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After the 2019 Global Solutions Summit

A narrative framework for paradigm change

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PARADIGM CHANGE IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

From 18–19 March, the 2019 Global Solutions Summit took place in Berlin. Its mission is to support the 2019 Japanese presidency of the summits of the Group of Twenty (G20) and the world's leading think tanks (T20) by providing it with new policy ideas.

As Dennis J. Snower, the President of the Global Solutions Initiative, said in his opening remarks, we are witnessing a crisis of the liberal world order epitomised by the universalist aspiration to institutionalise the rule of law, national sovereignty, human rights, and progress through economic growth. This crisis, he suggested, is due to the decoupling of the political, economic, and socio-cultural spheres of human activity in global governance.

To recouple these spheres and to overcome this crisis, the participants at the Summit agreed, we need global paradigm change—that is, a radical rethinking of the patterns through which we conceive of the world, and which shape its dominant political, economic, and socio-cultural systems. These patterns include globalised market capitalism and the central role of the nation-state, among others. Only by doing so, according to the Summit's general thrust, can we develop a global social contract that has the ability to create 'thriving societies' on all levels—local, regional, national, and global.

This perspective suggests that paradigm change is not about the replacement of one monolithic system with another—not least because many stakeholders have vested interests in retaining the status quo. Instead, it concerns the incremental, long-term re-organisation of dynamic relationships between different elements of the old system across the political, economic, and socio-cultural spheres.

This brief offers a framework for how we may think of this re-organisation process. Taking inspiration from the Summit's call for 'new narratives' to

KEY INSIGHTS

'RECOUPLING' THE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIO-CULTURAL DOMAINS OF HUMAN ACTIVITY, AS DEMANDED BY THE SUMMIT, REQUIRES A NARRATIVE CHANGE PROCESS.

KEY TO THIS PROCESS IS THE CREATION OF MULTIVOICEDNESS IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE.

AT THE HEART OF MULTIVOICEDNESS ARE EMANCIPATION AND TRANSLATION.

transform global governance structures, it conceives of paradigm change as narrative change. It suggests that rather than thinking of paradigm change in terms of 'solutions' prescribed in a top-down process, we need to develop an inclusive story with a new directedness.

PARADIGMATIC CHANGE AS NARRATIVE CHANGE

Telling stories is the process of organising the many different, isolated events and episodes that constitute human life into a coherent whole. We do this by selecting only some of these events and episodes while ignoring others, based on our values, norms, knowledge, and identities. In doing so, we insert order into the messy reality of our lives and make sense of them by giving these selected events and episodes meaning in relation to each other. We thereby situate ourselves in space ('here' and 'there') and time (past, present, and future), and establish the context in which we take decisions and motivate action.

> WE NEED TO RECONSIDER WHO GETS TO TELL THE STORY, BASED ON WHAT RESOURCES, AND WITH WHAT PURPOSE.

Crucially, this process also shapes our political order, because ordering life also means defining the boundaries of our social communities and fostering the relative differences in power that shape these boundaries in turn. Storytelling, by nature, is thus a social process, a co-production.

Consequently, narrative change is a collective effort that requires us to alter the patterns that define how we select episodes and events and compose them to create a coherent story that is directed at a certain (but unpredictable) outcome.

In the past few decades, the liberal world order and the knowledge on which it rests have moulded global politics, championed by a monolithic, powerful voice—the voice of Western, white, affluent, older, and generally male elites. This recipe for political and economic stability now seems to have outlived itself, as evidenced by the growing mistrust in public institutions, the revival of supremacy movements, and the struggle to uphold multilateral governance structures.

To achieve narrative change, we therefore need to reconsider who gets to tell the story, based on what resources, and with what purpose. To this end, the concept of 'multivoicedness' is useful.

TOWARD MULTIVOICEDNESS

These days, many people say that they have lost faith in the current world order because they feel like they no longer have a 'voice' in the multilevel, fast-paced, and conflictual political processes that shape their lives. Others—in particular the young, the less affluent, women, those who originate from the 'global east' or the 'global south'—never had a (real) stake in this process in the first place. At the same time, the Western monologue about the liberal world order is increasingly interrupted from within, with President Trump and increasingly autocratic leaders on this side of the pond presenting themselves as dissenting voices.

In light of these developments, the call for giving (more) people 'a voice' and a 'seat at the table' (while countering dissenting voices within the West) as both a precondition and an objective of global paradigm change dominated much of the discussion during the Summit.

The narrative notion of 'multivoicedness' helps to make sense of this call. It suggests that global governance is shaped by the continuous dialogue between various political actors who are situated in distinct contexts. Through this dialogue, these actors are implied within each other—even in instances where they define themselves in opposition to each other (e.g. the Western liberal order vs. China's autocratic regime).

