Summary of the 2003-2010 Project

of the

Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation
for the Progress of Humankind

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Introduction

The FPH is twenty years old. The 2003-2010 Project is the legacy of these twenty years of work, divided into two stages separated by a first sabbatical period (1988-1990). From the moment it was set up, the Foundation has tried to define and experience itself as a human adventure guided by constant perspectives, but inventing its path as it progresses.

The Foundation is independent and has the necessary resources for long-term action thanks to the income it receives from the Charles Léopold Mayer estate that was bequeathed to us. It has always considered that its duty was to put itself at the service of the major challenges of the present world, no matter how large the challenges and how small the Foundation.

The 2003-2010 Project is the fruit of a second sabbatical interval (2002-2003), which followed a period of twelve years of work (1990-2002) and allowed us to capitalize the experience we have acquired, to move away from everyday concerns for some perspective, and to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the action we have conducted so far.

The passage from the second to the third stage of the Foundation is characterized by both continuity and changes. Continuity lies in the ambition (to be at the service of the major challenges) and the style (a long-term human adventure for which the path is invented while in progress). It is also present in the priorities and methods derived from what we have learned in the past twenty years. There are three sources for the changes. First, the world has changed profoundly since 1990. The fundamental challenges are still the same but the economic, political, social, intellectual, scientific, and technological context has changed. Second, our action itself has brought deep changes upon us and led us to define ourselves differently. Third, the capitalization we undertook also revealed our weaknesses, our limits, and our contradictions, something we would now like to remedy.

1 This summary is taken from a much more detailed 65-page document, of which we have included the Table of Contents as an Appendix. The document, the main lines of which were approved by the Foundation Council during its June 20th session, is available on request, but only in French for the moment.
Summary of the 2003-2010 Project

The interdependence among human beings, among societies, and between humankind and the biosphere have continued to grow. Globalization, i.e. the development of all forms of interdependence on a global scale, is irreversible. Given the growth of world population, the unbearable pressure on the resources of the planet, the concentration of power and wealth, the development model that has dominated the Western stage and then the world for the last two centuries is no longer applicable. World society, which is emerging with no common benchmarks, no legitimate institutions, no justice, no responsibility, no solidarity, no long-term vision, and no shared objectives, is running straight into the wall. For the human adventure to continue, the twenty-first century will have to be a century of great mutations: in our ways of thinking, of feeling, of producing, of consuming, of relating with one another, and of governing ourselves. Everyone knows or feels this but, for small or great, poor or rich, the tendency is to withdraw into one’s own helplessness, therefore into a refusal of responsibility before the magnitude of the challenges. It is precisely against this helplessness and lack of responsibility that we have to react. And in fact, this reaction is underway all over the world.

On the strength of this conviction, which it forged for itself as early as the 1980s, the Foundation backed, starting in 1994, the birth and development of the Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World. Convinced that a collective will and common perspectives could only emerge through dialogue among all the regions and all the socioprofessional contexts of the world, the Foundation, in the framework of the Alliance, organized in 2001 the prototype of this dialogue by holding the first World Citizens Assembly, which crowned the support that had been given to building international thematic, socioprofessional, and geocultural networks. These networks did not remain within the confines of analysis and denunciation. They also drew up proposals. The summary of these proposals and that of the work of the World Assembly, which mobilized thousands of people from all the socioprofessional contexts and all the continents, strikingly highlight the imperative, urgent tasks that humankind must take on as the twenty-first century commences. This is what constitutes, in the etymological sense of the term, our Common Agenda: the things that need to be done. The 2003-2010 Foundation
Project is defined on the basis of this Agenda.

The Agenda expresses two important mutations: that of the development model—ways of life, of production, of consumption, and of trade—and that of governance—the art of organizing and managing societies, such as to ensure social cohesion, justice, peace, diversity, individual development, the conservation of resources, and preparation of the future. Common to the two mutations is an ethical foundation: building a viable world society supposes an agreement on common ethical principles; the enormous differences in the contexts, religions, and philosophical traditions cannot justify delaying the search for common ethical criteria for the management of a common planet.

