

Chapter 5

Title

Villages in a Growingly Urban World
Personal Glimpses on How to Promote
Public Discussion on “Glocality”

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Introduction This subject is close to my heart. I live in a village consisting of about 30 houses, two farms and maybe around 15-20 people living year round. I have been involved in the Swedish peasant organizations also working on rural development, and I am a year chairman of the Swedish association “All Sweden Shall Live” with around 5,000 local village groups. But I have also had a European perspective and an international perspective as President of the EU Economic and Social Committee 2010-2013 where I as a rapporteur coordinated an opinion on “A better territorial balance”. I have also had Swedish international assignments. So, even if I am in everyday life comes from a tiny little village I have seen all these in a global perspective, through visits, among others in African countries, China, Central America, for instance, in Guatemala, Honduras, and in countries such as Chile, Brazil. For me “glocality” means a good opportunity; perhaps also an absolute and necessary opportunity. I would like to offer a few thoughts from a time perspective.

Globalization When we say the word, I am convinced, many people attach different values to the concept. Good or bad, ranging from threat to opportunity. To many, it leads to the realization that one can only perceive it as a movement that seeks a capitalist international development, that it is just an economic integration between national economies.

I would still put it in a broader perspective from the beginning, saying that it also involves a cultural and political process with the countries of the world acting more closely together. Maybe some see this as more of a threat, but I personally do not.

Part of globalization is that we move from one place to another, from one region to another, from one part of the world to another. But this is not something that just happened in the course of the last century. I come from a northern country, which is often associated with the Vikings. Over the ages, people had been moving across large areas. In the 700's, the Vikings came from the north to England and Ireland and the East equaled it far. Christopher Columbus started his first world voyage in August 1492 but it took him 8 months. In Europe many wars reached far away, with here and the whole entourage that was needed, but the movements took time; weeks or months. So, if we talk about globalization in the sense that we can move great distances, so it is not new at all. The big difference is time, the time it takes. Jules Verne wrote the book "Around the World in 80 Days" in 1873; today you can do this in a few days if you want. Columbus' trip we can do in 18 hours by plane.

In the digital world we are moving even faster. Nanoseconds quickly. We behave today as we always have, but the Internet is as a newborn baby: a creation from the late 1980's with its expansion in the 1990's. For any piece of news it took days, even further back weeks or months to reach its goal to go around the globe. Today, you on Facebook have friends all around the world and can be in contact with them instantly.

Another part of globalization, we can see is the basis and terms of trade in the world. 1956 was loaded the first container ship with 58 pieces on board. Today's largest container vessel is nearly 400 meters long and carries 16,020 containers that are 20 feet long.

All these examples show that it is technological development that allows all of these to happen, especially, the information to spread faster around the world. At the same time, we also need to make ourselves aware that our human communities rely heavily on fossil fuels, which also leads to large risky problems: climate change must be taken seriously.

Urbanization It involves a population movement from rural to urban areas; a process that is not new either. What is new is about it is how fast it happens. In Europe, for instance, most of the population up to the mid-1800's lived in the countryside. Since 2008, the majority of the world population lives in cities. It is estimated that in fifty years two thirds of the world's population will reside in urban environments. Growing cities are creating new opportunities for economic growth but it is also this realm where poverty increases the most. We can also realize that the most intense urbanization occurs in Africa and Asia.

Urbanization, in the minds of many, is associated with agricultural technological development, where fewer people can produce more. For some scholars and politicians urbanization can answer the challenges of energy and climate. For others, it is the problem itself; and we may ask: is there a limit to the big cities' livelihoods? One does not need to visit the largest megacities to see traffic misery with stagnant highways. For those of us engaged in rural development – not liquidation – the speed of urbanization is a major problem. In my own country, Sweden, you can see in the north part and the inlands, too, an overgrown landscape. Travel in Bulgaria, on the other hand, and you see devastated villages.

Glocality So, we arrive at a third term “glocality”, which is a mixture of global and local, and it is a relatively new expression to think about our world and our own personal place and role in it: “to think globally but act locally”.

This portmanteau of global and local is said to come from a Japanese word (dochakuka), which simply means global localization. Originally referring to a way of adapting farming techniques to local conditions, it evolved into a marketing strategy when Japanese businessmen adopted it in the 1980's.¹ If we search for the term "locality" online, we can find such a description immediately: "Locality is the leading nationwide network for community-led organizations. We believe that every community is a place of possibility." (<http://locality.org.uk>)

I wish to quote what Wayne Visser wrote in a blog just about glocality: "When and by whom the phrase 'think global, act local' was first applied to environmental issues is a matter of some dispute. It may have been introduced by David Brower, founder of Friends of the Earth, in 1969, or by Rene Dubos as an advisor to the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment. Overpriced, in 1979, Canadian futurist Frank Feather chaired a conference called 'Thinking Globally, Acting Locally'. Whatever its origins, the notion of glocality has entered into the popular consciousness." (<http://www.waynevisser.com/blog/glocality>)

Figure 1.
Glocalization



¹ Visser, W. Thinking Global and Acting Local in CSR. Accessible at: <http://www.waynevisser.com/blog/glocality>

On the Internet we also find this description:

“According to the sociologist Roland Robertson, who is credited with popularizing the term, glocalization describes a new outcome of local conditions toward global pressures. At a 1997 conference on “Globalization and Indigenous Culture,” Robertson said that glocalization ‘means the simultaneity – the co-presence – of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies’.” (<http://www.jinn.co/glocalization/>)

Some people say that the increasing presence of McDonald’s restaurants worldwide is an account of globalization, and while the restaurant chain’s menu changes in an attempt to appeal to local palates we see glocalization taking shape. I do not know if I can directly associate glocality with just McDonalds, but it is certainly an interesting thought.

