Goodbye to elitism.
Anchoring global governance in societies

Michèle Roth

Continued economic and technological globalisation and the rising number of transboundary challenges have created an increasingly dense web of global cooperative relationships and international/transnational governance regimes in recent decades. But these achievements in global governance are under threat. Around the globe, right-wing populist forces are currently adept at exploiting the public's fears of a possible decline of status due to the negative consequences of seemingly relentless economic and cultural globalisation. They preach an "our nation first" ideology and discredit global governance as an elitist project.

At the International sef: Expert Workshop 2018, hosted by the Development and Peace Foundation

(sef:) jointly with the Institute for Development and Peace (INEF) at the University of Duisburg-Essen in September 2018, we therefore tried to identify new strategies which could contribute to the progressive rooting of global governance in societies. In light of the critical appraisal of the "cosmopolitan democracy" debate, recent trends – such as the growing mobilisation of cities, the use of digital and social media in global politics, and more flexibility in global agreements – were discussed with regard to their potential to "counter elitism" in global governance.

Taking emotions seriously

Is global governance an elitist project, as the title of the workshop suggested? And if so, why has this become a challenge? In their welcoming address, the organisers made clear that the intention of the workshop was not to practise elite-bashing. On the contrary, elites and their specific skills and engagement are badly needed to improve global cooperation. The challenge starts when elites behave as a superior group and detach themselves from society at large. This makes it easy for a certain type of elite to fight another type of elite, making use of anti-establishment resentments.

The financial crisis left many people with the impression that nothing good can come from globalisation. They were left alone with their grievances, creating a breeding ground for populist movements. Fighting grievances with facts does not work well, as one speaker put it; emotions have to be taken seriously

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and addressed properly (particularly as anger is the fastest moving emotion on social media, as one expert explained). In that sense, populism is not per se bad or right-wing. Populist strategies may be necessary in politics, and populism of a certain kind might lead to positive developments.

Cosmopolitan democracy in an age of nationalist populists

From a global governance perspective, it is the strongly rising nationalist populism that gives cause for concern. It shows that the embedding of global governance at a societal level has remained relatively weak – despite an intense academic debate on democratising global politics since the early 1990s. This debate was based on the idea that democracy does not stop at the border of an individual state; instead, people should become part of transnational global political processes. The idea was advanced by a triumphal march of democracies in the 1990s, overlooking the fact that the promises of democracy were often not realised, particularly with regard to social well-being, one expert explained.

Since the financial crisis, the share of right-wing populist votes has been increasing. The signs are worrying, even though there is some volatility in the figures. The shadow of the 1920s and 1930s is in the room, as one speaker stated, when fascism started as a joke and ended in tragedy. Today, we have to ask ourselves to what extent the joke is starting to become a tragedy again. Adherence to democracy is decreasing; in particular, many young people do not

Cornelia Ulbert and Hande Paker

regard democracy as essential any more. They stay outside formal political processes and do not participate in elections.

This "democracy fatigue" at the national level is accompanied by setbacks in international integration.

Some of the more prominent examples are the US's withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, the withdrawal of many countries, mostly African, from the International Criminal Court (ICC), the tendency to solve trade issues without the World Trade Organization and, of course, Brexit.

Daniele Archibugi

Has cosmopolitanism failed …

Do these developments signal the end of cosmopolitanism? The clear answer from a prominent protagonist of cosmopolitan democracy was "no". "What we've experienced so far was globalisation, not cosmopolitanism," he argued. "Cosmopolitanism has not been attempted." While globalisation is often outside democratic control and does not necessarily require involvement in political life, cosmopolitanism implies that individuals act as citizens of the world with specific rights and duties. The cosmopolitan community has been working for many years to reform international organisations so that they respect these individual rights, the ICC being one notable example. These institutions have to be transformed further as they belong to all of us, one speaker urged. "Souverainism is not the answer," he continued. "It is going to be a very short 'ism'" as governments will not be able to deliver. Many of today's challenges cannot be solved by states alone; other actors have to be involved.

