

## CHAPTER 1

# First perspective: interaction of the local and the global

The first perspective we consider in International Studies is the ability of the local to become global, and vice versa, and the interaction of the two. This may sound self-evident, but is very complex from an academic perspective because it demands continuously zooming in and out. The following notions will help navigate these multiple dimensions.

## 3-D chessboard

In International Relations, it is now recognized that domestic and global policies are interconnected (also known as ‘intermestics’), and that studying them separately or, worse, focusing on one while neglecting the other, does not contribute to a full understanding of the situation under study. International Studies as conceived in this textbook, translates this notion of intermestics into three spatial dimensions not unlike a 3-D chessboard. These dimensions are **the local, the national and the global**. The local can range from the level of the individual to that of an organisation or a town, the national refers to states and the global to everything that surpasses the state (like international organizations and corporations). In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the national and global dimensions also started merging into a hybrid form called region, and ‘regionalism’ has become the name for states who endeavor to create spheres of shared economy, politics or culture.

In between and intersecting with these three dimensions are numerous other actors at play, like international corporations, transnational communities, criminal organizations and religious institutions. Yet in the middle of all of them is the **human individual**, because it is only human individuals who can set any of these dimensions into motion.

**Intermestics** is a term used in International Relations to denote the interconnectedness between domestic and international policies.

The interaction of these **three dimensions** is the field of study of International Studies. For instance, local events may spark national uprisings that, in turn, can resonate on a global level. The Tunisian salesman who set himself on fire in 2011 in response to police abuse, triggered a national uprising that set in motion a series

of revolts across the Arab world. Or the highly infectious Covid virus that erupted in China and quickly spread across borders, growing into a worldwide pandemic. Likewise, national events can have global as well as local repercussions elsewhere in the world. The 2023 actions of the Israeli army in Gaza not only caused friction among states globally but also within states across the world. Global events can also have both national and local effects, such as climate change, or a political-military divide like the Cold War, or an international human rights treaty.

With the emergence of communication technology, these three dimensions have acquired a virtual parallel: contacts made among people on any of the three levels can now also be made without these people physically meeting. While this may speed up the communication and information flows, it is also cause for concern. Can people handle that much information? Can people function socially when they do not meet physically? What is the effect of all this on the cohesion of societies, the performance on the work floor, the governance of a corporation or a country? These and other questions have become pertinent after the Covid-19 pandemic (2019-2022) and still need answers.

The **3 dimensions** stand for three spatial dimensions: local, national and global. These dimensions, in their interconnectedness, are the domains in which human action takes place. In addition to the **physical** interaction among people in any of these dimensions, there also is an increasing **virtual** interaction by means of the multiple forms of communication.

Whatever global events or complexities are studied by students of International Studies, they require students to realize that the spatial dimensions play a role, and that the students should be able to move back and forth from one to the other to understand the issue at hand.

## Two processes

On the 3-D chessboard of International Studies, we can discern two processes of interaction: globalization and glocalization.

### Globalization

While the term *global* is an adjective that describes the nature of an event, *globalization* is a noun that refers to a process. Globalization means that the world has become **interconnected**: countries cooperate on a worldwide scale, large corporations do business across the world, international human rights organizations

are campaigning in multiple countries, disasters and wars are immediately visible to everyone on social media, and pandemics move across borders faster than ever before. It must be noted that globalization can have two meanings: it may refer to the political, social, economic or other human processes that have become globalized, but it may also refer to the policies that governments have put in play that, in turn, have set such processes in motion. In this textbook, globalization refers to the processes.

Because of this interconnectedness, local events can have global repercussions, and vice versa. In 2005, for instance, a cartoon in a small local Danish newspaper about the prophet Mohammed led to demonstrations all over the Muslim world and created global tensions between the Western and Muslim world. Similarly, the arrest and subsequent death of an Afro-American man in the United States in May 2020 spurred the Black Lives Matter movement that led to protests all over the Western world.

