, perhaps, the “hottest” topic of our times. Second, even though the document was primarily focused on G8 countries, appropriate reference ought to be made to developing countries: after all, developing countries occupy more than 2/3 of the land and contain much of the world's population; all the large problems that may arise in those countries – such as environmental pollution, land degradation, depletion of natural resources, spread of diseases, poverty and starvation, illiteracy, among others – are bound to affect the G8 countries in tangible and intangible ways. Several of our comments found their way in some form into the final document, thanks to Mr. Bernardini's efforts.

As a consequence, the meeting at ICTP that was earlier somewhat narrowly focused on scientific mobility took the shape of a G8 Forum in which the connection of the knowledge triangle to sustainability would be explored, amplifying its broad mention in the G8 document, as would be the connection to countries other than the G8 – even though the attention would remain primarily on G8 countries. At this point, it was

collectively thought that involving UNESCO would be highly beneficial because the Director-General had just launched the Decade of Education Program (aside from the fact that UNESCO is one of ICTP's parent organizations). Thus it came to pass that the Forum would be called G8-UNESCO World Forum. Trieste was thought to be the logical place to hold it because of its work on science in developing countries – for over four decades through ICTP and more recently also through other international institutions.

The involvement of UNESCO changed the character of the Forum substantially by making it more international in scope than was originally conceived. This evolution has been gradual though no efforts were made at any time to provide equal access to all parts of the world; in reality, the evolution was also the result of opportunism with respect to the availability of the right people willing and able to speak on the right subject, a compromise among the wishes of the many parties involved, suitable representation from the G8 countries, and so forth. Countless suggestions of numerous people led us nowhere but one common theme was embraced by all: to put some focus on Africa. The program of the Forum in its present form can be accessed on the website <http://g8forum.ictp.it>

I should perhaps say what I expect as the outcome of the Forum. First, the Forum is neither a purely political nor a purely scientific meeting. It provides a platform for expressing ideas from governments, universities, research institutes, industries and private entrepreneurs on its main theme, “Education, Research and Innovation: New Partnership for Sustainable Development”. Second, it was decided early on that no formal resolutions would be passed at the end of the meeting. It is not that good resolutions are not useful but history is a strong indicator that they are rarely effective unless backed by financial and organizational commitments. Instead, it was felt that, if the Forum can bring out a few good ideas that resonate with those present in such a way that they can work on them in their own way; if the Forum brings focused attention on important issues on which partial solutions are being practiced in different parts of the world; if the Forum kindles the imagination of the participants that they might to innovate similarly – that would in itself be a significant contribution.

The key to the success of the Forum, then, is the quality of speakers, the format of presentation and the time for discussions. We strived to get the best people we could find and have, in the program, many luminaries from politics and government to science and industry that there is little doubt that important things will be said. All presentations will be recorded and might be consolidated, if there is consensus to that effect, in the form of Proceedings. We did not aim for long presentations or uniformity of views.

We did hope – and still do – that the situation in sub-Saharan Africa gets some attention. We hope (dare I say, yet again?) that there will be some discussion of its needs that all of us will keep in mind and do our best to alleviate in our own ways. It is better to remember that good individuals working through transparent institutions are the ones who will make the difference; it is our collective responsibility to make this difference. This will not happen by throwing money at the problem (although nothing can be done without money) but by building human capacity to make progress. This is a hard and time-consuming task, nothing that makes headlines or excites the imagination of politicians, activists or the

powerful. But there is no other way to use available resources wisely for the betterment of the world's population. I hope that this will come through as one of the messages of the Forum, and that the institutions and people who are engaged in such efforts will receive some support and recognition – not for its own intrinsic value but for enabling useful action to follow.

As I pointed out already, many layers of the Italian Government and UNESCO, Italian embassies throughout the world, and other mid-level organizations within Trieste and without, have been involved in the organization of the Forum. For this reason, putting it together has been an arduous task: The key reason for whatever success has been achieved so far has been the unstinting interest from the very top: those of the Prime Minister of Italy, Mr. Romano Prodi, and of the Director-General of UNESCO, Mr. Koichiro Matsuura. I cannot name all the others who have contributed to this endeavor, but should express my thanks to those who have worked with me in the trenches, so to speak, on a day-to-day basis: within ICTP, numerous staff members who have given their time and energy, in particular Professor C. Tuniz, Ms. F. Delconte and Ms. S. Tanaskovic; in the ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ms. Savanella Teresa, Mr. Antonio Bernardini and Mr. Renzo Rosso; at UNESCO, the designates of the Director-General, Ms. Mary-Louise Kearney and Mr. M. El-Tayeb; at the office, Ms. C. Fiandra and her team; at the Italian Permanent Mission at UNESCO, Professor Ezio Bussoletti.