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Federalism in a Changing World – A Conceptual Framework for the Conference

1. The relevance of the federal idea in the contemporary world

In the contemporary world, federalism as a political idea has become increasingly important as a way of peacefully reconciling unity and diversity within a political system.

The reasons for this can be found in the changing nature of the world leading to simultaneous pressures for both larger states and also for smaller ones. Modern developments in transportation, social communications, technology, industrial organisation, globalisation and knowledge-based, and hence learning societies, have all contributed to this trend. Thus, there have developed two powerful, thoroughly interdependent, yet distinct and often actually opposed motives: the desire to build dynamic and efficient national or even supra-national modern states, and the search for distinctive identities. The former is generated by the goals and values shared by most Western and non-Western societies today: a desire for progress, a rising standard of living, social justice, influence in the world arena, participation in the global economic network, and a growing awareness of worldwide interdependence in an era which makes both mass destruction and mass construction possible. The latter arises from the desire for smaller, directly accountable, self-governing political units, more responsive to the individual citizen, and from the desire to give expression to primary group attachments – linguistic and cultural ties, religious

connections, historical traditions, and social practices – which provide the distinctive basis for a community's sense of identity and yearning for self-determination.

Given these dual pressures throughout the world, for larger political units capable of fostering economic development and improved security on the one hand, and for smaller political units more sensitive to their electorates and capable of expressing local distinctiveness on the other, federal solutions have had an increasing appeal throughout the world. The reason for this is that federalism provides a technique of constitutional organisation that permits action by a shared government for certain common purposes in a larger political unit, combined together with autonomous action by smaller constituent units of government, directly and democratically responsible to their own electorates. As such, federal political systems provide the closest institutional approximation to the complex multicultural and multidimensional economic, social and political reality of the contemporary world.

To what can this contemporary increased interest in federalism be attributed? One major factor has been the recognition that an increasingly global economy has unleashed centrifugal economic and political forces weakening the traditional nation state and strengthening both supra-national and local pressures. As a result governments are faced increasingly with the desire of their populaces to be both global consumers and local self-governing citizens at the same time.

The transition from an industrial to a knowledge-based and learning society has also contributed to this trend. Consequently the development of knowledge and its application have become fundamental to society. This trend has two important political implications. First, a primary task of political systems has become that of

facilitating the processes of knowledge development within society. Second, given the elements of independence and interdependence involved in the creation and dissemination of various specialised forms of knowledge, there is an increasing need for forms of political organisation that facilitate both the purpose-specific development of knowledge and its overall integration within the broader network of society. Moreover, since knowledge is constantly changing, renewing itself, expanding, and becoming ever more complex, the political framework must be flexible and capable of evolving by learning from its own experience. This requirement for a flexible and evolving balance of independence and interdependence has been a major factor contributing to the need for constantly evolving federal forms of political organisation, and is a trend that appears certain to increase rather than decrease (see, for instance, Courchene, 2001; Willke, 1995).

These developments have contributed to the current interest in federalism, not as an ideology, but in terms of practical questions about how to organise the sharing and distribution of political powers in a way that will enable the common needs of people to be achieved while accommodating the diversity of their circumstances and preferences. Furthermore, in the context of a world in which societies are becoming increasingly knowledge based, much can be learned from the experience of the various ways in which other federal systems have attempted to combine independence and interdependence in wrestling with similar problems and in adapting to ever changing world conditions.

As a consequence, there are in the world today some 25 countries that are federal in their character, claim to be federal, or exhibit the characteristics typical of

federations. Indeed some 40% of the world's population today lives in countries that can be considered, or claim to be federations, many of which are multicultural or even multinational in their composition.

During the past decade especially there has been an international burgeoning of interest in federalism. Political leaders, leading intellectuals and even some journalists are now increasingly speaking of federalism as a healthy, liberating and positive form of political organisation. Furthermore, Belgium, Spain, South Africa, Ethiopia, Italy and the United Kingdom appear to be emerging towards new innovative federal forms. In a number of other countries some consideration is being given to the efficacy of incorporating at least some federal features, although not necessarily all the features of a full-fledged federation. Furthermore, the European Union (EU), with the addition of new member states, is in the process of evolving its own unique hybrid of confederal and federal institutions. Thus, everywhere, with changing world conditions, federalism continues to evolve.

