

A NEW DIMENSION BESIDE GLOBAL, LOCAL AND GLOCAL: LOBAL

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ABSTRACT

Globalization, one of the most important phenomena of the recent past and of the future, is having an unprecedented impact on the way the world operates. Among the many ongoing related debates about how to realize this phenomenon, “Glocal”, as a combination of Local and Global, seems to have received wide acceptance by practitioners and academicians. However, understanding of this combination varies significantly. Some suggest it represents a reasonable balance of the two basic concepts from which the term is derived; others attach a specific meaning to this combination, and still others claim that there must be many definitions of such a concept. Here, after briefly discussing the main arguments about the use of the term glocal, we suggest a new term, “lobal”, as a contribution not only to overcome some of the criticism about the understanding and use of the concept of glocal, but also to the development of our comprehension and governance of global (and local) affairs.

GLOBAL, LOCAL, GLOCAL

While “globalism” or “glocalization” have entered our personal dictionaries as a consequence of profound changes in technology and society in general, two closely related developments – first, the expansion of multinational and other transnational corporations, and second, the growth of information and communication technologies, including the Internet and access to it – have had fundamental impacts on the way we think and function. Within this new picture, the nation-state may no longer necessarily be the most significant economic or political unit. Five hundred companies now control 42 percent of the world’s wealth; of the 100 largest economies, half are corporations, half are countries (Hearn et al. 2002). In today’s highly competitive business life companies try to be both local and global, big and small, centralized and decentralized, stable and dynamic; their goal is to simultaneously offer standardized mass manufacturing, customized mass manufacturing, and individually designed goods and services, which were until recently considered to be oxymorons. Siemens advertises its telecom business with the words “Local Presence-Global Player” and the headline “Connecting the Global Village”, while Hong Kong Bank advertises under the slogan “local insight global outlook”. “Think global, act local” has recently appeared as a catchphrase for several companies including Coca-Cola, Sandoz, and

Sony.

Within this perspective, Temporal suggests (2001) that in international business, the main advantage of global branding is the economies of scale it can provide. In holding fast to a single corporate or product face, design decisions are greatly simplified, as in Shell. Moreover, savings generated by organizational actions like product standardization, as in Coca-Cola, can be substantial. On the other hand, local branding gives a company the freedom to develop brand names, and produce and promote them locally. The products of technology industries enjoy more global standardization, unlike food products that may have to make ingredient changes to fit local tastes. However, with any global or international brand, it is inevitable that the company must accommodate cultural sensitivities to some degree.

In discussions about globalization, using global or local as separate terms, without respect to one another on either a cultural or a more specific business level, at least seems to be limited or limiting, if not troublesome. Thus, Benyon (2001) notes that the crude dichotomy between local and global has required intermediate concepts to analyze globalization, which involves not just a top-down process but also a process of localization. The “global localization” used by Coca-Cola and Sony; or, an originally Japanese marketing term, “glocalization”, used by Robertson (1995) are two known attempts for this. Robertson observes that Japan is in some ways the prototype for the approach that can be summarized as the deliberate adaptation of a foreign or global model to fit national circumstances, and in fact developed the term glocalization (Straubhaar 2001). As mentioned by Benyon (2001) there is also the concept of “glocal communities” described by Luke (1995). The emergence of “glocal identities” was noted by Featherstone as early as 1990. Approaching from an educational perspective Selby (2002) criticizes the view of local and global as two dichotomies; rather, he says, they are false dichotomies, as they are embedded in each other. Robertson (1995) and also argue that local is very much included within the global, while the globalization process involves `the invention of locality`.

Used in different disciplines, being given different meanings, the concept of glocal, together with those of global and local, also seems to be evolving with sometimes converging, sometimes diverging variations. In a 1995 interview (Senn, 1995), the former chairman of Sony proposed the notion of thinking globally and acting locally; half a decade later, we are confronted with the need to think and act globally, regionally, and locally (Prahalad & Oosterveld 2001). The glocal boundaryless structure for companies can now be visualized like an improvisational jazz ensemble that is composed of players around the world. The glocal company enables solo play at

times, but it also calls for ensemble work at other times (Ashkenas et al., 1998). As glocal dialects, not only global – technological, financial, commercial – but also local – ethnic, religious, regional communities – trends and forces can be thought of in terms of what Shafir (2001, p.218) calls “their negating but complementary reciprocation that erodes the major institutional and cultural framework of the nation-state”. Whereas, Naisbitt (1994) claims that as the world economy becomes bigger and more integrated, the small players become more important and powerful.