This perspective on cosmopolitanism was challenged by another expert, who criticised the universalistic tendency of cosmopolitanism that ignores national and local specifics. Alternative world views are marginalised. If cosmopolitanism focuses too much on macro processes of globalisation and somewhat abstract values such as human or minority rights, and too little on local mechanisms and people's lived experiences, it "lacks the comfort of particularistic, local identities, which are so easily tapped into by populist agendas," she argued. Furthermore, cosmo-

politanism is most visibly advocated by intellectuals and urban elites; if they are associated with a "frequent flyer" class consciousness, they cannot offer ordinary workers a strong basis of solidarity.

... or is it the answer?

On the other hand, cosmopolitan democracy could be understood as the great promise to include "the other". It could be the answer to the crucial question at the heart of current conflicts: how to live with the other, how to cope with diversity? So far, two responses have been given, both of which have failed: assimilation (leading to injustice and violence) and multiculturalism (failing to build common ground and interaction). According to nationalist populism, coexistence is undesirable. But this is structurally impossible. "Diversity is unavoidable," the speaker argued. "We have to cope with it." She called for a cosmopolitanism that appreciates diversity but puts the focus on what we have in common. A cosmopolitan does not have to be a citizen of the world, but he/she has to be able to relate to different others.

Following such a bottom-up approach, cosmopolitanism could be an answer to today's challenges, with direct implications for the future of democracy. What we need, according to one expert, is a different kind of transgressive cosmopolitanism, where all groups come together to shape a different public sphere.

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But what makes populist movements more attractive than the politics of the common good? To counteract exclusionary and polarising dynamics, she recommended a radical grassroots cosmopolitan democracy. The impact of civil society movements that foster coexistence and promote the commons should be strengthened, and local-transnational encounters that spread networks of solidarity horizontally should be increased.

Transcending nationality through "glocal" governance?

One concrete example of horizontal networks are transnational city networks, which are increasingly becoming involved in international policy processes. As one speaker told workshop participants, many cities – albeit mainly from the global North – are operating in policy spheres that would not have seemed

Monika Zimmermann

possible 20 years ago. But can they make a difference? One has to distinguish between city leaders and local officials, he explained. There are a number of extremely visible and highly charismatic mayors at the global level – in the US, they all position themselves in contrast and as a response to President Trump (which does not mean that local leaders generally are in opposition to populist governments). On the other hand, there are the unelected local bureaucracies. Many of them are coming up with detailed action plans for their local community in implementing the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These cities can become front-runners when it comes to climate mitigation in practice. They act locally in response to local problems, but do so in line with the international debate. They thus adapt global norms to the local level.

Cities' abilities to play a role in global governance are restricted by a number of factors, however. In a Westphalian system, cities are able to exercise power in certain spaces such as non-state climate action, but they are very limited in a multilateral system as this is primarily a state system. States define the legal and financial framework in which cities have to act. This can be a barrier to local governance innovation. Cities' potential role is limited, above all, by financial restrictions. It is mainly the large and wealthy cities that play a leading international role. Furthermore,

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there is no table for locals at the UN; the formal representation of local governments is not yet adequate. From a practitioner's perspective, one participant added that it is becoming more and more difficult to get mayors to speak at international conferences because of the bad press they get at home, which shames them for their international engagement.

Intermediaries between the global and the local level

Cities' transnational engagement is mostly an elite project. This is partly because city networks focus on speaking to the UN system, which requires very specific expertise. Local government staff are not trained for that. Networks and engaged mayors can act as intermediaries here. This intermediary role could be greatly strengthened if local officials then turned to the local communities to explain their transnational engagement and gain support for it. As one speaker put it: "City governments must help bridge barriers of understanding in the name and for the benefit of local communities." But this rarely happens: "There is still an incomplete feedback loop between what cities do in the streets passing citizens' houses and the deliberations in bars and meeting rooms on the streets passing the UN headquarters in New York."

One participant suggested that city networks could start processes of self-governance, e.g. in standard-setting or initiating a ban on plastics, below the national level. As a first step, an important function of city governments is surely to learn from each other.