2. The federal idea: its essential features

Over the years there has been much scholarly debate about the definition of federalism. Definitions have varied from broad inclusive ones to narrow restrictive ones. The basic essence of federalism is the notion of two or more orders of government combining elements of "shared rule" for some purposes and regional "self-rule" for others. It is based on the objective of combining unity and diversity: i.e. of accommodating, preserving and promoting distinct identities within a larger political union.

This basic idea has been expressed through a variety of federal institutional forms in which, by contrast to the single source of constitutional authority in unitary systems, there are two (or more) levels of government, combining elements of shared-rule through common institutions with regional self-rule for the governments of the constituent units. The broad category of federal forms encompasses a wide range of institutional forms from constitutionally decentralised unions to confederacies and beyond. Within this broad genus of federal political systems, federations represent a distinct species in which neither the federal nor the constituent units of government are constitutionally subordinate to the other, i.e. each has sovereign powers derived from the constitution rather than from another level of government, each is empowered to deal directly with the citizens in the exercise of its legislative, executive and taxing powers, and each is directly elected by its citizens (Watts, 1999, 6-14).

The structural characteristics generally common to federations as a specific form of political system are the following:

- Two (or more) orders of government each acting directly on their citizens (rather than indirectly through the other order);
- A formal constitutional distribution of legislative and executive authority, and allocation of revenue resources between the orders of government ensuring some areas of genuine autonomy for each order;
- Provision for the designated representation of distinct regional views within the federal policy-making institutions, usually provided by a federal second

chamber composed of representatives of the regional electorates, legislatures or governments;

- A supreme written constitution, not unilaterally amendable by one order of government, and therefore requiring the consent not only of the federal legislature but also of a significant proportion of the constituent units through assent by their legislatures or by referendum majorities;
- An umpire (in the form of courts, or as in Switzerland provision for referendums) to rule on interpretation or valid application of the constitution;
- Processes and institutions to facilitate inter-governmental collaboration in those areas where governmental responsibilities are shared or inevitably overlap.

What basically distinguishes federations from decentralised unitary systems and from confederations is that in unitary systems the governments of the constituent units ultimately derive their authority from the central government, and in confederations the central institutions ultimately derive their authority from the constituent units and consist of delegates of the constituent units. In a federation, however, each order of government derives its authority, not from another order of government, but from the constitution.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that some political systems are hybrids combining characteristics of different kinds of political systems. Those which are predominantly federations in their constitution and operation, but which include some federal government powers to override governments of constituent units, an arrangement more typical of a unitary system, have sometimes been described as “quasi-

federations". At different stages in their development Canada, India, Pakistan, Malaysia and South Africa have been so described. On the other hand Germany, while predominantly a federation, has a confederal element in the Bundesrat, its federal second chamber, which is composed of instructed delegates of the Land governments. A hybrid, predominantly a confederation but with some features of a federation, is the EU since Maastricht. Hybrids occur because statesmen are often more interested in pragmatic political solutions than in theoretical purity.

In setting out the distinctive characteristics of a federation there are some important points to note. First, there is the distinction between constitutional form and operational reality. In many political systems political practice has transformed the way the constitution operates. Therefore, to understand how a given federation operates, it is necessary to examine not only its constitutional law but also its political practices and processes. Significant characteristics of federal processes include:

- A strong disposition to democratic procedures since they presume the voluntary consent of citizens in the constituent units;
- Non-centralisation as a principle expressed through multiple centres of political decision making;
- Open political bargaining as a major feature of the way in which decisions are arrived at;
- The operation of checks and balances to avoid the concentration of political power;

- A respect for constitutionalism and the rule of law since each order of government derives its authority from the constitution.