Together with the technological and communicative convergences of “cyberspace” (Internet), some experts have spoken of the “glocal” communication era: local production and contents, but with a global diffusion (Wang 2000). Many local products, like crafts or ecotourism, are now offered for global consumption (Escobar, 1999). For instance, according to Tsuchiko (2002), for the crafting of Japanese sword, the word glocal emphasizes the point that globalization should involve harmony and recognition of differences rather than complete assimilation or homogenization, in addition to the fact that the values underlying local traditions can have international impact.

Can all this highlight a bottom-up impact that is gaining velocity in the process of globalization, making it possible for a local product, process or a group of people to have significant impact on a global scale? From another perspective, isn't the globalization itself also a process or product of this kind, originating from some specific local part of the world, having a thorough impact on other local areas and spreading over the entire world, and thus deserving to be called by our generic term, globalization? In fact, a great debate goes on as to whether Anglo-American popular culture is having a homogenizing or hybridizing effect, or even resulting simultaneously in a degree of both. For instance, while the manner in which new meanings are locally attached to imported goods throws a valuable light upon cultural globalization, the careful glocal marketing of global products seems to be putting “authentic” local goods under attack (Benyon, 2001).

Even while we find diverging and conflicting debates, within these different interpretations the one determinant and unchanging issue is that local and global are always together. As Massey says (1994), “The global is in the local in the very process of the formation of the local... the understanding of any locality must precisely draw on the links beyond its boundaries” (Escobar, 1999, p.120). This local-global symmetry makes it necessary to argue or question the two concepts together.

Dirlik (1999) discusses that the question of the local cannot be eliminated or marginalized without an equal elimination or marginalization of the global, which

restores to the problematic of the local/global discussion a symmetry that is missing from most other discourses. He also suggests that just as the local is not to be conceived without reference to the global, the global cannot exist without the local, which is the location for its producers, consumers, and the transnational institutions. Even corporate decision-making power must be located somewhere. The question is then not the confrontation of global and local, but of different configurations of “glocality”. Instead of calling some phenomena global and others local, in all but the most exceptional cases it should be recognized that these phenomena are all *both* local and global, but they are not all local and global in the same way.

Theories of globalization tend to assume the existence of a global power to which the local is necessarily subordinated, deriving its meaning only from its juxtaposition to the global. This also brings the need for a new language. As Dirlik (ibid) suggests, ‘glocal’ is a first approximation that suggests equal attention to the localization of the global and the globalization of the local (Escobar, 1999). However, we are still in need of better terming and conceptualizations to develop our knowledge of globalization and thus localization. As a new term, “Lobal” can be seen as a suitable suggestion to improve this intermediation, and in the next section we will discuss how it can be proposed as an alternative concept.

LOBAL, AND ITS INTERPRETATIONS

Basically, the word “lobe”, as used for the lung or brain, can be used as a metaphor for generating this new term, “lobal”, and its derivations “lobalization” and “lobalism” in order to contribute to the search of new concepts for analyzing and developing the debates about globalization. However, as a newly introduced concept in the ongoing discussion, lobal can be understood and used in various ways. Instead of presenting a strict definition, several different perspectives are proposed. With this open discussion, it is hoped that a better interpretation of the concept can be generated.

Lobal as a New Catch Word:

As a new catchword, “lobal” is a good option that offers several improvements over previous terms. Local and global together can find a useful meaning in lobal. This merger was tried with ‘glocal’, but lobal has some important advantages. It is a “naturally” generated word from an already existing concept, “lobe”, compared to glocal, which is an artificial combination of global and local. This could make the conceptualization and use of the new concept easier and more effective. Moreover, glocal has already acquired various meanings and connotations, as we have seen in the above discussion, some of them restrictively context specific, contested, or conflicting. This makes it very hard to comprehend the real value of glocal and use it effectively.

This does not necessarily mean that glocal should become a redundant concept. It is a very effective term with its own characteristics and proves to be very useful in terms of some of the conceptualizations that it proposes. Following Dirlik's argument (1999), we can view lobal as a new configuration of global or local, or a totally differentiated concept from glocal. On the other side, we can propose that it take the place of glocal, or some of its attributed meanings, to help us refine our theorizations. We might also suggest that for specific contexts with specific meanings attached, glocal can be a useful term with the right conceptualization, but for a more general discussion of globalization, a better concept would be handier. Any of these suggestions would provide starting points for arguments. However, one common point of all these debates should be to consider how their propositions would nest global and local together.

Lobal between Local and Global

We can simply perceive lobal as situated between local and global and symbolize a sequential relation between them as in Figure 1:

FIGURE 1: STAGES OF GLOBALIZATION



At one end of the line there is the local, at the other, global, and in the middle, lobal. Placing the three interrelated concepts in this way enables us to visualize a globalization model with different stages of development. In this view, lobal is a stage on the path from local to global. More specifically, for instance, lobal can correspond to the meaning of regional, being between local and global. In this way, as Prahalad & Oosterveld highlighted (2001), we can signify the importance of becoming regional in addition to local and global.

