Przemysław Mikiewicz

http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9128-4237
University of Wroclaw
przemyslaw.mikiewicz@uwr.edu.pl

OPEN ACCESS

Localization as an alternative to globalization. Critical reflections of a political scientist

Abstract

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The author's goal in the article is to present a few key ideas of localization as an alternative to globalization and a critical analysis of localization from the point of view of possibilities and barriers to their implementation.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: Criticism to the idea of localization can help reformulate the basic assumptions and could make it more relevant to the existing social reality in the future. The author briefly summarized the ideas and then criticized them asking about the chances of their implementation and the basic barriers to building „a better world".

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: The article begins with the presentation of the main ideas of localization. The author criticizes the asking how the localization could be implemented and at what price. The question remains who and at what price would choose to support the political program aimed at implementing the idea of localization.

RESEARCH RESULTS: The result of the analysis carried out is the general statement that the implementation of the localization would have to face numerous barriers. The costs of implementing the project also seem enormous when one considers the possible social resistance.

CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Can an attempt to build local reality succeed, remains an open question. We

cannot finally verify projects that have not (yet?) been implemented. However, we can point to a number of doubts that must arise when analyzing projects based on the idea of localization. Indication of project defects does not mean its discrediting. Identifying the unexpected consequences of implementing major social change projects can help improve a project that remains open.

Keywords:

  localization, globalization, idea, social order

INTRODUCTION

The idea of localization as a direct response to the overwhelming globalization is one of the basic concepts propagated by the social and intellectual activists and thinkers – critics of modern globalization. In addition to the idea of participatory democracy or projects to establish a global civil society, the idea of economic localization is at the forefront of concepts which guiding theme is the attempt to find a universal remedy for the negative consequences of globalization. Contestation of modern globalization combined with opposition to the ideological order of the modern world that supports it, guaranteed by the neoliberal hegemonic discourse, has emerged as an idea of localization as its direct opposite. Of course, this is not the only or even the most important alternative, but it is a direct response to the trends that globalization brings. In this approach, it can also be treated as the most direct ideological response to the challenges of the era of accelerated globalization (Scholte, 2005, pp.13-84).

Each project of the alternative, according to the founders, of a better organization of social order, contains valuable proposals that are worth a deeper consideration. These proposals for building a „better world" in the context of the subject of this article are consistent with the alterglobalist slogan „another world is possible" (World Social Forum!). That is why they contain valuable material for reflection and thoughts, guiding attention to the basic question: is the designed world really possible and desirable? The question posed in this way is not so much about answering the question is it really possible to organize society in accordance with the adopted assumptions, but rather about chances, but also barriers and potential costs of implementing the projected social order. Considering alternatives should

not be treated as creating utopian scenarios, but rather as seeking better solutions than those that currently exist and are potentially feasible. This is the approach that Immanuel Wallerstein called utopistics (Wallerstein, 1998, passim).

CRUTIAL IDEAS OF LOCALIZATION

Globalization, in turn, is a very ambiguous concept (Scholte, 2005, pp. 49-84) and raises justified disputes as to the nature and content that lies behind it. From the perspective of the purpose of this article, however, disputes over the definition, scope and history of globalization are secondary. It is important to make globalization a reference point for localization. From this perspective, it is only important that critics of globalization see it as a set of processes against which action is taken. For its critics, globalization is not so much a natural process as it is a political concept that aims to make the world unified to maximize the benefits of multinational corporations. Many elements described as the fundamental features of globalization are even considered by critics to be lies (globalization as an old or new phenomenon, bringing progress, development, free choice, broadening the range of democratic decisions, etc.), whose goal is ideological support for corporate profits (Starr, 2000, pp. 3-7).

Localization as a project to build a different social order has been embedded in a broader context that provides it with a starting point, which is provided by corporate globalization. This aspect of corporate power is described and explained in his project by American economist David Korten. His vision of a better world is embedded in a sharp criticism of corporate globalization, which he associates with death, and compares the corporations themselves to cancer developing on healthy social tissue. The opposite of the corporate world is therefore the reality that comes from the experience of life. Watching life in the social sense means, first of all, the policy of self-organization of societies, which in turn stems the postulate of delegating powers to the lowest possible levels of local government. This policy would also apply to the economy, based on a significant number of small enterprises owned by local communities. Korten reserves, claiming possible associations with central planning, that the system designed

in this way does not eliminate free market principles. According to Korten, it is modern corporate capitalism that is in conflict with market principles. (Korten, 2000, pp. 37-64). In later works, he also emphasizes that the change in the economic model of our management must take place through local ways of organizing social life, which is why we should „cultivate relationships within strong, caring communities" (Korten, 2008, p. 161).

