Rethinking and changing world governance

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Contents

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If we want to rethink the existing architecture of world governance and propose alternatives for a new world governance, we need to identify the actors and spaces that are already at work in this domain.

It is important to remember that we are dealing with processes and not only institutions. All political spaces where power, participation and representation are at play are necessarily characterized by struggle and tense relations. This applies both to existing spaces and to those that need to be created, since they too will be spaces in dispute.

We also need to examine the concepts and even the words that are used, such as architecture and governance, since they can give the impression that we are talking about static and balanced universes. Governance architecture, however, is a complex, dynamic and conflictual series of spaces, institutions and ideas wherein multiple actors dispute the balance of power within constantly changing relations. Within these disputes, social actors' ideas (words) and forms of participation interact and build on each other, together playing an important role in driving the process of change.

We also need to keep in mind that all governance arrangements have two levels: the institutional level, and the level where other factors and balances of power operate above and beyond institutions, which are only one element of power, an element that varies according to the context. Which is not to say that institutions are not "real" agents of power: it is a role that they play, as a function of each situation. However, even though they only represent one aspect of real power, they are also spaces in dispute.

The new political architecture is being built simultaneously on two main levels: locally (states also correspond to this local level, even though it may be in highly diverse forms), and globally, a level that not only corresponds to the inter-state context but also, and especially, to new transnational and global spaces.

There are two dimensions driving the process of constructing governance. The local dimension is where people's daily lives are played out, and the global dimension is where policies affecting these daily lives are increasingly decided. The scale of phenomena such as migrations, pandemics, climate crises and financial crises keeps escalating. In this context, local territory and local democracy provide the keystone for building a new

governance architecture. Nevertheless, in an era characterized by increasingly accelerated globalization, financial and trade flows and the circulation of people and information, the global dimension conditions daily life at the local level. We therefore also need to propose and introduce changes to governance at both the local and global level. There is a dialectical relationship between these two key dimensions of governance.

There is also an intermediary dimension that lies between the local and global levels: the regional level. This space has gradually been taking shape, and continental organizations play an important role in governance architecture. These regional bodies usually create regulatory systems that meet the interests of major states and corporations; however, they also constitute spaces in dispute. It is therefore important to look to regional spaces to act as agents for strengthening the links between territories, organizations and social actors seeking to bolster their capacity to counter the power wielded by states and transnational corporations. These spaces, lying between the local level—including country-states—and the global level, could provide a path of transition to a truly global future architecture. We therefore need to rethink regional governance spaces and structures.

The key questions that could guide us are: What are the alternatives for building a new governance architecture? How do we create them?

Actors: their relations, their contradictions

1. Transnational corporations (TNCs)

These are actors that operate primarily at the global level. Financial, industrial, trade, information and technology corporations shape not only production and consumption models but also the lifestyle and civilisation behind the current crises. TNCs cannot be tackled simply by proposing regulation. We need to put citizen and democratic control into practice. However, given the vast power TNCs have accumulated, one actor alone cannot exercise this sort of control. This needs state control on a national level, UN control at the international scale and control by social actors at the local level. In addition, close ties exist between TNCs and states, particularly the major powers. For example, the Davos Forum

provides a space that has been forging links between TNCs and governmental agents for several years. The key to achieving effective control over TNCs lies in linking all these actors together. However, in this context, multi-stakeholder forums should not serve to legitimize the power of TNCs. We need to devise and build structures that link together institutions and organizations from the local to global level, wherever the power of TNCs may be effectively controlled. Legitimacy and credibility are central issues to any attempt to implement regulations. A fundamental problem remains in this area: the elaboration of international law with the power to ensure that it is obeyed, since existing international law lacks such power.