Global, Glocal, Lobal, Local Together in One Model

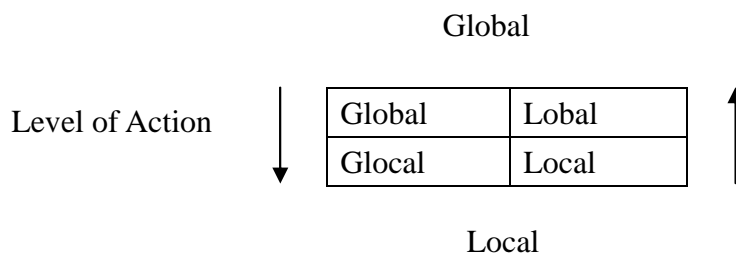
Another way of modeling would be to place local, global, glocal, and lobal together, diversifying their meanings in a specific way. As shown in Table 1, we take can the motto of glocal "Think global, act local", and re-conceptualize global, local and lobal with respect to this specific interpretation.

TABLE 1: INTERPRETING LOCAL, GLOBAL, GLOCAL, AND LOBAL TOGETHER

Local:	Thinking local, acting local
Global:	Thinking global, acting global
Glocal:	Thinking global, acting local
Lobal:	Thinking local, acting global

In this table, the meanings of local and global are straightforward. Then, in addition and contrast to the thinking global and acting local, understanding of glocal, lobal is defined as “thinking local and acting global.” This definition of lobal is well suited to the discussion of a bottom-up process involved in globalization, which we have tried to briefly highlight in our discussion of the ideas of authors like Benyon (2001), Excoabar (1999), and Wang (2000). The term, for instance, can be used to explain the production and marketing of products and services from the Internet to crafts or special tourism activities, which are indigenously or locally generated, and offered for global consumption. In contrast, the meaning of glocal processes and products can be positioned according to a relatively top-down approach, which would well suit to the original proposition of thinking global and acting local. Figure 2 illustrates this differentiation of the bottom-up and top-down processes of globalization (and localization)

FIGURE 2: TOP-DOWN, BOTTOM-UP PROCESSES OF GLOBALIZATION



This illustration captures the need to comprehend local and global together in the concept of “globalization”. In addition, it distinguishes the top-down and bottom-up processes of globalization in terms of glocalization and lobalization. If desired, the interconnections among local, global, glocal and lobal can be made more explicit by recognizing each concept as a different mode of globalization (in addition to the model for the stages of globalization in Figure 1):

FIGURE 3: LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT AND INTERCONNECTIONS AMONG THE MODES OF GLOBALIZATION

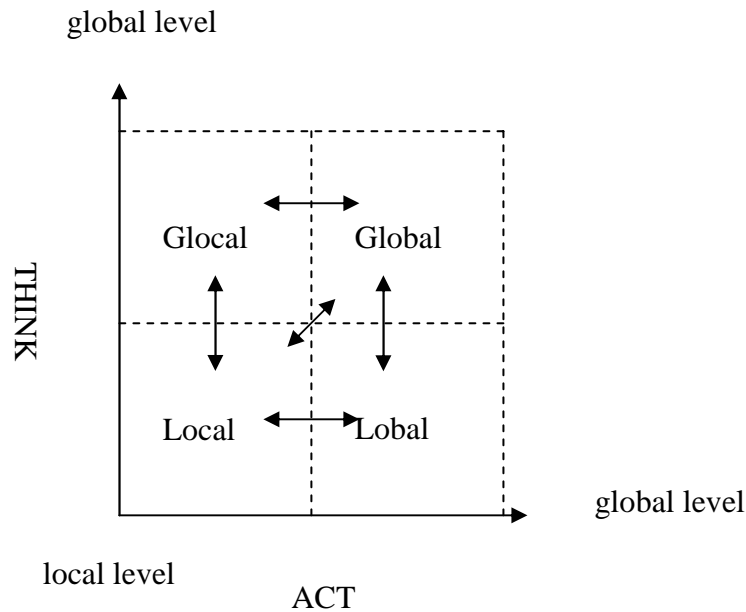


Figure 3 is a graphical representation of the concepts discussed above, showing what each mode is and the interactions among them. For instance, by thinking globally you can become glocal, rather than local, which is both thinking and acting on a local level. Of course, other graphical representations are possible, depending on how we conceptualize the terms local, global, glocal and lobal. It can be thought that the globalization follows the developmental stages of local, then lobal, and finally global, and glocal can be seen as the ultimate stage of the globalization. Or, it can be suggested that this follows a routing of local-glocal-global (and then lobal, as an ideal case). All these interpretations depend on how we understand and classify the different modes. For example, a term like “G-lobal” can be defined and used in place of other terms. Whenever we make a theorization like that, distinguishing whether we understand globalization and its sub-modes as a process or a product is important, too.