While certain structural features and political processes may be common to federations, it must be emphasised that federations have exhibited many variations in the application of the federal idea. There is no single ideal form of federation. Among the variations that can be identified among federations are those in:

- The degree of cultural or national diversity which they attempt to reconcile;
- The number, relative size and symmetry or asymmetry of the constituent units;
- The distribution of legislative and administrative responsibilities among governments;
- The allocation of taxing powers and financial resources;
- The degree of centralisation or decentralisation and the degree of economic integration;
- The character and composition of their central institutions;
- The processes and institutions for resolving conflicts and facilitating collaboration between interdependent governments;
- The procedures for formal and informal adaption and change;
- The roles of federal and constituent unit governments in the conduct of international relations.

Ultimately federalism is a pragmatic and prudential technique whose applicability in different situations has depended upon the different forms in which it has been adopted or adapted and even upon the development of new innovations in its application.

Consequently, the exchange of information among practitioners from different federations, including those active in governments and academics, can contribute to a more realistic understanding of the potential effectiveness or ineffectiveness of different kinds of federal arrangements and processes in different circumstances. Furthermore, given the pace of changing conditions in the contemporary world and the need for federal systems to adapt to these, much can be learned from exchanging information on the experience of different federations in responding to them.

3. Federal constitution, governments and societies

Federal systems are a function not only of constitutions, but also of governments, and fundamentally of societies. In learning from the experience of different federations, it is important, therefore, to distinguish between federal societies, governments and constitutions in order to understand the dynamic interaction of these elements with each other. The motivations and interests within a society leading to pressures both for political diversity and autonomy on the one hand and for common action on the other, the legal constitutional structure, the actual operation processes and practice of governments are all important aspects in the operation of federations. It is through considering the interaction of these that we

may come to understand more fully the nature of federal systems and how they are able to respond to changing conditions and circumstances.

At one time, the study of federations tended to concentrate primarily on their legal frameworks. Scholars have come to realise, however, that a merely legalistic study of constitutions cannot adequately explain political patterns within federations. Indeed, the actual operation and practices of governments within federations have, in response to the play of social and political pressures, frequently diverged significantly from the formal relationships specified in the written legal documents. Scholars writing about federal systems have, therefore, become conscious of the importance of the social forces underlying federal systems. As one author put it:

“The essential nature of federalism is to be sought for, not in the shadings of legal and constitutional terminology but in the forces – economic, social, political, cultural – that have made the outward forms of federalism necessary … The essence of federalism lies not in the constitutional or institutional structure but in the society itself. Federal government is a device by which the federal qualities of the society are articulated and protected” (Livingston, 1956, 1-2).

But the view that federal institutions are merely the instrumentalities or expressions of federal societies, while an important corrective to purely legal and institutional analyses, is also too one-sided and oversimplifies the causal relationships. Constitutions and institutions, once created, themselves channel and shape societies (Cairns, 1977). For example, in both the United States in 1789 and Switzerland in 1848, the replacement of confederal structures by federal constitutions marked

turning points enabling the more effective political reconciliation of pressures for diversity and unity within their societies.

The causal relationships between a federal society, its political institutions, and political behaviour and processes are complex and dynamic. The causal impact is not simply a unidirectional one, but rather involves a two-way interaction with each influencing the other two. The pressures within a society may force a particular expression in its political institutions, processes and behaviour; but these institutions and processes, once established, usually in turn shape the society. They do this both by determining the channels in which the social pressures and political activities flow, and by establishing policies that modify the shape of society.

Thus, the relationships between a society, its constitution and its political institutions and processes are not static but involve continual mutual interaction. In considering the experience of different federations, we therefore need to consider not only the influence of social forces upon the adoption, design, modification and subsequent operation of federal constitutional structures, but also the influence that particular federal political structures and the related processes and political practices have had upon social loyalties, feelings and diversities. It is in the interplay of the social foundations, the written constitution, and the actual practices and activities of governments at different levels that an understanding of the nature and effectiveness of a particular federation is to be found. In assessing the experience of different federations, account therefore, needs to be taken not only of how well the institutions in each federation reflect the particular social and political balance of forces within that society, but also to what extent and in what manner these institutions, once

established, have effectively channelled and influenced the articulation of unity and diversity within that polity.