In the past two centuries, the means have tended to become more important than the ends: science for science’s sake, the market for the market’s sake, growth for growth’s sake, power for power’s sake, wealth for wealth’s sake, up to the point where everything, including living beings as well as things, has become nothing but merchandise, with a price, but worthless. Governance and ethics are the two inseparable means to reaffirm the pre-eminence of the ends over the means, to give meaning once again to democracy, i.e., to the human community’s stated determination to guide its own destiny and not to be the blind toy of a dynamics that transforms it but that it no longer fully understands.

But who can present and implement a collective ambition of this magnitude? Do the great political and economic powers that be—in plain language, the major states and companies—have the capacity, the legitimacy, the vision, and the determination to do so? At a time when a legitimate, democratic, and efficient global governance is an urgent need, there is no political community to institute it. Most world and regional organizations—the UN and Europe for example, which could be the beginnings of structures to do this—are in crisis, because they are still working under the illusion of state sovereignty. In these historical conditions, we have to break out of the vicious circle in which the absence of a political community, the absence of a regulation institution, and the absence of vision all feed into each other, and to do so, we need to build a world community that includes all those, from every walk of life and from every continent, who are aware of their duty and aware of the challenges and wish to work together to design and to conduct these mutations, to pool their experience, their creativeness, and their energy to build a responsible, plural, and united world. Building this community is indispensable to design and to implement the necessary mutations, but it is already a great mutation in itself. It is indeed through a community such as this that a common ethics can be conceived and put into practice. This is also a fundamental dimension of the governance that needs to be built. With others, the Foundation therefore wishes to contribute to the emergence of this world community.
Is this a flight of fancy? an impossible dream? an idealist’s project? We don't think so. A world is on the move, a world is seeking. A multifaceted civil society is seeing the day, supported by the reality of globalization and made possible by the revolution in communication media. Networks of researchers, of businessmen, of NGOs, of labor unions, of social movements are becoming stronger. They can still be criticized for remaining all too often in their own compartments, or for being corporatist or united against a common adversary rather than being allies with common perspectives. Nonetheless, an evolution is in progress, nicely demonstrated by the replacement, in the course of the past two years, of the term “antiglobalization” by “alterglobalization.” This is a beginning, the clearing of a long path.

The coming mutations won't fall from the sky. They are to be invented, experimented, and imagined here, there, and everywhere. Isolated, they lose in strength because, as Paul Ricoeur has said, “Power exists when men act jointly, it vanishes when they are dispersed.” The construction of the world community needs to create power by federating experiences and by helping them thus to change in scale. This is why, in the Foundation project, building a world community and pooling experiences are inseparable and require moving constantly back and forth between the global and the local.

Governance, ethics, alternatives to development, and the emergence of a world community are all joined together by an invisible thread. This thread is the building of relations. We live in a radically interdependent world, where everything is related, living beings and things. However, our education, scientific, mental, moral, productive, political, and administrative systems spend all their time separating things, cutting them up into small slices. We have even been taught that slicing things up was the condition for efficiency and the symbol of Western rationality. But this, today, is one of the causes of our intellectual, moral, political, economic, and institutional crisis. This is why the Foundation project is devoted to building and managing relations: among the actions, the experiences, and the thinking; among the actors; between the local and the global; among the cultures; among the problems. The capacity to build and to manage such relations while respecting both unity and diversity, through the recognition of divergences and the will to overcome them peacefully, is at the heart of governance, of ethics, and of development in the twenty-first century.

The world community cannot be built by setting up large, monolithic systems of collective action, which are organized along a top-down format, or are single-community-based, as has been done in the past. It supposes, on the contrary, a profound renewal of collective organization and action, privileging alliance models, in which people and institutions come together around common aims without giving up their own identities and their diversity.
Every era has its privileged forms of organization. In the age of globalization and the Internet, new forms of organization need to be invented, which allow those who share the same ethics of responsibility and solidarity and the same determination to move out of a state of helplessness to recognize each other and to be linked together, to pool their efforts. By giving birth, then, to the Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World and by supporting its development, by backing international networks of people and organizations in different fields around a common challenge, the Foundation has contributed to the collective learning of these new forms of organization, which we call alliances. This learning has been sustained all over the world by millions of other initiatives. Such alliances are also a contribution to political renewal and to new forms of governance. Supporting the emergence of world alliances therefore constitutes a priority for the Foundation, a way to take full advantage of, to strengthen, to transmit, and to diversify what it has already accomplished over the years.