2. The state

The state as the regulator and organizer of society, a role that reaches beyond its boundaries, is subject to attacks by the de facto transnational economic and political powers that seek to reduce it. However, people continue to see the state and protection of the state as a tool for regulating these powers and guaranteeing citizen rights. It would not therefore be appropriate to promote anti-state proposals. A state that respects its citizens' rights is a requirement of democratic institutionality. However, we need to rethink the notion of the nation-state within a given territory. Flows such as migratory, trade and Internet flows ignore states' territorial limits, and we need to explore the idea of deterritorializing the state's role, a difficult task given the historical weight of borders. Today's state has an ambivalent role. It is necessary for regulating governance primarily at the national level — although even there it is moving away from the role of local democracy — and at the global level it is not the best means of meeting global challenges. States are also institutions in dispute and need to be guided towards democratic and efficient governance. Furthermore, looking at the medium and long term, the form of state that once played an important role in, for example, the decolonialization process, is part of the old world. It is therefore vital to explore how to transform it.

→ The question of participation and representation lies at the heart of the dialectic between society and the state. We know that representation systems do not correspond to the demand for active participation. The priority must be on promoting participation by implementing transparent information systems and open consultation mechanisms to ensure efficient decision making.

The state and representation systems will thus gradually be transformed by devising new political institutions. This represents an historical challenge, since we are experiencing a crisis of legitimacy towards elites. The current crisis of democracy is primarily rooted in a questioning of elites and how they have developed historically. Protests in various countries levelled at the political-party system are above all an expression of this questioning of elites. But above and beyond these questions, we need to invent new systems for organizing political systems, with citizens as the main actors working to take democracy to a new level and to ensure that leaders are legitimate and institutions are transparent and efficient. This process goes far deeper than political engineering alone: it has to do with the ethical foundations capable of supporting the new lifestyles, within society and civilizations that support life and the sustainability of the planet, that are needed at the outset of the third millennium.

→ *The UN's role*

There are three possible views of the UN:

- the first believes that we need to work with what we have, i.e. the existing UN, that it should no longer be criticized and that the most fitting action would be to reform it so that it could reclaim the role it played in the past, for example, during decolonialization after the second world war of the twentieth century;

- the second asserts that the UN cannot meet contemporary challenges, that it is not worth trying to reform it and that we will get nowhere by sticking with the UN;

- a third view contends that, although the UN is not managing to successfully tackle current problems, it would not be right to abandon it; we need to support reforming efforts to make it more democratic, without attempting a fast transformation of inter-state institutions. In this context, everything that aims to increase civil society's place in the UN system, by strengthening or creating new mechanisms for NGO participation and increasing its role in decision making beyond simple consultation, and everything that could help reform the Security Council, such as abolishing the veto system, would be positive.

In any event, the UN, just like states—and precisely because it is an inter-state structure— is part and parcel of an ageing system. We need to create new institutions that renew the world governance architecture. In this context, the UN is also a space in dispute.

The major organizations that currently seek to regulate world governance are divided into two main groups of actors:

- geopolitical groups—G8, G20, OECD and BRICS—attribute authority to themselves and are the most powerful actors, although they do not all adopt the same policies for tackling current crises;

- the UN and inter-governmental conferences.

These geopolitical groups, mainly the G8, supported by the IMF and NATO depending on the context, delegitimize the UN's role and impose their policies at the global level. Nevertheless, the deep-reaching and recurrent nature of the crises points to these actors' incapacity to deal with them. This is why spaces and opportunities to build a new architecture for world governance remain important, provided that citizens and peoples, their organizations, movements and networks prove capable of questioning them and putting them to good use. This is certainly one of the most testing challenges in today's world.

→ China

When discussing major global actors, China deserves a special mention. Architecture of a new world governance has to be rethought taking into account current events in China and China's place on the world stage. We are facing a vast power that is generating a new expansionist dynamics as well as being based on a highly unfair economic and political system. A number of workers, mainly migrants, live in conditions of extreme exploitation. Changes in this country are happening very fast, and some Chinese people feel ambivalent about being powerless to tackle them or guide them towards an alternative system, different from that based on exploitation and oppression of China's own people as well as other peoples and the resources of other countries.