Being interconnected oftentimes creates **interdependence**: an action by one of the stakeholders of a global network can have repercussions for the entire network. The worldwide economic crisis of 2008 started with the popping of a financial bubble in the American housing market, and this led to a financial crisis on a global scale because the worldwide financial sector had become interdependent. Likewise, the 2019 Covid-19 pandemic started in China but quickly spread due to the globalized and very dynamic transport networks. To stop the pandemic, these networks had to be shut down, which had enormous implications worldwide on a social and on an economic level.

**Globalization** means that states, organizations, and people are interconnected on a worldwide scale.

The terms '**international**' and '**global**' are often used interchangeably. However, there is a slight difference: 'international' usually refers to states or regions; 'global' denotes an interconnectedness on a world scale that can be among a variety of actors.

## Glocalization

So far, we have discussed how local issues can have global consequences. When it happens the other way round, so when global events have local consequences or local expressions, it is called glocalization. For instance, the idea of socialism gained worldwide popularity in the early twentieth century, and became a truly global ideology, but was adapted to local tastes and circumstances: the socialism of the Soviet Union was different from that in China, and the socialist leader Nkrumah of Ghana had different ideas from his colleagues in Asia and South America, just

like the socialists in northern European countries had their own interpretation of socialism. Of a completely different order is rap music, which is another example of glocalization: it has taken the world by storm, but the fact that it is performed in the local language and deals with local issues makes that this global phenomenon has become very localized. The interaction of globalization and glocalization takes place on numerous levels. If we visualize a network spanning the world, we can imagine all kinds of goods, information and ideas circling the world at dazzling speed, being uploaded, so to speak, into the global networks of communication and transported, downloaded everywhere in the world.

**Glocalization** is when global events or phenomena have local consequences or local expressions.

## Three scopes

In addition to the 3-D chessboard with its two processes of globalization and glocalization, this textbook introduces three different scopes through which we can view these dynamics: structures, trends, and challenges.

### Global structures

When people are active on a local or national level, they are often confronted with structures or mechanisms that exist everywhere, and that have become pervasive in human interactions. In this textbook we call these global structures. At some point in time, they were created by humankind and they are characterized by a certain degree of permanence and pervasiveness.

There are two kinds of global structures. Some are almost as old as humankind, like belief systems, the patriarchy, the arts, the economy, war and peace, migration. These structures may take very different forms (belief systems exist as mythologies, religions, ideologies; economies can be based on barter or on money, or they may be aimed at the redistribution of wealth or at the protection of private property), but their essence remains the same. In many instances, that essence has evolved into a variety of traditions. The other kind of global structures is what people have developed at various points in history and which have since become engrained and permanent across the world. Examples include the nation-state, international organizations, international law and diplomacy.

The process of globalization may enhance but also disrupt established global structures. An example of such disruption is the ancient global structure of diplomacy, whereby rulers and governments communicate with each other through ambassadors. In modern times, until half a century ago, everything international was

handled by national Ministries of Foreign Affairs and their international networks of embassies. Museums or companies that wanted to establish relationships with colleagues abroad would solicit the help of their embassies. But because of globalization, that is often no longer the case. Large companies don't bother with diplomats but establish their own international contacts. And directors of museums or mayors of large cities may not ask permission or advice from their Ministry of Foreign affairs but establish their own relations with cities and museums abroad.

A **global structure** is a mechanism or organization that is globally embedded in human interactions and is the result of cooperation or tradition. A global structure is always human made. See Part 2 for further discussion.

## Global trends

What is referred to in this textbook as a global trend is when a manner of thinking or behaving gains worldwide recognition or emulation. An example is nationalism: it emerged in the nineteenth century and quickly enveloped the entire world. Nationalism 'caught on' globally and had enormous repercussions locally. Other examples of such trends are modernization and secularization in the first half of the twentieth century, religionization since the 1970s, securitization since the 2000s. The reason and timing of global trends is often unclear. We can merely observe that such trends happen and greatly influence people's thinking and actions worldwide.