According to Korten future human life takes place in small communities, rather rural than urban, based on the principles of neighborly co-existence. The project takes on the character of a kind of idyll, when its creator assumes that along the roads are rows of houses built from locally available materials. Between the houses there are free spaces, which are gardens, where hens and goats are bred. There is a city within walking distance that provides more advanced services, such as high schools, workshops, repair shops, administrative offices, and public services (Korten, 2000, pp. 119-134).

Public transport plays a very important role in this vision: here small towns are connected with larger centers by bus and rail communication systems. This eliminates the need for private cars. In addition, an eco-friendly hydrogen or solar drive protects the environment. This protection is also strengthened by closed material circulation systems, and organic waste is used for biogas production. The economy is in balance with local ecosystems through appropriate tax systems and fees. These fees replace income tax. Human work is a source of fulfillment, and human needs are not artificially created, which means that there are no unnecessary goods. Traveling massively for business is a thing of the past, and the use of water and rail transport allows a better understanding of the environment and the discovery of a new dimension of travelling (Korten, 2000, pp. 130-131).

A similar message can be found in the project developed by a team of American economists under the direction of John Cavanagh and Jerrey Mander. The important content of their message is building sustainable societies. To a large extent, they remain complementary to Korten's previously presented vision. According to the vision of Cavanagh and Mandera, sustainable societies are to be based on a new formula of democracy, promoting responsibility for the community. This general premise boils down to the principle that decisions on

the communities in question would have to be accepted in each case, and that all decision-makers would have to take full responsibility for any damages resulting from their decisions. Such a subsidiarity model should be the basis of a locality-oriented system. The concept promotes a market-oriented economy, local production and local consumption. These assumptions fully correspond to the principles of localization as a response to globalization.

The economy would also be based on the principle of sustainability, and this would mean the adoption of management rules consistent with the principles of intergenerational justice. The sense of this principle boils down to the fact that future generations have the same rights to use natural diversity as current generations. Globalization in its current form is treated as particularly harmful in this dimension of social life, because it is based on the intensification of exports and international trade, which are extremely burdensome for the resources of the natural environment. The determinant of real common wealth – in accordance with such a designed social order – would be both natural resources (natural resources, biodiversity, forests, etc.) and cultural (public health, education, security). These resources could be used by accepting a moral commitment on the part of people and communities to be guardians of nature and its resources. Not only natural but also cultural diversity should be protected everywhere. (Cavanagh, Mander, 2002, pp. 54-77)

Further clarification on the issue of locality is provided by Manifesto on Global Economic Transition, a document prepared by the International Forum on Globalization, an institution within which both of these authors form. This document emphasizes the urgent need for global changes in the way management is done. The premise for this necessity is the convergence of three factors: accelerating climate change affecting all regions of the Earth, the ending of the era of cheap energy, and the progressing depletion of our planet's key resources (water, biodiversity, forests, wild life, fertile soil) (Mander, 2007, p. 1).

According to Manifesto, neoliberal globalization driven by transnational corporations has created a system that leads to climate chaos and resource depletion. The inherent mechanisms of the system, i.e. increasing production, the huge scale of international transport, the constantly increasing consumption of resources, the expansion of

markets, are not sustainable in conditions of the planet's limited resources. Therefore, to ensure continued viability, the global economy must evolve into local economies with a local or regional government (subsidiarity principle) that emphasizes, where possible, local production and local consumption, but even local ownership and use of local materials. Local economies are less dependent on long-distance transport and the supply of raw materials, and have less negative effects on the planet. It is stipulated that this does not mean the end of international trade or travel, but a reversal of priorities towards the localization of economic activity. The functioning of these principles would be based on a stable democratic model (Mander, 2007, pp. 12-13).

Collin Hines details the economic localization design. He defines localization as a process that deters globalization trends by diversifying processes in favor of locality. Depending on the context, the term 'local' means part of a nation state, nation state or regional group of nation states. Localization understood in this way does not mean a return to all-powerful state control, but provides a conceptual framework that allows people, groups of people and business to diversify local economies (Hines, 2007, p. 5).

