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Global Identity Is Real
Contribution to GTI Forum Think Globally, Act Locally?

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Collapsing the global into the local, as Arturo Escobar does in his comment, is neither necessary nor useful. It is true that everyone has a local position in space and time which is the starting point for any action. However, this position is not fixed and, in fact, can move quite frequently. In addition, technology and interdependence have intermeshed positions and scales so that actions have impacts beyond the local. Even without such tangible interdependence, philosophical thought across the world's regions—ancient Greek Stoic philosophy, the Tamil Sangam literature, the Hindu Upanishads, the Confucian thought of the "Great Unity," and so on-- has stressed the inherent connection of all human beings wherever they may be. Humans may be rooted locally, but their minds may embrace a global perspective based on inclusion. Clearly, solidarity and empathy can and do often expand beyond the immediate locality and identity. Recent surveys show that large majorities across the world accept the notion of global citizenship that carries global rights and responsibilities. Identity is built upon many different loyalties, layers, and outlooks that have different weights, priorities, and reaches for each individual. This often includes a global identity.

If people feel and express a global identity that makes them part of the larger human family, this cannot be undone by simply stating that the global does not exist. This is an odd claim in light of the existence of international law, international institutions, international relations, and global decision-making. Then, there are global public goods such as the atmosphere. There are formal governance structures at different levels from the local to the global: municipalities, cities, counties, provinces, states, federal states, subregional and regional international communities,

continental agreements and bodies, and finally all of the institutions of the UN system and global governance.

I agree that local action is key, but it is not exclusively so because local action in many important areas is determined by governance and decision-making structures that are beyond the local. Consider nuclear disarmament and collective security as two examples. The principle of subsidiarity offers useful guidance. Decision-making should be located at the lowest possible level of governance that is still able to deliver effective solutions. Subsidiarity in many cases may imply decentralization and moving decision-making closer to the local. However, in other cases, it may also imply the necessity to move beyond the nation-state upwards to global decision-making structures. All structures must be as democratic, accountable, transparent, and inclusive as possible, and this applies especially to those that are global. These structures already exist, but they do not meet such criteria.

It is necessary to build stronger connections between the local and the global. This is one of the reasons why we need a UN Parliamentary Assembly so that UN members will be accountable to their local constituencies. Soon we will launch a campaign that promotes the instrument of a UN World Citizens' Initiative that will allow a number of global (sic!) citizens to formally present proposals to the UN General Assembly.

About the Author

Andreas Bummel is co-founder and global coordinator of the Campaign for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly, which advocates democratic representation of the world's citizens at the UN and the institutions of global governance. The campaign has been endorsed by 1,500 sitting and former lawmakers from over 100 countries. He has authored numerous publications, spoken at events around the world, and organized relevant conferences on the subject, and he is the author of a forthcoming book on the project of a world parliament. He has been a council member of the World Federalist Movement–Institute for Global Policy, a fellow of the World Academy of Art and Science, and an honorary member of the Society for Threatened Peoples.

About the Publication

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