

Global Citizenship

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Paper in progress

What about the World Cup 2010 in South Africa and the players from North Korea? You remember the pride and tears of some players singing the North Korean national hymn when the soccer games started? You remember them fighting, losing and returning as they came: as largely unknown tradable state commodities. Disgraced by their defeat in the eyes of the 'beloved leader', Kim Jong Il, and with rare life-broadcasts of their games seen at home, the possibility of collective punishment and a life in re-education camps seems very real. For them, temporary global citizenship was no win-win situation.

What, if President Mugabe had been able to send a Zimbabwean soccer team to the World Cup 2010? Would the players have thought more about the nation's glory, or about opportunities to leave the national paradigm behind – something that remained so unchallenged in the case of North Korea?

While leaving for a world cup to represent one's country is seen as the nearest to attaining global citizenship, returning after loss is likely to be seen as disgrace, as tainting the fragile fabric of the nation. France's national soccer team is a clear example of appeals to restore the tainted collective image of the nation, and so is Argentina's, and punishments are still worked out and implemented as we reflect.

These days, certain national soccer teams – particularly male soccer teams - are truly global in their origin, and some European teams have more players with migration background than life-time nationals. The result is most beneficial for European soccer. The phenomenon is rather new though. There is a visible shift away from the national as the pre-dominant identification of individuals. And this shift is public and welcome.

The undoing of the national to reclaim the glory of the national is no longer limited to soccer. There is an increasing number of public areas where the national is losing its defining power. Will this lead to global citizenship beyond global sports events? Eventually yes, but no without fierce conflict.

Waves of right-wing exclusion paradigms are brainwashing the minds of the North American public. The competition for the minds, souls and emotions of the spiritually-minded is in full swing leading to unprecedented numbers of self-styled fundamentalist churches and sects praising values non-compatible with human rights, dignity, respect and global citizenship. Unprecedented also the opportunities to steer up collective levels of fear!

It seems as if all this happens, in parallel. The old slogan 'Think globally, act locally' is revisited and at work, and there are encouraging gains in collective local and global thinking and action. And then, there is this increasing number of the uprooted, be it due to economic crisis, be it due to manmade ecological disaster reaching ever greater proportions. No, this is not the end of the world, but it is the end of an era, and global politics as we know it.

Thirty years ago the vast majority of societies believed in the integrity of United Nations. It also believed in UN's genuine and deserved leadership in mending a world badly fragmented into cold-war chiefdoms and commercial interest zones. People believed in progress, the progress of nations and that of the world as such. Life was seen as an upward spiral where each new generation would have more than the one before it.

Global thinking and action was seen as synonymous with being on the right track, moving forward. People were keen to adopt a progressive image of the world where the full potential of all and everything was used for the purpose of progress and invention. Environmental action, an end to authoritarian political leadership and the breaking of the authority of repressive religious models, all that was seen as possible - even where dissent remained about the right pace of change. Even industry publically advocated for less hierarchical leadership structures, more participation and transparency. Being modern was seen as awarding because there was money to spend on 'modernity', and it seemed well invested.

Sharing ideas globally appealed to liberals and the left alike because it provided them with insight and a claim to being original, something every generation treasures. Right-wingers could live with the internationalists and environmental, too. Power was affirmed in armed conflict and these women and men were mostly 'benign', non-violent and non-interfering since they lacked the power to restructure the world.

Many internationalists later transformed and revamped themselves when the cold war warmed. Even then, global thinking was no threat because there seemed to be endless resources.

Some globalized movements, like the woman's movement, worked at progress with remarkable gains in legal understanding and practice. At the same time they mainstreamed themselves beyond recognition effectively eliminating women's power as a mass movement.

While political, economic and social fragmentation remained widely unchallenged and ever better hidden, the idea of safeguarding the treasures of nature began to take root in a new way. The environmental movement took the perspective that resources might indeed be scarce one day and that locally sound and responsible action was the key to making the world a better place.

Over the last 40 years, 'global citizenship' has become a commodity and a brand-attribute like so many others! 40 years ago its connotation was clear, distinct, precise, positive, a beyond nation-state paradigm and associated with 'modern'. Globalization was seen as more positive than negative. To see other continents was a must for the educated. Working for the common good was just fine while today people would be quick to ask whose common good, and at whose expense. There was less fear of the future than today. But since then, meaning and quality of use have continuously diminished.

Today, global citizenship may be expressed through the choice of a specific drink or of a brand of car. Estate agents act globally, serving the global nomad among the rich. The local is a prerequisite for the global, but the global is interchangeable, is a background, can be

anything. It is a mere platform and springboard for action in the inner circles of those using technology and systems depending on it.

Indeed, more among the rich are more regularly drugged than in a century before – perhaps with the exception of the opium-dependent pre-revolutionary Chinese. Regular drug consumption goes along with sinking productivity and a loss of value-orientation in investment decisions. Bankers at the key stock exchanges of the world before, during and after 2008 are only one example for a world which has decided to hand over its wealth to party-drug addicted gamblers for no particular purpose. The wake-up is blunt and bleak.

Global citizenship has been revamped and re-appropriated by the exclusive class of those for whom 2008 was a deplorable event harming others, and not a structural crisis. The appropriation has served to make money and to establish and maintain distinction between the have-nots and the frequent flyer community with upward mobility orientation.

The idea of a global common good and of shared global citizenship on equal terms has either evaporated or has been perverted! If my common good is in conflict with your common good, then my common good takes precedence: this seems to be the new credo.

After 2008, global citizenship appears to be something for the upwardly mobile. Since very few can be certain to belong to this segment for long, claims as such have changed. These days, claiming global citizenship may be synonymous with claiming the right to a life in prosperity and privilege, including the right to fiercely defend oneself against the social exclusion that goes along with asset loss. Where whole nations change their relative position in the world within a decade, nothing is certain but much is to be lost.

Fear and impoverishment go together and are powerful deterrents. When the credit cards go and the frequent flyer bonuses, more is seemingly lost than if your partner separates from you as studies in the US have shown. Companions can be bought or otherwise replaced but privilege? Where does that leave people?

Value is being shifted further under the permanent influence of advertisement overloading the human being with unattainable dreams of omnipotence, against which all real life is but blunt, poor and uninteresting. If they did individuals might have to face up to the fact that decision-making takes place elsewhere.

Global citizenship – like many other positive and seemingly reliable terms – has been compromised and usurped. How then can it be understood and used today? How can meaning be regained, and how dignity?

Those who are beginning to think about this question are the Chinese. An aging society is defined as a society where 10% of its members are above 60 and at least 7% are above 65 years of age. China fulfils these criteria ever since the beginning of the millennium. In 2050, 30% of its population will qualify. China, in the absence of a functioning pension system will have what is locally called a ‘4-2-1 problem’. In a country with a 4-2-1 problem, two (2) people of working age look after one (1) child and four (4) parents. The widespread fear of

China's newly rich is that the new found wealth of economic transformation will be eaten up by demographic changes (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung of 18.08.2010*). The Chinese are not alone. Others will undergo this experience.

Will one of the answers simply be a global bride market, or are there more positive expectations?

There will be a rethinking and, to my understanding, it will be further developed by those who have already undergone un-voluntary, frequent and life-changing experiences. I assume this because of the transforming character of un-voluntary change.