The most elementary justification for the localization as a design is based on a simple assumption: The shorter the distance between the producer and the consumer, the greater the chance that the latter controls the former. More specifically, Hines's location would consist of several more rules:

- protecting national and regional economies against imports of goods and services that could be produced locally,
- 'produce here and sell here' rules,
- location of cash flows in order to rebuild the Community economy,
- the introduction of resource taxes and other taxes to support fundamental transformations and environmental protection,
- support and concern for democratic involvement in the economic and political system,
- reorganizing trade and international assistance to help build a more local economy than support international competitiveness. (Hines, 2007, p. viii)

But why should economic localization be better to some extent than globalization? Why do alternative thinkers claim that system change is necessary? British ecological and alterglobalist activists Michael Woodin and Caroline Lucas provide an interesting justification for the need for systemic change. They assume that the modern economic system, which does not meet the needs of people and does not contribute to maintaining a satisfactory state of the natural environment, can no longer persist and thus must be unconditionally completely changed. In this context, the idea of economic localization seems to be somewhat natural, becoming the only true alternative to corporate globalization. Therefore, localization is understood as oriented towards maintaining national and local economies and thus becomes a true antithesis of globalization. The introduction of localization principles into the practice of social life would change the logic of management by the fact that the governing principle in this system would not be competition oriented at the lowest price, but cooperation undertaken to achieve the common good. As a consequence of this transformation, goods and services should be produced and delivered locally.

Woodin and Lucas stipulate that the ideas of localization are not intended to create the power of an all-encompassing state, which is associated with the experience of former „socialist" states, but to implement policies that promote diversification that would promote the cohesion of local communities, reduce poverty and inequality, and improve the standard of living , support social resources, security and protect the environment. In addition, they point out that the localization would support poorer countries and their emerging industry and protect it from the devastating effects of goods and their competition from highly developed countries. A separate argument boils down to the fact that localization also has a huge advantage over globalization as the guiding principle of economic organization when it comes to the natural environment, because it does not require transporting goods over huge distances. On a political level, the localization also has the advantage of being democratic because it allows local communities to decide on the direction of their economic development. The local economy could be regulated according to their own needs and goals expressed by the given communities, and regions should be able to create their own money exchange (Woodin, Lucas, 2004, pp. 87-90).

Summing up the localization ideas, it is worth noting that despite the obvious reference to the sphere of economic relations, the core of the idea are the issues of relevant policies. In the statement prepared by Eva Frankowa and Nadia Johanisova among the ideas related to the localization represented by several authors (Shuman, Desai and Riddlestone, Hines, Hopkins, Douthwaite, Horberg-Hodge) the theme of protecting the local quality of life, which is threatened by transnational corporations, is constantly repeated. The emphasis is on protecting economies against imports of goods and services that can be produced locally and therefore do not have to be huge. There is also an argument about the democratic right of communities to decide about their lives. All these issues have their roots in the sphere of political strategies, which ultimately determine the institutional shape and rules of social action. Therefore, the principles and conceptual foundations of social order should be subject to debate and criticism.

QUESTIONS AND CRITICAL REMARKS

The idea of localization arouses interest and justified criticism. Arguments against the idea of localization have already been put forward by Don Robotham, but he focused primarily on the economic dimension of the problem. According to Robotham, supporters of localization should take into account the experience of operating „socialist regimes". Robotham claims that the localization leads to central planning, creating bureaucratic controlled societies. This issue is supplemented by wider critical remarks. The problem of the size of the economy among the supporters of the localization project is gaining in importance. They argue that globalization is growing beyond the human or local scale, assuming that in itself it leads to an undemocratic concentration of corporate power. However, according to Robotham, in reality this assumption ignores the issue of technology and the scale of production. The localization proposal shows a return to the eighteenth-century ideas of the era of the industrial revolution with its vision of perfect competition for companies of a similar scale. Localization supporters argue that such a reduction in the scale of business ventures would be based on the assumption of maintaining the current standard of living, leading to questions

of feasibility and assuming that resources needed for research, environmental protection, health and debt relief of the Third World would be available. However, the question should be asked where the resources needed to implement the above undertakings would come from. A significant misunderstanding is the claim that small businesses produce for local markets (Robotham, 2004, pp. 127-142).

