

REDEFINING CONCEPTS: GLOBALIZATION (AND REGIONALIZATION)

ZNOVUVYMEZENÍ POJMŮ: GLOBALIZACE (A REGIONALIZACE)

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Abstract

Globalization, a complex phenomenon, has been defined largely in a superficial manner. Generally, this is a result of the broader, ingrained ways of narrow thinking based on traditional disciplinary views. In light of new approaches, which embrace complexity and recognize we must look at the issues in a systemic way, we seek to redefine key concepts of today, including that of globalization and the related idea of regionalization. This paper provides a perspective on one such redefinition which provides a pre modern and modern era conceptualization and unifies both globalization and regionalization phenomena.

Keywords: Globalization, regionalization, complex systems, concepts, definitions

Abstrakt

Globalizace, komplexní fenomén, je definována většinou povrchně. Obecně je to následkem širších, zakořeněných způsobů úzkého myšlení vycházejících z tradičních oborových východisek. Ve světle nových směrů, které zahrnují komplexnost a uznávají, že se na problematiku musíme dívat systémově, se snažíme nově definovat i klíčové pojmy dneška, včetně pojmu globalizace a souvisejícího pojmu regionalizace. Tento článek přináší pohled na jedno ze takových znovu vymezení, které zahrnuje pojetí z předmoderní a moderní doby a sjednocuje fenomény globalizace i regionalizace.

Klíčová slova: globalizace, regionalizace, komplexní systémy, koncepty, vymezení

Introduction

Globalization is touching various aspects of lives of nearly all of the planet's denizens. It is transforming the way we perceive the space around us, the manner in which we are governed, the products we buy, or the jobs available to us. It is even reflected in the shifts in the universal languages, lingua francas, we must use to communicate with others. At the same time globalization is exposing our vulnerabilities as nations, regions, societies or communities while offering opportunities for growth and learning. Globalization as part of a plan for global governance, or possibly a global government, may be in works,

though it carries many contingencies. However, the end result could be much different than the blueprints the global policy (public relations) organizations may be presenting.

Given its broad reach, it is not surprising the term *globalization* (and surely its counterpart *regionalization*) has a variety of conceptions. Just as other broadly descriptive words, its interpretation is often based on one's own looking glass. As a result, globalization may take on social, economic, or physical meanings, which only superficially, or at best partially, describe the reality of this intricate phenomenon. This is not sufficient for any serious analysis, however, and so we require a rigorous

definition that also captures and explains both the proximate and ultimate drivers of globalization. What conception may serve us best, unifying pre modern and modern era processes, joining it also with its regionalization counterpart?

The basis of this contribution is a premise that as we begin to gain greater understanding of the complexity around us, we must reconceptualize major concepts including globalization, which has been often viewed in traditional, selective manner. Common definitions, including one presented in a classic treatise on globalization as per Jan Scholte's (2002, 2017), do not capture the globalization's complexities and skew and color the ensuing discussions with simplification and underestimation of the underlying realities. This contribution sets the stage with a different look at modern world capturing some of its key characteristics. Next, it critiques existing definitions of its global quality and offers their benefits and drawbacks; extra attention is given to Scholte's analysis. The text follows with a new interpretation of globalization: one of emergence. Viewing the world as a complex adaptive system, a system of integrated systems which give rise to emergent realities its component parts lack, is seen as essential. Next, the paper presents the significance of such interpretation. Finally, it discusses compatibility of the new definition with other views and provides a summary.

Modern World

The global changes that include innovation in transportation, networking, and technology have transformed the way we learn, communicate, do business, socialize, and understand the world around us. Public access to knowledge, infrastructure, and finance on the global level is unprecedented. It is increasingly easier develop an idea into business, obtain funding, outsource the operations to the most efficient bidder, and sell the output across the globe all using a computer network. It is also easy to buy, rent, or sell real-estate, equity, or innovative financial products. At the same time, we are faced with crashes, bubbles, various asymmetries, or environmental destruction. Indeed, we have started to realize that our traditional, linear thinking about economic (Helbing, 2015), social, and natural systems and the resulting policies underlie such issues. The increasing number of participants, connections, rules, and social dimensions generates immense uncertainties, limit our modeling and predictive capabilities and require systems thinking to begin to make sense of the new world. In light of this new understanding, we must start to reformulate not only the policies and regulations, but also rethink the foundational concepts of markets, governance, and *superphenomena* such as globalization.