Figure 1 The interaction of federal societies, constitutions and governments

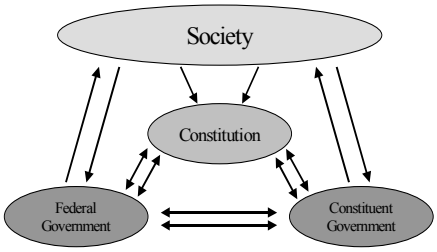
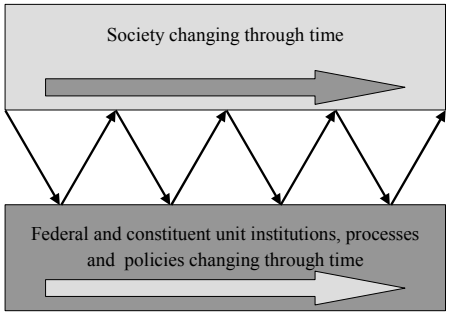


Figure 2 Federal evolution through time



The analysis of the interaction between social integration, economic integration and political integration and the relation of these to the counterbalancing catalysts for regionalism, requires an examination of a number of factors. First there is the character of the background conditions, including:

- The relative strength or weakness of national, economic and social links among the constituent units;
- The proximity of the constituent units to each other;

- The degree to which particular constituent units are themselves internally homogeneous in language, religion, race and culture;
- The degree to which particular constituent units differ from neighbouring units in language, religion, race, culture, level of modernisation, economic development and political ideology or outlook;
- The degree of disparity in relative wealth and political influence;
- The relative size and bargaining power of the constituent units;
- The complementarity or competitiveness of the elites in the different constituent units.

Second, there is the strength of the motives for integration and for regionalism, including:

- The desire for security from external or internal threats;
- The desire for the economic benefits of integration;
- The balance between the desires for a wider common identity and the desires for a sense of regional identity or even nationhood;
- The desire to secure the distinctive features of the society within a constituent unit against threats of assimilation;
- The desire to enhance the economic benefits for a particular regional group.

In addition to analysis of background conditions and the strength of various motives, important to understanding the interaction of social, economic and political

integration, is the character of the integration or devolutionary process in each case, including:

- The character of the negotiating process itself (e.g. use of referendum and election campaigns);
- The role of the leading elites;
- The impact of direct and indirect external influences;
- The timing and sequence of steps in the process of negotiation and of unification or devolution.

All these elements – the role of underlying conditions, motives, and the character of processes – are important to understanding the origin, operation, and evolution of federal systems.

4. Three particularly significant contemporary issues

Three particularly significant contemporary issues provide a focus for identifying the impact of the changing nature of the world upon the evolution of federations.

The first arises from the impact of globalisation which has tended everywhere to the increased merging of domestic and international policy issues. This has radically changed the handling of foreign relations in federations. The traditional approach to foreign relations was that of “recognising internal diversity but emphasising external unity”. Foreign relations were regarded, therefore, as solely the domain of federal governments. But that approach has now been called into question in many federations by the increased activity of the constituent units in foreign relations, and

by their active participation and involvement in the formulation of federal foreign policies. Constituent units of federations are now frequently involved directly both in trans-border arrangements with the constituent units in neighbouring countries, as well as in establishing missions abroad, especially to attract investment. In such federations as Germany, Belgium and Switzerland, the governments of the constituent units have also been recognised formally as important participants in the development and formulation of the foreign policy of the federation. This has derived from the recognition that foreign relations now frequently relate to other areas of jurisdiction previously constitutionally assigned to the constituent units. In addition the implementation of some aspects of international and supra-national law has increasingly fallen, within federations, upon the governments of the constituent units. Furthermore, a number of supra-national and international organisations, such as the EU or Francophonie, have provided a role for the constituent units of federations to play.

A second major issue arises from the prominence of multicultural diversity and the frequency of multicultural conflicts in the contemporary world. Federalism and decentralisation can make a substantial contribution to the peaceful resolution of multicultural conflicts in a world marked by many such conflicts. This raises for comparative consideration, the role that federalism and decentralisation can play in constitution making and nation building in societies marked by diversity, and in reinforcing democracy, transparency and accountability in such countries. Important aspects here are also the roles of communities and civil society in conflict management, and of efforts to resolve such conflicts through international mediation.