The arguments presented above deserve to be taken seriously, but the issues raised are only part of the broader issues that emerge from reading the work of localization supporters. It is worth paying attention to a few issues that have not been considered further or have been signaled, but have not been developed. Localization does not have to be interpreted solely in terms of opposition to globalization. In a broader sense, globalization can be understood as a manifestation of modernization processes. George Ritzer argues that bureaucratic harmonization and standardization are effects of modernization covering the whole world (Ritzer, 1996, passim). Roland Robertson convinces that globalization and locality do not have to be treated as opposing forces (Robertson, 1992, p.15). In this process, what the local absorbs, shapes, changes what is global and stands in opposition to it and ultimately co-shapes the global form (Almas, Lawrence, 2018, p. 10).

The localization designs therefore include the idea of grassroots self-organization of social life. But its attempt to make it happen may reveal new problems. To achieve locality, people would need to organize themselves within local communities. Local communities, according to the analyzed projects, would obviously have such an advantage over globalized systems that political and economic responsibility for decisions would be closer to the citizens, which would encourage the ruling local elites to be more honest and work towards realizing the will of the community. But why should we assume that the basic motive of action would be to achieve the good (benefits, development, prosperity) of the community, and not to realize their own goal and achieve private (and not public) benefit by individuals using positions in the system. Furthermore, the assumption that grassroots social self-organization will always act for a noble purpose remains doubtful.

Similar questions should be asked regarding the assumption that local communities will be the actual protectors of Earth. It is assumed that decentralized authorities will be careful about the state of the

natural environment. There is no guarantee, however, that communities will undertake far-reaching actions for the natural environment, and only such undertakings could in total prove effective on a global scale. The sum of local actions as a remedy for the global ecological crisis can only seemingly seem a rational enterprise. It is true that the community is usually interested in the quality of the environment and is able to take rational measures to ensure the good condition of the environment. But the degree of care for the environment could in fact turn out to be very diverse, especially since it may depend on many factors: material current interests, ideas, degree of awareness and the importance of ecological problems. In addition, there is a cost problem. There is always the temptation to transfer the costs of environmental protection to other communities. Will there not be a resentment for a stronger superior authority?

Important questions should be asked about the systemic lack of way to the imaginary goal or the underestimation of barriers that would inevitably have to arise if attempts were made to realize the vision of the localization. In many visions, there is no reflection on the path to achieving the goal being put together. Some even programmatically do not deal with this issue (design by David Korten). The problem, however, lies in the fact that when attempting to realize a better social order, it is not enough to have a good vision of a better world. You need to have an idea for its implementation, that is, indicate a specific way to implement the project. It is obvious that every social change causes counteraction. For many reasons many social groups resist change. Essential in this context is the question: what social groups would be interested in change and at what price and what groups would be against change. If we admit that the moderne system is based on comprehensive globalization, then transforming it into a system based on the idea of localization would have to be the deepest revolution in the history of the world, taking place additionally on a global scale. What to do with opposition: Persuade, buy support (for what means?) And what to do with opponents? Would resistance be broken by force, if persuasion failed, denied the idea of community rule? Would it be the new totalitarianism of local rural autocrats? How would this work in practice?

Particularly noteworthy are the ideas of returning to or learning from nature as a program to build a new, greener society within

localization-based ideas. David Korten eagerly refers to the wisdom of observing nature, opposing its corporate capitalism and treating it as a perversion. According to such assumptions, he treats return to locality as a return to nature. Capitalism based on constant rivalry in the current reality contrasts the vision of a world in which nature is cooperative. Korten stating directly that nature values cooperation. However, the problem is that both competitive and cooperative interactions occur in nature. Claims that nature is cooperative or competitive are only partially true. Real ecological relationships are in fact much more complex and cannot be described with one concise formula. By using a selective approach to nature, you can justify your unauthorized analogies with people's social life. Cooperative behavior of social insects (ants, bees, termites) cannot be an argument in favor of analogous mechanisms of life in human communities, because social insects adopted a completely different evolutionary strategy . The approach that boils down to using examples confirming the preconceived thesis is not useful.