Organizing relations of all kinds, building viable alternatives that take into account the diversity and complexity of the world, transforming experience into knowledge and then knowledge into action, organizing international alliances, designing governance, structuring and providing information: all of this calls for a new culture, new methods, and new practices. These must be able to change continuously in terms of experience that may have been acquired, but also because of the fast revolution of the information systems, constantly offering new opportunities but making it difficult to acquire the necessary learning, to harmonize the tools, and to make the systems compatible. The Foundation has always been aware of the importance of developing the tools and methods needed to prevent energy from wearing out and momentum to fall. The inadequacy of forms of organization and working methods is also part of the crisis in governance and democracy. Appreciation of the methodological capital accumulated over the years by the Foundation, its constant evolution, and its mutualisation with everything that is invented and experimented elsewhere therefore constitute another major priority.

A plural and united world calls on the art of combining diversity and unity. Diversity has several dimensions: geocultural diversity, socioprofessional diversity, and thematic diversity. These three types of diversity need to be expressed while simultaneously underscoring the connections within this diversity and producing their syntheses. This twofold effort of expressing the diversity and seeking a level of synthesis, which is guiding the governance revolution, also guides the Foundation project. After the 1990-2002 stage, during which the Foundation’s organization was above all based on thematic programs, we are seeking a new balance for the 2003-2010 Project. Consistently with our proposals on governance, much greater importance will be granted to territorial approaches and to the relations that will be developed with and among our different partners within a given region of the world.
The major mutations, which we state as needed urgently, will not only be the fruit of political and social struggle. They call for another view of the world, another way to join the individual and the collective, another approach to science and technology, another education system, another governance. All of this supposes a deep transformation of the systems of thought and of regulation. It is to this transformation that the Foundation must be attached as a priority. Work conducted all over the world for the past ten years by the Foundation with its partners has made it possible to collect in all these fields a capital of proposals. Not only is there an Agenda, a statement of the things to do, there are also proposals on how to do them and this is true for the three major priorities of the Agenda: governance, ethics, and alternative development models. Appreciation and enrichment of this intellectual heritage is part of our priorities. In contrast with the previous stages of its history, the Foundation is no longer exclusively in the position to provide the means to facilitate the appreciation of others’ experiences and to build networks. It has become a place to present and implement convictions and proposals, for a new conception of governance, for a Charter of Human Responsibilities, for new development, economic, scientific, and technological models. It must try to promote these proposals, share these convictions, and search for new alliances with all those who are working in the same direction throughout the world.

We can summarize the main lines of the 2003-2010 Project as following:

The Foundation is committed to contributing to the long-term mutations of our societies. For this, it supports the emergence of a world community capable of designing and conducting three major mutations: new social, political, and institutional regulations from the local to the global (the governance revolution); a common ethical foundation (the Charter of Human Responsibilities); and new development models. It seeks a constant coming and going between diversity (expressed in its different dimensions) and unity (expressed through a constant attention to the management of relations and to territorial consistency). To implement these guidelines it combines three forms of action: promotion of ideas and proposals; support to the emergence of socially responsible alliances; and promotion and improvement of the methods.

The resources that the Foundation can mobilize to serve this project are of two kinds. The first, material, is the income of its estate and its human resources: it is divided when it is shared. These resources are therefore limited by nature and are allocated according to the priorities described above.

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2 The Foundation’s own resources amount to 9 million CHF (6 million euros) per year.
The second, immaterial, are the joint product of innumerable efforts with which it has been associated and which have made it possible to accumulate an intellectual capital—findings, concepts, and proposals—a symbolic capital—resulting among others from its publishing policy and the organization of the World Citizens Assembly—a social capital—the whole of human relations and partnerships that have been established among a large number of people and institutions with a great variety of roots and skills—and a methodological capital—a great diversity of methods and tools, improved and changed over the years. These immaterial resources, far from being the property of the Foundation, grow when they are shared and have no value unless they are shared. The Foundation will endeavor, between 2003 and 2010, to maintain and to develop this capital.
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