A third issue very much to the fore in contemporary federations is that of the appropriate assignment of responsibilities and of fiscal resources to the different orders of government, because of the worldwide trend to more decentralisation and autonomy directed at greater efficiency and equity. Related subthemes which need to be examined are the consequent political decision-making structures that are required, the problems of equalisation to correct financial disparities among the constituent units in federations, enabling fiscal competition but without excesses, and the appropriate forms of decentralisation in federations marked by transitional or developing economies.

These three sets of particularly significant issues in contemporary federations are, of course, interrelated. Each of them relates to efforts to reconcile unity and diversity: the first to reconciling internal and external diversity, the second to reconciling internal diversity through processes of democratic self-government, and the third to reconciling internal diversity with the requirements of divided responsibilities, efficiency, equity and accountability.

Because of their importance and relevance in the world today, these issues were chosen as the three main themes of the International Conference on Federalism 2002.

5. Federations learning from each other

Federal systems reflect the society that produces them. In a world that today is undergoing social change at an unprecedented rate, all federal systems are currently undergoing continuous transformation. They are all faced with the need to develop

an ability to learn and adapt in order to cope with the challenges they face. In such a context there is a very real value in exchanging experience about different ways of tackling common problems.

At the same time we need to recognise that, as already noted above, no single ideal federal model is applicable everywhere. There have been many variations in the application of the federal idea to fit different circumstances. One therefore cannot simply transfer an institutional model from one country to another without taking account of the different conditions and circumstances.

Nevertheless, as long as this caution is borne in mind, there is a genuine value in learning from the experience of federations elsewhere. Many of the problems faced are common to most federations. The experiences of other federations may therefore help us in several ways. They enable us to foresee more clearly the likely consequences of the various arrangements being advocated. Through identifying similarities and differences, attention may be drawn to certain features of our own arrangements whose significance might otherwise be underestimated. Options that might otherwise be overlooked may be identified. Furthermore, experience elsewhere may provide both positive and negative lessons: we can learn not only from the successes but also from the difficulties of other federations.

When considering how federations can learn from each other, we should recognise that learning theory distinguishes three types of learning (Probst and Büchel, 1994). The first type, known as “adaptive learning”, is purely confined to conveying information from the “initiated” to the “uninitiated”. However, federal systems have two characteristics that make this model unlikely to succeed. The first is their

heterogeneity: when considering the different experiences of federal systems, with their different background conditions, it is clear that each country is to a considerable extent unique. These differences should be borne in mind when attempting to transfer a model from one situation to another. Their second characteristic is an underlying dynamism. Beyond being simply different from one another, federal systems are in a constant state of flux, of ongoing development, and there is no guarantee that a given solution will work in the same way at different points in time and under different conditions. The combination of these two characteristics seriously limits the usefulness of the adaptive learning model.

5.1. Types of learning

The second type of learning, known as “learning for change”, analyses the way in which federal systems function, together with their objectives and how these can be realised. In view of the inconsistency and variability of different federations, the relevance and value of the data used as a tool for learning for change must be constantly checked. Depending on how political objectives have changed, the outcomes of the learning process will have to be constantly adjusted and redefined.

The third type of learning concentrates on learning to learn, and is known as “process learning”. This method focuses on the learning process itself underlying the actual content of what is being learnt. When using this method, it is necessary to check whether long-established behaviour patterns and forms of dialogue, such as the tendency to ignore errors or prevent them from being raised, are impeding or bypassing certain conclusions and learning processes. In order to uncover such

unconscious defensive routines, the way in which participants learn for change must be analysed.