Dieter Reinl

cooperation more transparent and accountable. The initial optimism that digital communication would bring people together globally has turned in a rather critical view that digital journeys, in the end, tend to reflect the local sphere and, in the worst case, contribute to hate and mistrust among different communities.

Integrating digital technologies into the day-to-day work of international organisations or foreign offices is a huge challenge, one expert explained. In diplomacy, digital media faced resistance at the beginning as they did not seem to be compatible with the work behind closed doors. Meanwhile, 90% of states have Twitter and Facebook accounts but only a handful of states know what they are doing, according to the expert. Digital media change very fast. It is crucial to learn how to listen to what data tells you and to understand the audience and the big platforms you have to work with.

This analysis was fully supported by a practitioner who confirmed that it was difficult for administrations to adapt quickly to new media. They require a totally different kind of behaviour in foreign policy. The real challenge lies in using social media strategically – in a pro-active manner to shape the narrative of a liberal international society, to set an agenda, to counter fake news, and to be present instead of leaving spaces to others.

Iris Korthagen and Corneliu Bjola

Digital media: a silver bullet for enhancing transparency?

From the role of local actors, the workshop then turned to the role of digital media in making global

With regard to transparency and accountability, the challenge is the information overload, one expert explained. Nobody has the resources to cope with that. Today, we have much more information than in the 1990s, but less transparency. It is very difficult to identify what is relevant and what is noise – or disinformation. During the US election, 150 million people were reached by Russian ads on social media,

and only 20 million by regular broadcasting firms.

Attempts to clean up the platforms have to be dealt with carefully so as not to feed authoritarian aspirations. To save our democratic systems, politicians need to become more pro-active and strategic, one speaker urged. Education, a pluralistic media system and citizens' trust in their government are important factors in making a society more resilient to propaganda – but these elements take time.

E-participation: not a quick fix for democratic deficits

Other aspects of digitalisation are e-participation and e-decision-making, which are seen as a possible remedy for democratic shortcomings. Very often, however, e-participation does not give the citizens the feeling that they are being heard and taken seriously, one speaker explained, pointing to the example of the European Union and its member countries. E-participation only really matters when it has an impact on decisions. Therefore, it is important to link e-participation to a formal agenda or decision-making process. The goals of the process need to be clear, and participants should be provided with feedback. The hope of being able to reach people you don't reach offline is not easily realised, as studies have

Harris Gleckman, Jonathan W. Kuyper and Clara Brandi (l.t.r.)

shown. In practice, the same people – or perhaps a slightly younger age group – participate online as offline, because mobilisation strategies are generally lacking.

Digital technology, in conclusion, is not a quick fix for a global democratic deficit. States and international organisations need to invest, and there are major risks if they do not use instruments properly. They should also think in new dimensions: one option may be to integrate national parliaments electronically into a virtual world parliament, one expert suggested.

Monitoring websites, on the other hand, could help to make information about global governance processes easier to grasp.

In view of the new technologies, the value of face-to-face citizens' dialogues should not be forgotten, as one participant emphasised. People value those who make the effort to come to them and show them respect. This is still a valuable way to bring global issues back into the public debate and include young people (e.g. through "back to school" programmes for public officials).

Common but differentiated governance?

In a third attempt to identify ways to better root global governance in societies, the workshop turned to the question whether flexibility in governance provisions fosters their efficiency and their ability to deal with global challenges.

"No, flexibility does not foster efficiency" was the clear answer given in the introductory input, with reference to various case studies. But it makes it easier for states to reach an agreement at all and to sustain cooperation. The alternative would be no agreement. A prime example is the Paris Agreement which is "incredibly flexible" as the expert put it; this may be why it was so difficult to reach. The agreement is built bottom-up, based on the concept that countries can submit whatever contributions they like. It does not include a compliance mechanism; states' progress in fulfilling their own rhetoric can only be tracked by naming and shaming.

