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## Globalization and Geographical knowledge Some questions and issues

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### INTRODUCTION

Globalization of knowledge has given rise to important questions and exchanges since it became a reality at the end of the 20th century. It has shaken and reshaped the ways we produce scientific knowledge, discussed it and published it. As the literature shows, debates in geography were intense early in the 21st century, but became more sporadic in the following decade. More recently, we witness a renewed interest in the subject. *It is not surprising.*

Twenty years later, we know better the effects of globalization: we can appreciate its benefits, but also recognize the problems it creates in terms of understanding the worlds we study, and of explaining them in texts and in communications. Ways to live up to the challenge are being discussed in the geography subfields. Point in case, I am a specialist of the geography of commerce and, as we all know, globalization was at its beginning a matter of expanding commerce. As geographers, we had to take into account this global scale and its effects on space, places and territories. We quickly realized that we had to consider two intertwined articulations:

- 1- *The articulation of the different scales, from local to global,*
- 2- *The articulation of those scales with a variety of cultures and societies.*

To that effect, the concept of “**glocalization**” was put forward to think about the interactions between the local and the global. The intend was to give an active role to the lower scales in the makeup of the global one. Surprisingly, this concept has not been fully applied to reflect on the globalization of geographic knowledge. In the last 15 years, as I become interested in the subject, be it in conferences, forums, as well as in writing, I have realized we should think otherwise, and try to understand the globalization of geographic knowledge through the lenses of *glocalization*.

As a starting point, a simple question can be asked: *How can someone be a local or national geographer, speaking one or more languages, while pretending to be a global one in adopting and adapting to the international language of science?* While everyone can answer the question from her or his standing point, the materials on the subject I have examined, fall, in a way or

another, in one or two of the following themes: 1- the production of geographic knowledge in relation to their society and culture, 2- the diffusion of geographic knowledge in dominant English-only journals, 3- the conformist and normative effects of the models adopted at the global scale by those journals, 4- the role of “national” and international institutions in defining the globalization of knowledge.

**In today’s communication, I would like to focus on the interplay of language and scientific production, through three points that cut across those thematic. My comment is based on my experience, observations and actions, at all scales, in the French academic context. The first point deals with “the production of geographic knowledge,” the second deals with the question of “its diffusion,” while the third relates to “the role of institutions.”**

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### **First point: the depreciation of the local/national**

#### 1. *From Plurilingualism to Monolingualism in geographic expressions*

In a paper published in 2001, G. Harris shows that between 1871 and 1938, four languages, French, English, German and Italian, were in use in IGU congresses; Portuguese and Spanish were also officially present from 1938 to 1956. From there, there is a steady march from plurilingualism to monolingualism in international circles. It goes without saying that the more global we become, the more we need a common language to communicate, debate and exchange, all moments that are at the heart of the scientific activity. English has become a passport to the international... in fact, the two have become synonymous.

Communicating in English might be a personal challenge - *as it is for me right now*, **but is not *per se* a problem**. The most important issue is rather the normative models adopted at the global scale by the dominant English-only journals (and congresses). So: *The question is not what is lost in translation, but what is misrepresented in trying to say something else of what is intended.*

French professional translators hired by scientific institutions consider that 80 % of their difficulty is not translating, but what is called: *transposing*. This standardization and normalization go hand in hand with the weakening of the diversity of forms of expressions. It ultimately limits the restitution of geography to the local, regional and national societies, in which, and for which, the research is often conducted. One of my colleagues, from Madagascar, recently wrote that, as “local” scholars, they often end up being the “in between” persons: trying

to explain the big international plan to the locals, who do not understand the language, for one part, and explaining what the locals seem to understand to the global experts, on the other.

Another issue relating to this normative system is the *casestudyification* of the "local/national," as every world we study becomes an exemplification of the normative conceptions, theories or, even, visions of the world. This is not without consequences. Indeed, in France, some of the new French generation of geographers, the one who learns early to navigate inside the English-speaking networks, totally ignore the heritage of French geographers when writing for the so-called global journals. **I imagine that it is possible, but it is kind of shocking when one writes on Regional Geography's epistemology! Isn't it!?!?**

Don't we face here a paradox? While the globalized world promise to help us better appreciate diversity, and even to benefit from it, it tends to empty it from its true nature. It raises two interconnected questions. Does this normative way of encoding knowledge the only way of being international? Does this normative way of encoding is the only way to universal? I do not know the answer, but I would say that *glocalization* certainly helps us reconsider the articulation of scales, and the recognition of the role of the local/national in this process. That is certainly the path followed by the *decolonial approach* to the production of knowledge. It explores ways to value the expression of the local or the national, including the diverse forms of expressing knowledge.