The concept also acknowledges that these actors, both individual and collective, are 'multivoiced' themselves in that they may speak from different positions—for example as worker or parent, or—like the EU—as an organisation that both promotes regional economic integration and acts as a broker for peace in more remote geographical areas.

Pursuing such a multivoiced model of global governance means to acknowledge the complexity and diversity of actors and the interactions between them. It draws attention to the fact that 'us vs. them' distinctions are artificial constructions that deny this complexity, and at a considerable price. Two dimensions in particular are key to the implementation of this model: emancipation and translation.

1. EMANCIPATION

Voices can be undermined or altogether silenced by others, often with the consequence of denying entire social groups essential material benefits such as education, income, housing, etc., because their demands remain (often literally) unheard. A multivoiced model of global governance actively engages with the full range

of voices across hierarchal, spatial, generational, gender, racial, and moral boundaries. It integrates them (further) into governance structures, which will change in turn, e.g. by moving institutions' headquarters to different parts of the world, as suggested more than once during the Summit. It pursues their emancipation, that is, their liberation from imposed intellectual and material restraints.

Emancipation is not simply a question of fairness, but of prudence: as recent elections in the US, Brazil, Turkey, and elsewhere have shown, perceptions of 'having lost one's voice'—or, worse, that (an often undefinable) someone has taken it away—can distort political processes and present a major challenge to the liberal world order. Giving younger generations a voice in and a responsibility for global change also demands that they have a chance to build their own lives in the first place. This demand was emphasised in particular by the Young Global Changers, students and young professionals from around the world who participated in the Summit. It also expresses itself in the 'Fridays for Future' demonstrations across the globe.

Promoting emancipation may happen on different levels, for example through initiatives such as the G20 Africa Partnership or greater efforts to transpose existing rights frameworks into action, as done, for instance, by the women's rights organisation Womankind Worldwide. Doing so is essential for motivating collective action, which is key to (re)building trust in the idea that international corporation is mutually beneficial—not despite, but because of people's different life realities, values, and ways of thinking.

Precisely because of these differences, emancipation processes in less-than-democratic regimes should be observed carefully. As the global populist surge demonstrates, an overemphasis on 'the will of the people' may result in simple majoritarianism. While this promotes paradigm change, it does so based on emotionality instead of reason, which often leads to irresponsible decision-making. Recent events—in particular, the Brexit referendum in June 2016 and its aftermath—are illustrative of this dynamic.

2. TRANSLATION

Multivoiced global governance also requires different processes of translation. Global principles and goals—such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals concerning poverty, health, education, equality, energy, and the environment—have to be translated in a way that makes them actionable in local contexts, and that preserves the principle of subsidiarity by allocating

resources to the appropriate level of governance. Cooperation at a higher level needs to be a tool for improving the conditions of human life on the lower level(s). This is important, because depending on their position (e.g. West vs. East, urban vs. rural, etc.), the actors involved value and prioritise different things (e.g. security, environmental protection, etc.), as Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Chief of Staff Gabriela Ramos emphasised at one of the Summit panels.

Another relevant question is how we can translate the ultimate goal of creating 'thriving societies' into concrete figures. As Ramos suggested, we should "measure what we treasure". When it comes to people's wellbeing, i.e. their current quality of life and the resources that sustain it, growth-based GDP figures are not the only important indicator, because people also value things that cannot be measured in this way, for example their natural environment, work–life balance, and good governance. This holistic approach has already been institutionalised on the national level in Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index, rooted in an idea that dates back to the early 1970s, and in New Zealand's Living Standards Framework.

> MANY PEOPLE HAVE LOST FAITH IN THE WORLD ORDER BECAUSE THEY FEEL THEY NO LONGER HAVE A 'VOICE'.

A third dimension of translation relates to the institutions that mediate between different voices and the channels through which paradigm change may happen. Social media, for example, are increasingly important for formulating and spreading ideas within and across societies—the #MeToo movement on Twitter is a prime example. In this context, the Director of the Voice of America, Amanda Bennett, noted during one of the Summit panels that local journalists can compensate for the democratising forces that have been lost in the increasingly commercialised, digitalised, and fragmented news media market. The American Journalism Project is one prominent initiative that conducts social philanthropy in this area.

CONCLUSION

Dominant paradigms shape the stories we can tell, and everyday storytelling reinforces these patterns in turn. Breaking this cycle to recouple the political, economic, and socio-cultural spheres of global governance is the challenge we are currently facing.

Calls for 'taking back control' that continue to be popular in Western politics, however, are not an adequate response. They further erode trust in the capabilities of international organisations and governance structures and make an untenable promise of a return to an era of certainty that actually never was—at least not outside the already-affluent countries of the West.

Instead, we need to be better equipped to deal with uncertainty—that is, the fact that we lack knowledge about what is to come. Telling a new story that is directed toward multivoicedness in global governance may help us to achieve this.

The Hertie School of Governance hosts the Secretariat of the Global Solutions Initiative.

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THE DAHRENDORF FORUM

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