The 'glonacal' paper after 20 years

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Multi-scalar higher education

In the 1990s, amid the rapid expansion of cross-border economic activity, travel and communications, quickened by the emerging Internet, it was apparent that we were all becoming more closely connected, not just 'internationally' in the sense of relations between separated nations, but also on a world-wide or 'global' basis. The sense of a single world was powerfully advanced by the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War and Japanese and Western engagement in China, and by global brands and cultural icons, mostly from the United States. The buzz word for worldwide convergence and integration of course was 'globalisation'. By the end of 1990s, amid the growing mobility of students, researchers, policies and ideas, the impact in higher education and knowledge, variously theorised as 'internationalisation' and 'globalisation' was being much discussed. Scholars in RIHE and elsewhere not only chronicled but also contributed to these changes.

In 2002 the journal *Higher Education* published a paper by Gary Rhoades and myself, titled 'Beyond national states, markets, and systems of higher education: a global agency heuristic'. Our ambition was, no less, to 'shape comparative higher education research with regard to globalisation' (Marginson and Rhoades 2002, p. 282). It was apparent that the research field lacked 'a framework for conceptualising agencies and processes that extend beyond the nation-state' (p. 285). The standard model of higher education was in two dimensions - local higher education institutions embedded in national systems, which in some countries were seen also as national markets, and with international activity taking place at the edges of national systems. But we were both working in internationally active systems and universities, and when we looked at higher education, we saw not two but three dimensions, 'three intersecting planes of existence', operating simultaneously: global, national and local. In what we called the 'global agency heuristic' we reworked the standard model on this basis, in words and diagrams (p. 282). The word 'agency' that became very important, which was inserted before 'heuristic' by Gary Rhoades, emphasised that we were not talking about static spaces but about purposeful activity in those spaces - activity which on one hand is structured by history and material resources, 'layers and conditions' as we called it, and on the other hand by the vision, imaginings, ideas and discourses of agents.

We argued that in higher education, pan-national organisations, governments, institutions and individuals were all active in all three dimensions or 'planes of existence'. In the composite term '*glonacal*' we combined *glo*bal, *na*tional and lo*cal*. We also argued that

in the real world the global, national and local scales had no fixed order of importance. We saw the ontology as open. It was clear that the global factors were growing in weight. It was also apparent that in certain countries national systems and cultures were being questioned by local movements. Sometimes local agents related to the global space while by-passing the national. However, the global was not necessarily dominant (Marginson and Rhoades 2002, p. 292), nor was it always the starting point. 'We do not see a linear flow from the global to the local; rather we see simultaneity of flows', we stated. Activity could be initiated and determined in all three dimensions, and 'at every level – global, national, and local – elements and influences of other levels are present' (pp. 289-290). Relations between the three dimensions were shaped by unevenness and inequality but also by reciprocity in the material flows and effects (pp. 290-292). The paper provided examples of intersections between local, national and global in higher education, showing how the 'glonacal' heuristic opened new understandings, inquiries and possibilities for action.

In the remainder of this talk I will further review the 2002 paper, not just its argument but the associated observations about the sector; contextualise the paper at its moment of production and consider its longer term influence; and then look at criticisms made by other scholars, the elements they missed and their extensions of the argument. The conclusion reflects on what we might say differently, or in addition, if we wrote the paper today, given what we now know about higher education; and on further developments of the ideas.

A product of the times

Like most social science, this argument was a product of its times and practical in intent. Our starting point was the higher education institution. The glonacal paper was designed to explain the novel and fast changing environment challenging institutions and to help them, and groups and people in them, to act freely. It was also a counter argument or critique of two other perspectives then current. The first was the standard model of higher education, as mentioned: local institution in always dominant national system in which international activity was marginal. We saw that the growing weight of global connections and diffusion, and transnational knowledge, had rendered this obsolete. There was too much going on between, across and beyond the national containers. The second perspective was the high globalism then current in social theory. Waters (1995), Appadurai (1996), Sassen (2002), Beck (e.g. 2000) and many others saw globalisation of the economy, and communications and culture, as fundamentally undermining the nation-state. We did not see this, in general or in higher education. The nation remained the primary definer, regulator and funder of the higher education sector. That had not changed and there was no reason to think it would. Hence glonacal fell between two extreme, and, in retrospect, absurd positions: the idea that nothing is changing, and the idea that everything is changing. We got that right.