Common Perceptions of Globalization

There is no shortage of definitions of globalization. They generally stem from disciplinary views of the pundit and capture only some of its aspects or proximate causes. From Scholte's research dating back 13 years ago, there are multiple, commonly employed perceptions of globalization: liberalization, westernization, internationalization, universalization, and, his own definition of supraterritoriality (Scholte, 2002). Although a cursory look through more recent research shows greatly refined views, it is worth discussing the strengths and weaknesses of all major conceptions.

Liberalization

focuses on economic aspects of globalization. Removing barriers to trade such as tariffs, capital controls, or restrictions on movement of labor and allowing markets to allocate resources by their invisible hand are major characteristics of liberalization. Although the economic component is central to globalization, this definition ignores any socio-cultural implications.

Internationalization

describes the increasing exchange of communication, knowledge, services, or people across borders. Advancements in telecommunication, information, and transportation technologies are considered to be the drivers of internationalization. While very descriptive and sufficient in most analyses, this view fails to appreciate the multidimensionality and rising complexity of the trend.

Westernization

is the export of consumer-centric, mainly American culture (including the iconic brands, lifestyle, and language) across the globe. This observation extends liberalization, emphasizing the dimensions of space and culture, but is highly western-centric and can be seen as contradicting the next view.

Universalization

a term embraced by supporters of pre-modern globalization, describes the global cultural crystallization. This definition is criticized as describing natural trends in social geography and not considering the modern features of globalization such as virtual spaces (space beyond territory).

Recognizing the redundancies of the above definitions, Jan Scholte provides his own view: globalization is the surfacing of *supraterritoriality* or *transworldism* (a real label indeed), which describe the transcendence of traditional spaces of state bound to geography and captures flows and exchanges not defined by distance. Scholte acknowledges such interpretation is subject to revision and claims his definition is reflective of historical and geographical understanding. In his opinion, it may be used as a solid foundation

for discussion (Scholte, 2017). While it captures the existence of additional dimensions present in modern globalization, his classification appears to be lacking: it can be considered a generalization of the universalization and one that describes traits already present in pre-modern era.

Scholte's own argument is to avoid redundancy in definition. However, his view can be seen as a superset of an existing term: universalization. The global consolidation of peoples sharing the same history, religion, or language creating cultures tied to and disconnected from geography underlies universalization. Indeed then, universalization is not necessarily territorial. Relevant points can be found in Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*, which captures the nature of future conflict as one that is oddly detached from ideology, geography, or nationality and has a new *casus*: cultural differences (Huntington, 1993).

Scholte's definition also aims to capture modern character of globalization, one of detachment from geography. This argument is also tenuous, considering a historical example of pre-Westphalian Europe, namely Holy Roman Empire, then home to millions of people. Holy Roman Empire was loose coupling of entities based less on ethnicity or language, but rather on religion. The religion and its iconography transcended geography, and formed a common medium with church as the dominant component. The appreciation of geography was limited, usually in the domain of a select few. Concepts such as citizenship, nation, and transnationalism were not applicable then (and began to take shape only after 1648 following a destructive religious strife), so the signs of *supraterritoriality* as exhibited in literature, art, and architecture were clearly present, albeit on a smaller scale. The communication was slow and the sophistication in commerce and production low, yet common, lasting, and elaborate themes were created. Furthermore, such themes were then brought to the New World independently by various settlers and are felt to this day.

Reinforcing the above claim is the research of scholars such as Jan Zielonka who see the structure of the European Union converging to this neo-medieval paradigm (Zielonka, 2006). Europe, in his view, is returning to the state of fluid identity, borders, and authority. In other words, the union is becoming familiar to students of history, a space returning to its unique pre-modern disposition of territorial openness and ambiguity. Supraterritoriality is fast becoming an apt characterization of modern Europe, just as it was 500 years ago.

In Scholte's view, supraterritoriality in globalization is apparent across dimensions of communication, markets, money, production (commoditization), finance, and in the subsequent rise of global organizations. Although commerce and communication are well developed in the modern world, it can be argued there is, for example,

a large disconnect between digital cultures and popular communication online. The main obstacle is likely language: a study sponsored by European Union claims 61% of Europeans do not understand a foreign language well-enough to be able to communicate online (DGCOMM, 2012). While further statistics are needed (such as social media interactions between the Eastern and Western users), the above number is suggestive of a much smaller, less communicative and aware 'global village' compared to one intimated. This is certainly limiting the magnitude of the supraterritorial, virtual spaces and lessening the differences in an experience of an ordinary citizen in a networked and disconnected world.