The difference between a global trend and a global structure is that a global trend is not yet fully embedded in human interactions. Some global trends may gradually evolve into global structures (like the nation-state), but some trends may also lose their traction and dissolve (for instance, it is argued that the global trend of international cooperation that started in late 1940s is on the decline). Some global trends transformed in unexpected ways. It was believed, for instance, that the modernity of the twentieth century, with its emphasis on rationalism and science, would push religion to the background or even make it obsolete. It did not: religion became a factor of social and political significance from the 1970s onwards. Similarly, it was believed that national and international solidarity would make nationalism disappear. It did not: in the second half of the twentieth century, nationalism started to re-emerge with a force that took everyone by surprise.

In International Studies it is important to recognize global trends because they may explain much of what is happening in a certain period. Nationalism, for example, was an incentive in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to think about a society as a single people that shared the same language, history and religion. This led to many cases of ethnic and religious cleansing and contributed to the high number of states in the twentieth century. The study of today's global trends is a challenge however, because it is hard to recognize them: people usually

consider the times they live in as ‘normal’ and not as part of an upcoming or passing trend, and even when people do realize something is happening that helps define their time (as was the case with populism in the 1990s, or with the decline of multilateralism in the 2020s) it’s often difficult to identify exactly what it is and how it affects the world.

A **global trend** is a manner of thinking or behaving that gains worldwide recognition or is emulated globally. Global trends happen at moments and in ways that are usually unforeseen. See Part 3 for further discussion.

### Global challenge

A global challenge is a problematic issue on a global scale that affects people worldwide, and that needs to be addressed by the concerted efforts of various actors on an international scale. Examples include climate change, migration, ‘policing’ of international peace and justice, and sustainable development. These global complexities cannot be solved on a national level: international cooperation is needed to address them.

An interesting aspect about global challenges is that they usually only gain that status once they are recognized as such. There is, in other words, a difference between the *existence* of a global challenge and the *recognition* of one. For instance, scientists and policymakers have been warning against climate change since the 1970s, but it only became a global challenge when it was put on the international agenda in the early 2000s. Another example is terrorism: nationalist and left-wing terrorism existed around the world in the 1970s, and Muslim militants were a menace in the Arab world during the 1990s, but it was only considered a global threat after the 9/11 attacks in 2001 against Americans on American soil and after subsequent attacks in Europe. Conversely, policymakers may also decide *not* to allow a problematic global issue to turn into a global challenge. This has been the case with the Covid-19 pandemic, when the presidents of the United States, Brazil and Belarus tried to downplay the gravity of the corona pandemic, refusing to consider it an issue of national emergency, let alone something that needed an international approach.

A **global challenge** is a problematic issue on a global scale that affects people worldwide, and that needs to be addressed by the concerted efforts of various actors. A global issue becomes a global challenge once it is recognized as such. See Part 4 for further discussion

## Some examples of interacting and overlapping global structures, trends, challenges

*Migration:* People have been migrating for as long as they have been inhabiting the earth. As such migration is a global structure. But many of today's migrations – especially of refugees and illegal migrant workers – are also designated as global challenges, and to address them, global structures like international treaties on refugees and the International Organization for Migration are called upon.

*Democracy:* while democracy has a long history and manifests itself in many ways, it became a truly global trend in the 1990s: democratic reforms took place in many Asian, African and South American countries, and people took to the streets in countries like China, Mongolia and most eastern European countries calling for government reforms that would lead to democracy. Demonstrations like these would recur in the decades after that, ranging from the Color Revolutions in Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan to the Arab Spring in 2011 and the uprisings of 2019 in Hong Kong, the Middle East and South America. These events showed the globalization of democracy in the many different ways that countries view and structure their democracy. And whereas most Western countries saw this global trend as the start of a better and more liberal era that should ideally turn into a global structure, states like Russia and China considered these developments a global challenge.

*Pandemics:* Pandemics are a recurring phenomenon in the history of mankind (think of the plague or the Spanish flu). Recent pandemics, like the Mexican flu (2009) and Ebola (2014) were treated as local problems. Covid-19 in 2019 was at first also considered a local issue (China), but once it started to spread it became clear that concerted efforts were needed worldwide to fight this disease: Covid-19 became a global challenge. Some global structures were severely affected by it, like the global economy, while other global structures, like the World Health Organization, geared up to confront it. The globalization of the pandemic showed in the different manners in which it was handled in each country.