The risks of flexibility are numerous, as the debate showed. States can exit agreements or not comply with them. Flexibility can also lead to minilateral agreements instead of multilateral ones, particularly if multilateral negotiations are stuck in gridlock. Minilateral agreements often lead to very different winners and losers; certain countries and/or sectors are left behind. Furthermore, flexibility in agreements can pose a risk to future generations if problems are not solved properly, with negative consequences in the long term.

One practitioner criticised that today, we are in a kind of "dealism". Everybody wants to get to a deal. In order to do so, the level of substance and commitments is driven down by those who are not really interested in a substantial solution. He also warned against moving to voluntarism in global agreements and then calling it governance – as is the case with the Paris Agreement or the SDGs. The possibility to drop in and drop out undermines action and only creates the illusion that we are going forward. The perception that any deal is better than no deal is wrong.

Does flexibility mean more or less legitimacy?

Another participant asked who was gaining from flexibility. He mentioned the workers' safety accord for Bangladesh between global retailers and global federal unions as an example of private labour governance. The accord is characterised by unprecedented flexibility – and, at first, seemed to be very effective. If suppliers do not reach a certain safety level, there will be no cooperation. But global retailers enjoy flexibility in funding suppliers to achieve the required safety standards. Legitimacy gaps therefore remain and call the further operation of the entire accord into question. The accord shows that flexibility mechanisms do not include accountability to those who lose out if the mechanisms do not work.

Flexibility can also be seen differently, as another expert showed. The form of flexibility that is inherent in the SDGs could well be a means to root global governance in societies. It might not increase efficiency, but it can enhance legitimacy. Non-flexibility, on the other hand, is often an expression of power inequalities. Flexibility offers a chance for states to contribute in their own way – and could lead to something like best-practice multi-stakeholder agreements.

Nora McKeon

Flexibility may also be a way to evade or cope with complexity, another expert suggested. The question remains whether it is still an option to get binding agreements within the UN in view of the current shape of the international system. Binding agreements with substantive outcomes might be possible if we do not try to be universal and reach them by consensus, one participant suggested, calling for coalitions of the willing that attract others.

Rooting global governance in societies: the way forward

The concluding roundtable discussed strategies for further transnationalisation and democratisation of global governance. As the previous panels had shown, existing power structures and dynamics are a key challenge. Another challenge in rooting global governance in societies is how to take people's grievances seriously and how to answer simplified narratives.

As we are in a period of transition, we need to step back and think of the next form of governance structures and institutions, one speaker said. "We need to try to reconceptualise the system we would like to have. We need to get a better sense of what we are dealing with." This was also true of democratisation. We need to acknowledge that we do not have a popular parliament at a global level yet as Western powers would be confronted with the dominance of the Global South, and China and India in particular, in such a parliament, one speaker concluded. Hidden power issues need to be addressed, also with regard to multi-stakeholder arrangements. We need good practices to hold such arrangements accountable and increase their legitimacy. Rulebooks for negotia-

Tobias Debiel and Nicole Bogott

This view was supported by yet another expert, who cited the example of the Committee on World Food Security, where voluntarism has reached higher degrees of commitment as governments are bound by social movements. Inclusion of civil society seems to be key in implementing flexible agreements, an expert confirmed, taking the SDGs as an example once again. Member states transfer the SDGs back to national policy processes; it is then up to civil societies to take them up and hold governments accountable – in a political, not a legal process.

tions need to be public, while stakeholder transparency could be enhanced by a financial statement, for example.

Structures need to be accessible

There are essential differences between inclusive governance structures where stakeholders have a say and the trend towards multi-stakeholderism where everyone comes into the room without taking into account power differences, another speaker added. The question was how to make governance structures more accessible in a transparent way. A good example is, again, the Committee on World Food Security, where governments are duty bearers (within the human rights framework) and people are rights holder. Other stakeholders can give their advice. It is important to ensure active participation by the most vulnerable, and to give civil society the autonomy to self-organise, as one expert emphasised. When civil society feels ownership, as was the case with the Voluntary Guidelines on Land Tenure, they bring international agreements back to their societies. Horizontal networking among grassroots civil society groups has increased to an astonishing extent, she added, as has their capacity to reach out to the global level. Each of them contributes a piece of the mosaic. That is why we should start with the visions and energy coming out of society and then use global spaces to generate appropriate normative guidelines.