If federations are to learn successfully from each other, they must use both the technique of learning for change and that of process learning. Integrated with these must be a continuous communication process not only between different federations, but also within a federal system itself. Once set in motion, this process should be a continuing one, allowing constant interaction between the parties involved. This communication relates to the structure of and changes in a collectively shared and publicly usable knowledge base. In exchanging statements, justifications, explanations, interpretations and so on of day-to-day events, those participating in the learning process generally refer to concrete episodes and patterns of explanation in what they say. This so-called routinised reference both challenges the prevailing situation and at the same time reproduces it. According to this line of reasoning, dialogue can produce new realities within the federal systems.

5.2. Rules of dialogue

A major pre-requisite for federations to learn from each other successfully is the creation of optimum conditions within which interpersonal communication can take place. The great challenge for those engaged in a learning process involving individuals from different federations is that they are not learning only for themselves, but are part of an environment which facilitates their learning capacity. It is therefore necessary to create suitable forums in which individual learning interests and collective learning requirements can come together.

According to the theory of group dynamics (Isaacs, 1999; Schein, 2000), “dialogue” is considered the most suitable form of regular communication between individuals. In this context, dialogue is a form of conversation that enables participants to go beyond the limits of their individual understanding. Unlike “discussion”, in which those taking part are generally intent on asserting their own opinion, dialogue is about going beyond the bounds of one’s own understanding. As Plato emphasised long ago, in a dialogue, a group explores a specific subject area from many different angles. Individuals do not tie themselves down to their own opinion, but freely share their assumptions. The result is that participants can explore and bring to the surface the full wealth of their thoughts and experience in an unfettered way, going far beyond their individual opinions. Those participating in dialogue can be said to be observers of their own thinking.

The success of dialogue depends to a great extent on the selection of participants. In particular, the following considerations should be taken into account.

- Participants in a dialogue should not be chosen vertically, according to positions held, but horizontally, according to themes and interests. In other words, depending on the breadth of the topic to be covered, all possible points of view and all known positions should be represented by the most committed and knowledgeable people available. This process, known as “triangulation” (Campell and Fiske, 1959), allows participants to work all around the issues to be examined.
- Participants must have an adequate knowledge of the issues being considered, and of the current opinions and ideas surrounding them. The

distribution of background materials prior to the dialogue provides a useful resource, making the necessary knowledge available.

Dialogue thrives mainly on the quality of the communication between the participants. It is therefore essential to apply some basic rules of discourse, including the right to form opinions freely. Provided that participants adhere to the requirement for mutual respect of integrity, and no specially justified and accepted confidentiality or secrecy requirements are breached, all themes and contributions can be openly analysed. Their relevance is decided in the discourse itself. Disagreements over problem definitions and proposed solutions are settled by arguments that require collective acceptance. Objections or criticisms can be raised, and criticisms invalidated at any time. A basic pre-requisite for this is that it is possible to reach a common understanding of the relative contributions (Habermas, 1988a/b).

5.3. Learning arenas: the knowledge spiral

One way of facilitating this learning process is through so-called institutionalised learning arenas or as part of process-oriented conferences. The International Conference on Federalism 2002 was designed as just such a learning arena. The approach that was chosen involved the selective enrichment of individual experience by integrating it with more generally available knowledge, and developing it further in conversation.

In a learning arena, individuals expand their own knowledge through a “knowledge spiral” (Osterloh and Wübker, 1999). It is developed by integration with new practical and theoretical knowledge, and finally transformed into procedures producing political action. This process has the specific intention of fostering a collective vision

among those attending process-oriented conferences. This vision can assist the development of new solutions for problems in specific subject areas – in this case, the ways in which federal systems deal with the challenges they face, and their ability to adjust to new goals and objectives.

During the first stage of this process, referred to as the “combination stage”, participants are apprised of the state of the art regarding a given subject. Full information on the subject is made available to participants, who add it to their own knowledge and experience, and alter this in the light of the new information.

During the second stage, the “internalisation stage”, participants are required to make a critical analysis of their own practical experiences in the light of the new theoretical knowledge they have acquired. This broadens their understanding of their own experiences. The aim of this stage is to make individuals receptive to new patterns of thought and action, and so enable them to see and interpret their own social and political reality in new ways. During this process they become receptive to hitherto unfamiliar or misunderstood points of view, and reach a fresh understanding that enables them to solve problems in a new way.