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**My second point deals with the diverse forms of diffusion of knowledge. I entitled it:**

## *2. From renewed forms to new forms of diffusion*

This normative process on expressing geographical thought hits local and national journals of all themes and orientations. Following American journals, English-speaking countries soon followed suit in adopting the same system of evaluation, thus contributing to a worldwide competition between Anglo American journals. In the non-English-speaking world, the national systems had to adjust to the open access to the world stage. With the aim of reaching the world stage, many European (national) journals started to be published in English. For some observers, this sets the stage of a Western hegemony in geography, not just an Anglo American's. *The question is: what's left to other journals written in another language than English?*

First, the statistics are not good: [On quote]: *Of 27,000 journals included in the Web of Science (WoS) indexes, only 9,000 are published in a language other than English, but most of these journals are excluded from prestigious journal indexes* ([end of quote] Curry and Lillis, 2013). This leads to a difficult choice: either you publish in English or face the end of publication, a pressure to editors that often came from national academic institutions. But there has been a second wave of more positive reactions in search of new local/national/global combinations.

First, national platforms were created in regrouping journals online. For example, in France, most of the French geography journals are on the "Open-Edition" platform which manages 559 journals. This is a platform implemented by French public research, which is now moving to a European scale with OPERAS: <https://www.openedition.org/6438> Needless to say, those platforms tend to be multilingual. In the same way, specific journals opened their pages to bilingual or multilingual publications.

Second, despite financial and institutional difficulties, many journals are asserting their dynamism with a plurality of models. One was to reaffirm the value of their heritage and their "ancestral" model, by being attached to a "regional" or "thematic" anchoring; another was to find partnerships with associations specialized in their themes, and became *de facto* pluridisciplinary.

A third one was to diversify the ways of writing and expressing geographical researches, using all forms of technics, from films and photos to the inclusion of local languages. These exhibitions, films and public performances are anchored in their territory of "action" or "activism" and claim their "science-society" link. Many of these dissemination media are not new, but it is their growth and their development, as a means of scientific communication, that are renewing their use.

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**For the third and last point, I wish to highlight the contradictions of public policies and national academic institutions.**

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### *3. Global/local and public policy*

In many countries, researchers are asked nowadays to participate in the dynamics of their society in two main ways: i) by promoting the country's scientific value through their international influence and, ii) by contributing to the improvement of their society through their

work in a generally interdisciplinary "science-society" approach. *These expectations are being concomitant, but how do we as a scientist manage the tension that accompanies it, since one is pushing you outside the realm of your society, while the other aligns with it?*

Considering the time needed to produce knowledge, then to disseminate it in one form or another, these paradoxical injunctions lead to the construction of teams in which a 'division of tasks' can occur and gradually lead to the construction of 'complementary,' but dissociated researcher profiles, some of whom are more integrated into international networks, others on the scale of the studied space and place. This dissociation could eventually lead to a lack of connectivity between the two levels, especially as promotion on an international scale is more profitable for the recruitment and academic career progression.

To limit these consequences of a contradictory and reductive public policy, several actions can be adopted: one can be binational meetings; another proposal is the exchange of articles that have already been accepted and either published or can be published simultaneously in two national journals and in two different languages. Favoring internationalism while ensuring the diversity of its expressions must be based on meetings that are less complex to organize than the very large international congresses, such as binational meetings. Through the logistical and linguistic flexibility that they offer, they make it possible to promote the construction of scientific networks as well as to preserve or even encourage research on territories that may be gradually marginalized in research or simply become case studies. These experiences exist and build on established links but need to be revived to encourage further research.

## **CONCLUSION**

This communication can be seen as a contribution to the on-going, and even increasing, debate on what is it to be international in scientific circles. My point is that the global, as important as it is for scientific debates, needs to be thought in re-balancing its connection to other scales; that is in taking into account the many scales of the worlds we, geographers, study, and live in. I suggest that the concept of *glocalization* is a useful device for achieving this goal. Dealing with issues relating to the relation between language and scientific production, I tried to show its value in going counter a conformist and hegemonic way of defining the international. Diversity for the sake of diversity is not the goal, diversity as a way to enrich the scientific debate is!