Another expert called for a different approach. We need to focus on implementation, she claimed: "Who is solving issues? Who does so in the most effective way?" Governments and international institutions should not be idealised; there are other players on the ground that are very effective, she said. These players are not waiting for the government; they are active citizens. This is particularly true of social entrepreneurs who are focusing more on having an im-

pact on societies than on profit but follow a different approach from that of development cooperation. The power here lies in their access to networks, funding and knowledge. Organisations like imPact can help to create access to such networks internationally. Social entrepreneurship can also be a way to address grievances, particularly among young people facing identity crises. For these young people, alternatives to the offerings of radical groups are urgently needed.


Fritz Nganje

Bring complexity back home

To make global governance work better and to root it in societies, we have to take into account the Eurocentric ethical foundation of the system we have today, one speaker added. The question then was how we can make global governance work for everyone. We should accept that all cultures are equal: "What are our common aspirations while accepting our differences?" he asked. Different forms of prioritisation exist with regard to human rights, for example. We need to take this seriously. Furthermore, we cannot run away from the fact that our institutions are a result of an unequal distribution of power.

This is true not only of the international arena, but also with regard to the capacity of local actors. The internationalisation of subnational governments could contribute to the democratisation of international politics, as local governments are closer to the people. But so far, the way this internationalisation has been conducted is anything but democratic, one expert criticised: often, only a small elite of officials is engaged, with no accountability to the people. As mentioned earlier, local politicians should ask themselves to what extent they bring global visions back to the citizens and how they should engage the people on the ground. Furthermore, they could pro-
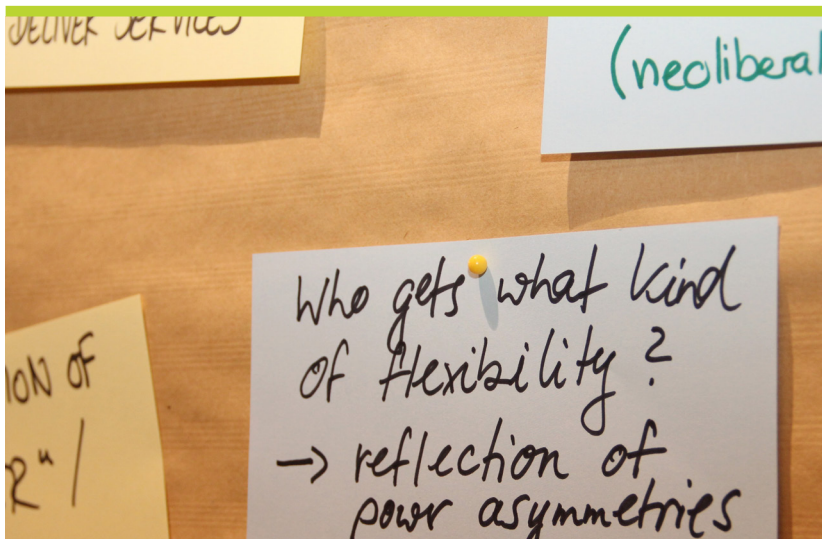
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mote greater people-to-people interaction within city partnerships and shift the focus away from technical cooperation to citizens' empowerment.

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All leaders in the global arena have a responsibility to bring complexity back home, another speaker added, and this applies to civil society representatives as well. One speaker suggested that large civil society organisations such as Greenpeace or amnesty international should organise workshops in schools, factories etc. to build a stronger relationship with the public. An important factor in this regard is appropriate use of language. "Should we really talk about global governance – or rather about international cooperation?" one speaker asked. Unless we are talking to global policy experts, global süß governance might not be a helpful term, he said. This does not mean that we should give up our views along with our language. On the contrary, it is very important to make the benefit of international cooperation clear to the public.

International sef Expert Workshop 2018: Participants

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