The third stage of the knowledge spiral, known as the “externalisation stage”, involves a verbal explanation of participants’ new understanding of individual experience. Intense personal communication is essential for this inductive process, and following demanding group interactions concrete results are eventually produced, which can be used and adapted in other situations.

6. Conference concept

6.1. Combination stage: scientific preparation

The considerations for effective learning through dialogue, outlined in the preceding section, were taken into account in the organisation of the International Conference on Federalism 2002. Since a carefully planned preparation of the content of the conference themes is a vital component of the learning arena, papers were prepared in advance on the three conference themes described above: Federalism and Foreign Relations; Federalism, Decentralisation and Conflict Management in Multicultural Societies; Assignment of Responsibilities and Fiscal Federalism.

Each of the three theme papers was prepared under the coordinated direction of a "Leading House" consisting of three Swiss academics and an international expert on federalism. The content of the papers included the development of the main points pertaining to the theme and an explanation of the choice of the four subthemes for each. The subtheme papers were written by eminent international scholars. They outlined the state of the art in research in these fields, and identified key questions to assist the in-depth consideration of particular cases in the work sessions at the conference. The theme papers and the subtheme papers, assembled in a "Conference Reader", were sent to participants prior to the conference. These enabled participants to give some preliminary thought to the conference issues and to prepare themselves.

Thus, in this first step of the learning process, existing knowledge was organised into themes and subthemes, and made available to everyone involved in the process.

Participants therefore had access to the academic background material related to the various issues before they attended the conference.

6.2. Internalisation stage: work sessions

Work sessions were selected as the ideal forum for implementing this stage during the International Conference on Federalism 2002. The work sessions were central to the conference, and were intended to develop innovative, pioneering problem-solving approaches based on both general themes and specific cases.

Experience has shown that work sessions that produce successful dialogue take a considerable period of time; in this case, three and a half hours were allocated to each one.

Each work session was introduced through one or two cases illustrating the subtheme concerned, which served as a starting point for a learning-oriented dialogue. While it was important to realise that these specific experiences could not be translated directly into other circumstances, the use of cases underlined the emphasis on generating practical rather than theoretical dialogue.

According to the triangulation procedure, in order to present the fullest possible picture of a given case, the content needed to be explored from a number of different reference points. Therefore, during the work sessions each case was presented by three to five “case statement makers” in short summaries detailing their responses to the questions formulated in the subtheme papers. Their statements provided the vital link between theory and practice, and ensured that the ensuing dialogue had its foundations in existing situations and problems.

Using the presentations of the case statement makers as the starting point, the next objective was to draw on the experience of the other participants, thus expanding the dialogue to include diverse situations. This dialogue was moderated according to the guidelines laid down above. During the discussion, the following issues were given particular consideration:

- What can be learnt from the cases presented?
- What generalisations can be drawn from the learning process?
- What can be applied to other cases and how can it be done?

To ensure that the work sessions ran smoothly the following tasks and functions were performed by the participants.

Work Session Chair: this role involved introducing the various participants who delivered presentations during the work session; their presence provided the sessions with a necessary element of formality. At the International Conference on Federalism 2002, this position was allocated to members of the Swiss governments from different levels (cantons, cities etc.). It was important that their function in government stood in a relation to the theme of the work session.

Dialogue Leader: the work sessions were moderated by the dialogue leaders, whose profile included skills in group dynamics, assertiveness and conflict management, an ability to instil enthusiasm, and experience of different cultures. They also possessed a keen interest in political matters and were prepared to explore the theme of the work session in depth. In addition, they were experienced in moderating political dialogues at an international level. To ensure that moderation was impartial, the

dialogue leaders were not actively associated with special interest groups in the narrower sense of the term.

Case Statement Makers: the case statement makers set out their points of view in a short presentation, based on the questions formulated in the subtheme papers. To ensure that the presentation of the case was broad, practical and in keeping with the triangulation procedure, the case statement makers were experts from diverse spheres, such as politics, the civil service, the sciences, and civil society. As well as playing key roles in their fields, the individuals selected were willing and able to take part in a learning-oriented dialogue.