From the point of view of political science, one of the most important problems that can be created by attempts to implement the localization idea lies in the specific apoliticality of projects. They are characterized by abstracting from the political conditions of the modern world and from the political consequences of attempts to change and implement them. The issue of social conflict with its inherent political dimension was omitted in the above-mentioned localization ideas. The concepts of localization do not assume new ways of regulating the conflict, which would inevitably have to arise when the assumed project was implemented, as well as in the hypothetical phase of its functioning. One can get the impression that the creators of the localization concept assume the emergence of a conflict-free society or assume that a localization-based system would find itself to find a way to regulate conflict processes inevitably. One cannot accept the thesis that the realization of the localization project and the realization of human potential would put an end to conflicts over power, distribution of goods, ideological, religious and ideological issues. To adopt such a position would mean underestimating politics, and the very complex issue of political power, which could have extremely adverse consequences.

The institutional shape of the world based on the localization project remains poorly defined. It seems to be the most concrete in David

Korten's concept, where the mainstay of the system are local communities in which the decision-making mechanism is focused. Therefore, it can be assumed that this is a self-government-type mechanism. However, the problem arises when considering potential conflict situations, because it is in such circumstances that systemic defects are revealed. How would the political conflict over power be allocated. What about the distribution of common goods within and between local communities? Should the state intervene or any conciliation bodies? Would the abolition of „pathological capitalism" and the creation of a system of power based on territorial communities in itself prevent the destructive consequences of conflicts and the possible destruction of the system itself? What should be done if the system were not resistant to social and political conflicts and unstable in situations of intensified conflicts of interest? Could this not create informal systems and out-of-system solutions and create the danger of non-legal solutions, including the use of force? How would the political conflict about power, resources allocation, the distribution of common goods within and between local communities be regulated? Should the state intervene or any conciliation bodies? Would the abolition of „pathological capitalism" and the creation of a system of power based on territorial communities in itself prevent the destructive consequences of conflicts and the possible destruction of the system itself? What should be done if the system were not resistant to social and political conflicts and unstable in situations of intensified conflicts of interest? Could this not create informal systems and out-of-system solutions and create the danger of non-legal solutions, including the use of force?
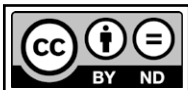
CONCLUSIONS

There is more unknown here, because social life remains unpredictable, even if it seems to us that we have sufficient experience or knowledge in a given field to determine the rules for the future functioning of systems. Potentially faulty systems, as noted above, can generate unpredictable and uncontrollable conflicts. Political practice indicates that even well designed institutional solutions do not always prevent undesirable social processes, and belief in good institutions can be a manifestation of wishful thinking.

Bibliography

Archibugi, D. (2008). *The Global Commonwealth of People. Toward Cosmo-politan Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Almas, R., Lawrence, G. (2018). Introduction: The Global \ Local Proble-matic. In R. Almas, G. Lawrence (eds.), *Globalization, Localization and Sustainable Livelihoods*. New York: Routledge.

Cavanagh, J., Mander, J.(2002). *Alternatives to economic globalization*. San Francisco CA: Berrett-Koehler.

Frankova, E., Johanisova, N. (2012). Economic Localization Revisited. *Environmental policy and Governance*, 22 (5). https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/eet.1593

Hines, C. (2007). *Localization. A Global Manifesto.* London – New York: EARTHSCAN.

Korten, D.C. (2000). *The Post-Corporate World. Life After Capitalism*. San Francisco CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Korten, D.C. (2008). *Agenda for a New Economy.* San Francisco CA: Ber-rett-Koehler Publishers.

Mander, J. et. All. (2007). *Manifesto on Global Economic Transitions*. http://ifg.org/v2/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/manifesto.pdf

Ritzer, G. (1996). *The McDonaldization of Society: An Investigation Into the Changing Character of Contemporary Social Life*. Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press.

Robertson, R. (1992). *Globalization. Social Theory and Global Culture*. Lon-don: SAGE Publications.

Robotham, D. (2004). *Culture, Society and Economy. Bringing Production Back in*. London Sage Publications.

Scholte, J.A. (2005). *Globalization. A Critical Introduction*. New York: PAL-GRAVE MACMILLAN.

Starr, A. (2000). *Global revolt. A guide to the movements against globalization*. London, New York: Zed Books.

Wallerstein, I. (1998). *Utopistics. Or historical choices of the twenty-first century*. New York: The New Press.

Woodin, M., Lucas, C.(2004). *Green Alternatives to globalisation. A Mani-festo*. London: Sterling.

World Social Forum. https://fsm2016.org/en/