Body Metaphor, Networks and Lobal Organizations

We began our discussion by reflecting on the concepts of global, local and also glocal, then proposed lobal, as a new concept, while stressing the need to better articulate these conceptualizations. Being new, lobal should be defined by its own terms, which is not an easy task. As we mentioned, the original meaning of the term refers to lobes in the body. Thus, the metaphor of the body could be used to generate this definition. However, if conceptualizing a valuable and distinguishable meaning is at stake, this also requires a good knowledge of the body-related disciplines.

The lobes in the body correspond to specialized units, which fulfill expert functions, as important parts of the bigger system they belong. Within itself, the lobe governs the specific operations that are designated to it, while as a member of a very well

interlinked system of organs, it responds to the requests of the whole system and its different members for maintaining the well being of the system. Even if furthering such a proposition derived from this complex system of actors and interactions in the body requires a deeper level of knowledge, analysis, and analogy, and is not free of problems, at least it should be possible to use lobal in a way that represents a framework for “networks”. Within the readily or potentially available networks that can flexibly go beyond the local and global borders, these lobal frames can be used to comprehend and realize models that can bridge global and local. This understanding of networks can also involve not only intra but also inter-levels of organizational analysis.

Within this perspective, our interpretation can go beyond the study of globalization. Our attempts for defining lobal could be applied to the organizational actions of individuals, institutions, or nation states, depending on the unit of our analysis. In this way, for instance, we can suggest that business organizations become lobal institutions, specializing on what they can do best and providing the most benefit (for themselves or for the network to which they belong, which are in fact interrelated). This kind of explanation corresponds well with arguments about sustaining the competitive advantage of a profit making or a developing organization. Within globalization, we can consider organizations going international, and benefit from the understanding of lobal as thinking local, acting global, as introduced in Table 1. According to this, we can suggest that companies differentiate their products or services in order to meet the differing demands of international customers. If we consider that the glocal already applies these principles to large companies like multinationals, then we can direct our suggestions to the small and medium scale enterprises that want to become international. Both kinds of firms tailor their products and services to different markets, but they do so in different ways.

One more point is significant to mention when we use body lobes as a metaphor to develop models for organizations. It is right to suggest that all these lobes are individually important. All have certain duties; they differentiate and specialize according to what they do best, but what should be the tradeoff between individual independence and serving the well being of the whole system? Concerns related to this issue fall outside the scope of this discussion.

If we continue asking how all these definitions can be used, another implication could also be the suggestion that nation states should become lobal. This could only mean more than seeing the complex local and global concerns that have serious impact on themselves as interconnected issues of one combined lobal frame and taking measures to resolve them. It also could suggest their development as a lobal power, rather than

remaining as a local one or being overly ambitious to become global. This can be a model applied to countries with emerging socio-economic systems that have the potential to play leading roles in their regions, which will also determine their local and global position in return. An individual country's realization of the importance of the lobal role could, on aggregate, result in a global shift in the governance of states. As we discussed for lobal companies, we can also say that lobal countries can learn to rely on their own unique characteristics, which can become their comparative competitive advantage. By specializing according to these qualities they could also assume an important role in a world system of integrated, interacting and evolving networks. The role that each country fulfills would be individually significant. However, this importance can still be put on a relative scale, which is again open to discussion if we recall the metaphor of body lobes: Each part of the body is important, but some parts are more critical than others.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, by continuously stressing the need to be aware of varying dichotomies, we have tried to contribute to the ongoing discussions about globalization and glocalization. We introduced a new term, lobal, originating from the lobes of body, to supplement the existing terms of local, global and glocal. It was discussed from various perspectives, such as the development stages of globalization, together with its different modes, and the bottom-up and top-down processes involved. Furthermore, we have provided an approach to lobal organizations, interpreting them also as networks, together with implications for companies and countries. We have also tried to provide explanations that are combinations of some of these different perspectives, trying to keep our discussion open, by presenting various, even conflicting ideas. In that manner, the views provided here are by no means exclusive; other kinds of understanding and interpretation are possible. What we have also proposed here can also be changed; especially the models which are, after, all, simply approximations of reality, have their own flaws and can always be improved. All these points could hold for any suggestion we make, including the one we would mostly favor, an understanding lobal socio-economic systems with a bottom-up impact on globalization. We believe that the conceptualization of lobal can substantially improve our existing knowledge about issues related to globalization and any contribution for this is encouraged.

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