Analysis Statement Makers: the work session proceedings were assisted by two "analysis statement makers". They were experts in the field, and their academic knowledge of the subtheme enabled them to place contributions by the practitioners in a theoretical or generalised framework, putting the dialogue in a new perspective and opening up new areas. At the conference in St Gallen these positions were occupied by the author of the subtheme paper and a representative of the Leading House responsible for the theme.

Scientific Summary Writers: this role involved summing up the work sessions, paraphrasing the dialogue and undertaking an initial analysis of its content. The scientific summary writers were academics with special editing or journalistic skills. Their reports are published in this volume.

6.3. Externalisation stage: dialogue tables and plenary sessions

During the third stage of the knowledge spiral, knowledge accumulated by individuals has to be internalised and then further developed or externalised, for

which the most suitable method is the use of what are known as dialogue tables. This forum creates an interactive space devoted to small groups in which the dividing line between the speakers and those listening is deliberately removed. To this end, those investigating a theme, i.e. the participants from the four work sessions associated with a given theme, were brought together in a large room, divided into small groups of seven to twelve and seated at appropriately sized tables.

The dialogue tables were organised by a facilitator, referred to as a “dialogue table moderator”. His task was to briefly explain the dialogue table method, lay down the time frame and formulate the deliberately open questions to be examined by participants at the tables. These included:

- What concerns me about what I have heard in the work sessions when I think of my own political realities?
- What is new to me and where do these different experiences fit in?
- Have I acquired new basic knowledge from what I have heard?

To begin with, the case statement makers from the work sessions were present on the podium, and from here they summarised in a succinct statement the knowledge they personally had gained from the work sessions. Once collected, these statements gave the dialogue table an impression of the direction in which new problem-solving models, and where appropriate a new understanding of federal systems, could develop.

Following these statements, the other participants were given the opportunity to ask questions, and the podium speakers were each asked to join one of the group

tables. It was important to ensure that at least one podium speaker was allocated to each table. A rotation system was used to stimulate dialogue, whereby the case statement makers left their table and joined a new one at regular intervals. At the end of each dialogue table, participants also had the opportunity to address the plenary and inform it of the most important information they had acquired from the group dialogues.

The dialogue table moderators presented their general conclusions in a final plenary session. They outlined the visions developed over the course of the interactive sessions, and brought together the overriding themes and issues that arose.

7. What next: continuing the knowledge spiral

To ensure that the knowledge spiral continues into future, the findings of the conference had to be subjected to thorough evaluation and reflection.

The knowledge gained has been set down in writing and is published in a suitable form in this book, so that it is available in its entirety to interested parties at any time. This guarantees that future learning arenas can immediately proceed from the previous combination stage, building on the progress already made, and facilitating the process of learning for change in the future.

Events such as the International Conference on Federalism 2002 are of great value for those involved in the operation of federations, since they provide an opportunity to exchange information on their various experiences. The title of the conference was appropriately “Federalism in a Changing World – Learning from Each Other”. In making this emphasis, the conference represented a major advance forward, in that

it built upon the first such event held in Mont-Tremblant, Canada, in October 1999, and the subsequent establishment of the Forum of Federations as a network for exchanging information among federations. All too often, learning efforts made in conferences previous to that had the disadvantage of being dissipated in small scale activities, and hardly noticed outside the groups of participants immediately involved.

Thanks to the knowledge generated at the conference, it will be possible to create a new treasury of experience that must be systematically extended and expanded. In particular, it must be enriched with further learning experiences. It is hoped that the institutionalisation of learning arenas with the aim of generating and spreading knowledge will be achieved by developing a network of knowledge exchange regarding issues related to federalism. This will extend the possibilities for productive dialogue through suitable forums in the future. According to the concept of process learning, no effort should be spared in continually seeking new forums that encourage the productive exchange of knowledge between people from different cultures and sectors of society. These endeavours are justified by the fact that such future learning arenas will continue to promote the confirmed aim of the International Conference on Federalism 2002: “to safeguard peace in the world”.

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