The Chinese are aware of the destructive effects produced by the authoritarian capitalist growth-based model they are immersed in and its impact on other parts of the world. They are therefore making efforts to reduce pollution and the greenhouse effect by introducing mechanisms such as circular ecology or industrial ecology into their economic policies. On the other hand, China feels that it does not have total freedom to take decisions, since it is obliged to take into account other governments. For example, when it wanted to reduce production of carbon-based pollution, European and North American countries demanded

that it maintain the quotas they required from China, at the risk of exacerbating energy and environmental problems. This is a responsibility to be assumed by all those who expect and require China to adopt a specific economic and financial approach. At any rate, China's stability and growth not only represent an economic issue, they are also vital to the stability of the continent-country's system.

Another fast-growing phenomenon, in other parts of the southern hemisphere as well as China and Asia, is the irresistible tide of rapid urban growth. This trend means that the planet's population will be mainly urban and most large cities will be in China and Asia. The challenge is thus to develop territorial policies not only for rural areas (which remain significant in China, India and various southern countries) but also for urban spaces. The aim is to build or rebuild sustainable cities with new transport systems, ecological housing, and easy links between work and home, and, most importantly, to encourage supportive relations between inhabitants and neighbours.

Within these macroeconomic and geopolitical processes, which appear to override efforts to create a fruitful dialogue between people and exchanges between the Chinese and citizens from other parts of the world, we are separated not by cultural identities but by the expansionist policies imposed by those in power. Fostering and organizing direct dialogue between Chinese citizens and citizens from elsewhere in the world is therefore a key proposal in devising and building a new social, political and inter-cultural governance that opens up spaces for new voices and new pillars of a governance architecture firmly rooted in solidarity.

3. People, communities, civil society and a new relationship with nature

A third actor in governance architecture corresponds to a complex group of diverse subjects. It is made up of people, communities, civil society organizations and nature, which is also now perceived as a subject. Relations within this group are not always harmonious, and sometimes even conflictual.

When we refer to governance actors, we usually think about the state-civil society-business triangle. We need to add a fourth element: the community, which is not the same thing as civil society.

A community refers primarily to the notion of identity. Civil society, on the other hand, refers mainly to the notion of citizenship. We thus need to rethink the relationship between community and civil society in order to build alliances and identify areas of disagreement, such as between women's rights and community practices that do not necessarily correspond to these rights.

This field does not have very well-defined boundaries. It needs highly precise and far-reaching analyses of each subject, their differences and interdependencies. A number of questions need asking in this context:

What degree of empowerment do these actors need? What rights? What responsibilities? What representativeness? What alliances could be formed between them?

4. Local territories

We are seeing the "revenge" of local territories, until recently overlooked and buried in the macroeconomic and macro-political workings of world power architecture. It is now clear that a revaluation of local territories is vital to a new governance architecture. However, their configuration remains unclear: where does a local territory lie? In a neighbourhood or a district? What is the scale of urban territories and rural areas? Is a country a territory regardless of its surface area? Are there continental territories, such as Europe, South America and so on? Is not the whole world a territory?

A number of appropriate solutions do exist. The key is to link together the scales and levels of governance, keeping in mind that this does not mean trying to force good relations by failing to recognize that they are not necessarily harmonious between the different levels. Tensions between levels often outweigh the links. Active subsidiarity is not an automatic principle. It is important to develop it by using arbitration bodies and consensus-building.

It is worth highlighting at this point a keystone for the new architecture of world power: localizing and territorializing the economy and power as much as possible, since citizenship can only be fully achieved in a citizen-based territory. This is based on the interdependency of the local and global levels, wherein the principle of subsidiarity is fundamental. For example, let us consider the climate question. It is clear that this is a global issue that requires world governance. However, such governance cannot work without citizens making real compromises in their local territories. The territory is thus an element specific to the relationship between society and nature, the building block for achieving a symbiosis

where the planet's sustainability can find social expression that reflects the complex diversity of nature.