Villages in an urban world I finally wish to turn to this topic from my own perspective, and also comment on my own values in terms of the ‘global’ and the ‘local’. I am not sure that I can only be optimistic in that it is possible to combine the global and the local. However, my intention is to maintain optimism, and to see it as a possibility.

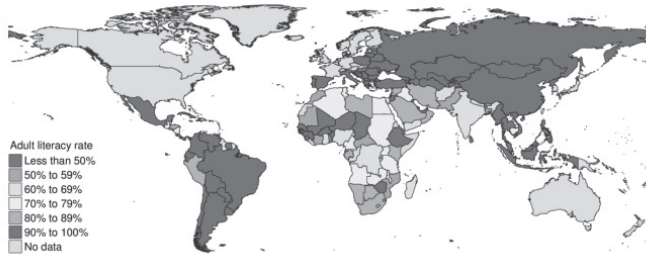
Even if we do not reach the 2015 Millennium Goals, there are positive trends connected with globalization. A clear example of a positive trend is that the number of people worldwide living in extreme poverty fell from 1.9 million in 1990 to 1.3 million in 2008. This has occurred despite the fact that the world population grew over the same period. In percentage terms, this means that extreme poverty in the world has declined by nearly 30 per cent in just less than 20 years.

It also offers trends that show that a large part of the development goes in the right direction. The number of people having access to clean water has increased with an incredible number of two billion since 1990 and now has a total of almost 9 out of 10 people on the planet with access to clean water. The rate of adult literacy has been also increasing. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2012):

“Adult literacy rates are estimated to continue to rise in the coming years but are expected to remain below the youth literacy rate in nearly all regions. The global adult literacy rate is estimated to reach 86% by 2015 and the youth literacy rate 92%.” (<http://www.uis.unesco.org>)

Figure 2.
Where are Literacy Rates Lowest and Highest in the World?

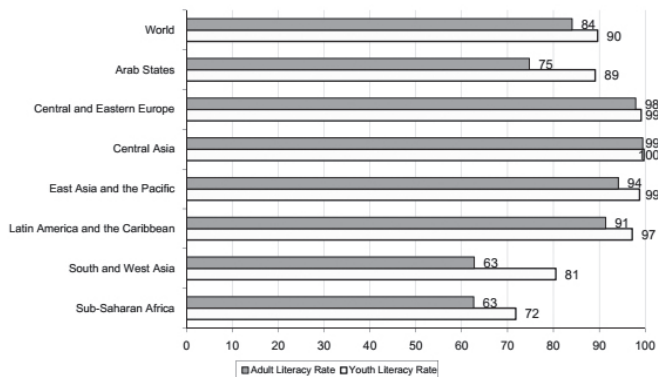
Global Maps of Literacy Rates for Adults and Youth, 2010



Source:
UIS, 2012
September

Figure 3.
What is the Global Distribution of Adult and Youth Literacy?

Source:
UIS, 2012
September



We cannot and should not try to stop what is today global. However, we can aspire to achieve the ambitious climate targets, which go further than the EU Commission proposed in January 2014. Without sustainable development, we do not know how the world in all respects will be changing.

Globalization has also led to a more diverse society, partly by evil necessity and as a result of the world's violent conflicts and wars, partly because cultural exchange is a daily possibility. We travel and can therefore experience other people's cultural traditions.

In my role as chairperson of a rural organization in Sweden, I can see that we are witnessing a difficult change, so I am not just an optimist, but a realist, too. The city becomes the norm and the 'ruler' while the countryside becomes a 'servant'.

But as I said before: I want to stay an optimist, as if we ourselves do not believe it is possible to combine a global world with a local perspective in our closest vicinity, we will not succeed to unite them into glocality. We see the bar trends and developments: while we can enjoy a taste of other countries' cuisine, growing movements toward supporting local shopping, locally grown and locally produced products push society away from the multinational big food companies.

We should look at the European Union to understand cohesion. The reformed cohesion policy will totally make up 351.8 billion EUR available for investment in EU regions, cities, and the real economy. The European Regional Development Fund focuses on key priorities such as support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are mostly located outside cities and towns, where the goal is to double the support scheme by 70-140 billion over the seven-year financial framework.

These areas constitute an important part of the EU's 'natural' identity. According to a standard definition in the

European Union, more than 91 per cent of the EU's territory is 'rural', and more than 56 per cent of the EU's total population lives in this area (Rural Development Policy 2007–2013). We receive virtually all products from the countryside, all the food, most of our energy, raw materials from mines, forest products and other things. However, usually their value is not transferred back to the countryside. In Sweden this is something we are pursuing right now: better and bigger reflux of rural values.

In sum, I believe in 'glocality' as a concept and an opportunity: it is possible to combine a global world and a local perspective. It certainly hangs on the right political decisions locally, regionally, nationally and at the EU/global level, but it depends even more on each and every individual.