*Climate change:* In 1972, the Club of Rome, a think tank of intellectuals and business leaders, published *The Limits to Growth*, a study on the problems the planet was facing due to excessive production and consumption. This was one of the first warning signs for the global challenge of climate change. But it took until the 2000s for climate change not to be an issue of discussion but a generally accepted scientific fact, and as such also an accepted global challenge. Global structures like the United Nations are at the forefront of addressing this challenge.

## Further reading

Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *Globalization*, Durham & London, 2001

Scott Lash and Roland Robertson (eds.), *Global Modernities*, Sage 1995

George Ritzer (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization*, Blackwell Publishing, 2007

Saskia Sassen, 'Globalization or Denationalization?' *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol.10, No.1, 2003, pp. 1-22

Joseph E. Stiglitz, 'The overselling of globalization', *Business Economics*, Vol.52, No.3, 2017, pp. 129-137



## CHAPTER 2

# Second perspective: people

International issues are commonly studied by an academic discipline called International Relations. Their focus is on international politics and economics, and therefore predominantly on the ways states interact. However, in International Studies the dominant focus is on the role of people. This domain of academic study is reserved for Social Sciences and Humanities. But whereas these disciplines usually focus on individuals and communities in their local environment, International Studies explores the role of these people in a global context. This textbook provides the following concepts that will help the student of International Studies understand the interaction between the individual and the global world.

## Agency

In International Studies, the dominant focus is on the role of people – as persons, from the individual worker or parent to religious or national leaders – but also on their ideas and cultures, on their organized forms as communities and, in a final stage, on the roles they play in states and international organizations. These are the mentioned three dimensions of the local, the national and the global. A key notion when studying the role of the individual in these three dimensions is **agency**, which refers to the power and potential of individuals to shape their own lives. This does not mean that people are the determining factor in what is happening in their lives. Much happens that is outside of their control. The question is then how they will respond which effectively is also a form of agency.

The notion of agency challenges the traditional approach of studying states and (usually male) leaders by contending that *all* people play a role. Studies have subsequently been directed at uncovering the voices and roles of women, people of color, the enslaved, and people of lower socio-economic classes. The notion of agency allows students of International Studies to get a much wider view of the actors who play a role in the global complexities of this world.

**Agency** refers to the power and potential of each individual to shape their own life.

While agency is a useful concept for studying individuals, some academic challenges remain. One such challenge is how to study the needs and desires of individuals when considering that these individuals interact with each other. Are the needs and desires really those of the individuals who express them or are they

influenced by or copied from peer groups (family, friends, communities)? Or are these needs and desires perhaps an intricate part of the political, economic and social dynamics that play on a national and global scale? In the social sciences this dilemma is also known as the '**structure-agency duality**', which explores the balance between free will of the individual and the constraints or other influences of their environment. The assumption is that social structures such as social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, family and culture, but also political structures like laws, bureaucracies, governments and states may limit (or motivate!) individuals to exercise their agency. Studying these processes will help students of International Studies understand the dynamics of global events.

The **structure-agency duality** explores the balance between the agency of the individual and the constraints or influences of their environment.

Another challenge when exploring the concept of agency is how this may affect others. The focus of agency is usually on the individual's needs, desires, drives and capacities. Agency studied in this manner may then explain much about people's individual behavior, but not how that agency interacts with local, national or global issues. When researching the impact that people may have on others and how they may set something in motion that may or may not have a global impact, the Social Sciences often use the notion of the **change agent**. This is a notion that has been applied in a wide variety of contexts, ranging from the mass communicator and educator to human rights activists. Oftentimes the term change agent is used in combination with the concept of leadership, but the two are not necessarily the same. Consider, for example, a group of people who want to protest against something, so they post a time and place for this protest on social media, and several hundred people show up. Some people present made the first move in this scenario and may be considered change agents, but there is no act of leadership.

A **change agent** is someone who advocates or causes change in an organization or society. The notion of change agent is often used in conjunction with – but is not always the same as – the notion of **leadership**.

### 3-I's

Agency considers the actions of people, but another important question is what motivates people in today's global setting: what makes them tick? The answer to this question is of course immensely complex but can, for the sake of simplicity, be