As shown, while Scholte's is an apt definition, it could describe many elements of the pre-modern era, and has gaps in defining today's world. It also does not capture the idea of composition, interaction, actors, and systemic complexity. In addition, the fact the supraterritorial commerce and global organizations would not be possible if not for the interaction of individual, localized, adapting entities must be taken in account.

New Interpretation

Now that we have established a new definition is needed, formulations must first focus on the character of the global world. Note that for the purposes of this discussion, the focus will be on social systems, rather than on ecological and geological systems, although they are interrelated. From its beginnings, the world society consisted of units of organization, which have consolidated overtime, got bigger, and started to take on ever so greater roles for their constituents. These entities have also interacted increasingly with each other aiming to attain control and dominance. Today, the international landscape can be seen as a set of these advanced states (generally organized around ethnic lines) at different levels of integration. By itself, each system can be understood as independent, yet the set of integrated states gives rise to a greater, overarching system of systems. This global environment is complex and adaptive. The complexity lies in the fact that there are many varying relationships and connections between the states. They are adaptive which means that they evolve or change in response to collective feedback.

We have just described the social world in terms of a *complex adaptive system* (CAS). Two properties of complex adaptive systems of interest in this context are nonlinearity and emergence. *Nonlinearity* means that a small change in one aspect of the system can result in a possibly large repercussions to the whole (popularly known as the butterfly effect). The interaction of individual systems (states) give rise to new, collective properties and behaviors of the whole, known as emergence.

There is a number of examples of the ability of the systems to adapt to various disruptions from within, but also from its environment. Consider a historical example of the fall of Constantinople in 1453 closing the important eastern trade route to Europe. This event is seen as a cause for strategic readjustment of focus to the Atlantic, leading to new trading posts along African seaboard and ultimately the discovery of America (Levitt, 2013). This adaptation had revolutionary consequences. On a smaller scale, forecaster Friedman (2009) noticed cyclical system changing crises that occur in the United States with regularity. The crises are caused by demographic and socioeconomic shifts and result in power transitions and adoption of new economic approaches. In those cycles, four of which have occurred since the Interdependence, a solution to a set of issues give rise to new disruptions requiring readjustment. The results of nonlinear and unpredictable character of world CAS are also visible, as seen in the financial crisis of 2008 that caused reverberations throughout the entire world; the trigger, by its nature, stays unknown. Such occurrences should be used as a wake-up call to start appreciating the systemic nature of the world CAS and restructuring not to prevent, but rather minimize the risk of disruptions.

It is important to note complex adaptive systems are not an ingredient of globalization nor they represent globalization. Rather, the globalization is an emergent property of the systems of states that are in a state of continuous change. Hence, emergence is seen as a fitting description of globalization, one encompassing a globe of interconnected, complex systems, one in which small changes can lead to severe reverberations, and one which manifests new and unforeseen effects. This is a crucial element to keep in mind and will be revisited next.

Significance Common Perceptions of Globalization

As hinted above, the traditional narrow and linear disciplinary views and our understanding of markets as self-regulating, people's behavior as

rational, or economic equilibriums as real are giving way to new, refined approaches embracing systems thinking including complexity and nonlinearity. Conventional structures are becoming inadequate in effectively addressing the complexities inherent to globalized trade, financial regulation, environmental policy, or international affairs and new approaches to governance are being proposed. We are a long way from intelligent government, smart policymaking, self-organizing systems, and other advanced features. The best way to begin to prepare is arguably to take a broad approach to promote these new ideas from the ground up. This is why new conceptions are so important. They are used as basis for presentation in the media and slowly change the general perception. Seeing the global system as a system of systems and defining it this way encourages the progress from the bottom.

Compatibility and Conclusion

As mentioned, globalized world composed of integrated countries with ever-changing policies, rules, institutions, and technologies features emergent properties. These properties are the now familiar commoditization, westernization, internationalization, supraterritoriality, and others yet to emerge. Hence, the definition of emergence is one that encompasses the narrow views discussed above; and they are not redundant, but rather complementary.

Discussion of CAS in the context of globalization is not new. For example, Yellowthunder (2007) discusses applicability of complexity theory to issues in globalization and Earnest (2015) recognizes relevance of complexity theory in international relations. The contribution of this paper was to use CAS concepts in the definition of globalization. It should be noted that the purpose here was not to present a detailed model of the global world as a complex adaptive system, but instead use this high-level concept as basis for a definition of globalization and explain what others saw as globalization was merely an emergent property of the complex system of states. The paper also highlighted the importance of viewing the world in this new way.

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