The process for building a new architecture clearly needs to focus on bottom-up mechanisms. Existing regional groupings, such as Mercosur, Asean, the European Union, the African Union, Unasur and so on, mainly created by inter-state agreements, should not be seen to provide the definitive model for regulating regional trade and political agreements. Social forums and citizen assemblies, for example, provide a means of linking territories to local levels within countries, and to regional, sub-continental and even multi-regional or multi-continental levels. Nevertheless, the linking up of territories, civil societies, communities and people on a global scale remains a distant prospect, one that reaches far beyond the goals achieved over recent decades by citizen initiatives in various regions of the world. Plenty of tasks still need doing to reinforce the social construction of territories and democratize them.

5. Hidden powers

Efforts to build a new governance architecture must not overlook the hidden powers, namely, illegal and illegitimate powers, or those that operate far beyond their legality and legitimacy and encroach upon other spaces, such as organized crime and drug, weapons- and people-trafficking networks. Other hidden powers have vast influence over the balances of power, such as media organizations, often with links to transnational corporations and ideologically driven institutions. Hidden powers also represent a complex universe with economic, social and military ramifications that govern the processes for building a sustainable and responsible governance architecture. When democratic regulation bodies are fragile, the influence held by these hidden powers grows. The task of identifying, neutralizing, regulating and abolishing these hidden powers must also be explicitly included in the priorities for building a responsible world governance rooted in solidarity. Otherwise, the construction process will be constantly undermined by these hidden powers' anti-democratic, corrupt and criminal practices.

The process for building a new governance must go hand in hand with a process leading to a demilitarized society. Militarism is specific to the patriarchal system and should not govern relations between states and their populations. Nonetheless, in a context of escalating current crises and during periods of cultural change, wars and oppression are causing irreparable damage to life and the planet. It is therefore important, within the process of transition towards demilitarized societies, to implement mechanisms for reforming the armed and security forces of the people who are the first victims of conflicts.

Key conditions for a new governance

Building new governance is not only an institutional or theoretical question confined to the political or sociological spheres. All governance proposals and plans depend on the action and mobilization of a huge majority of people, actors, movements and populations. This is a critical issue. And ideas and proposals play a crucial role in such action and mobilization. This is why we need to remodel governance architecture by incorporating it into the perspective of biocivilization for the sustainability of life and the planet. Architecture for a citizen, solidarity-based and fair governance must be rooted in solid ethical and philosophical foundations. It must also both support and enable a new economy centred on social and environmental justice. What is needed is to work together to devise responses to today's challenges, rooted in the contexts relevant to each person and each population. This involves recognizing the different forms of knowledge that exist in all continents, among all peoples, without trying to impose one of them as the unquestionable reference. The key conditions for a new governance must be formulated within a critical and democratic approach. In addition to the other proposals for furthering the process of historical transition that are underway, it is therefore important to:

- give concrete form to deep-reaching changes in education, aiming for an education that teaches a new democracy and new relationship of society with nature;

- promote education on rights and responsibilities;

- promote a culture and economy of care in order to rethink policies, combat patriarchal domination and encourage gender equality, a fair division and distribution of socially useful work and a new economy centred on common goods;

- take responsibility for regulating sciences and technologies and enable them to be democratized and subject to popular and citizen oversight as a common good;

- refocus on, promote and raise the visibility of initiatives that are proposing alternatives and are already underway in local territories, both urban and rural, with the aim of creating the conditions for them to increase in number and scope;

- foster the democratization of information and communication as a basic condition for radicalizing democracy;

- reinforce the capacity for participation by combining information, consultation and decision-making power so that participation spaces can become mechanisms for changing the state and representations. Movements seeking to transform political systems, such as the Spanish "Los indignados" movement, the social movements in Tunisia and Egypt or the Chilean students movement, have a critical and mobilizing component that includes and goes beyond traditional actors, such as unions, parties and so on: the central actor is the individual, who seeks to take action as a

mobilized and critical person linking up with thousands of other people;

- create a link between personal transformation and collective transformation. Democratization is only possible if it takes root in each individual's way of thinking, feeling and acting. In the same way, changes to processes and institutions can consolidate personal changes. There is thus also a dialectical link between personal and collective transformation.