What else did we get right, or wrong? How does the glonacal paper look now in the light of the evolution of globalisation, and higher education, since 2002? The paper has been widely used – as of this week there were 359 cites in Web of Science and 1,244 in Google

Scholars. It continues to enter the framing of new doctoral studies. So did we remake comparative higher education research as we hoped? When the global dimension or scale in higher education (Marginson 2022c) is discussed directly the paper is often referenced, and some scholars have used it to springboard their own global formulations (notably Shahjahan and Kezar 2013). Comparative education mostly starts from the national rather than the global, and glonacal complicates this, but some comparativists draw directly on the heuristic (e.g. Kosmutzky 2015). The paper's core ontology, the three simultaneous dimensions of activity, has not been challenged intellectually, though others have deepened and supplemented it. However, like most ideas it is often ignored. The glonacal heuristic has become influential but not hegemonic. The standard nation-bound model of higher education is still largely intact, despite the flourishing of research on global phenomena. Dominant ideas are not always the best explanation, resting as they do on power not truth. However, in the case of glonacal this has meant that demolishing the dominant idea of nation-bound higher education by argument has not been enough, alone, to surpass that idea. Perhaps only global ecological catastrophe will break open the national container.

Methodological nationalism continues to frame thinking in most social science, despite numerous and excellent critiques (e.g. Agnew 1994; Wimmer and Schiller 2002; Harvey 2005; Dale 2005; Matthews and Sidhu 2005; Beck and Sznaider 2006; Chernilo 2007; Valimaa and Nokkala 2014; Komotar 2021; Reed et al 2021; Shahjahan and Bhangal 2022). Methodological nationalism is 'the belief that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world' (Wimmer and Schiller 2002, p. 301). This precludes other ways of seeing and in higher education, it tends to occlude or marginalise phenomena that are located beyond and below the nation. In higher education, methodological nationalism tends to frame politics, policy and much of institutional strategy, defining the relevant and the possible. It is not surprising that most scholars continue to run with it when we consider that governments and universities fund most of their research. One surprising consequence of the continually 'outsider' nature of the glonacal argument is that it is always fresh and transformative. It continues to challenge common sense and received belief.

Globalisation specific to higher education

The glonacal paper emphasised the need to theorise and analyse globalisation in and by higher education itself. It critiqued the common understanding of globalisation as economic and external to the higher education sector, the economic determinist vision of a sector annexed by global capitalism and deployed in the 'knowledge economy'. Universities were non-profit institutions as well as economic actors, with a wide variety of goals and roles:

> The metaphor of academic capitalism reveals a powerful global trend but blinds us to the power of national traditions, agencies, and agents in shaping the work of higher education, as well as to the local agency exercised by students, faculty, non-faculty

professionals, and administrators, pursuing prestige, knowledge, social critique, and social justice (Marginson and Rhoades 2002, p. 287).

Here we saw in the literature a tendency to reify economic globalisation while leaving the old nation-boundedness undisturbed. 'The global … is invoked as a residual explanation for observed commonalities across countries' (Marginson and Rhoades 2002, p. 285). While there was no doubt in our minds that world market forces and neo-liberal economic policy agendas in higher education were highly influential, they were not the only factors at work; nor were the state and market intrinsically separated and in a zero-sum relation, as liberal theory implied. We were influenced by Held and colleagues (1999) who saw globalisation as partly nation-state fostered, and explored differences in the global/national configurations of the various social sectors. Global integration and convergence were not just economic but also technological, political, cultural and also educational in contents. We knew there was a long history of global diffusion of models of higher education, from the Catholic Church, the Bonapartist university in South America and the German research university in the United States to the worldwide transmission of the US university (Marginson and Rhoades 2002, p. 288). Further, global forces were not uniform in effects but articulated and varied by national and local factors. They were also multi-directional. Higher education institutions were shaped by global and regional trade and by pan-national organisations like the World Bank and OECD, yet were also 'global actors' in their own right (p. 282). 'They are globally, nationally and locally implicated.' To understand higher education we need to grasp these 'multiple realities'. This was the purpose of the heuristic (p. 288).

The global agency heuristic enabled researchers to unpack variations in directions of flow, reciprocity, strength and agentic resources, working both within and between the three dimensions (pp. 288-294). Our term 'spheres of agency' referred to 'the parts of the world' reached by an institution, a unit or a national higher education system, its 'webs of activity and influence' (p. 293). These potentials were unequal, but by locating agency in an open glonacal ontology, the paper broadened the possible and emphasised freedom of action, and resistance. It noted 'the prevailing view that national higher education policies are defined by the country's position in the global economy'. Again, we disputed the idea of economic programming, arguing that 'choices are possible' (Marginson and Rhoades 2002, p. 300). Actors in higher education were motivated by revenues and also by other factors. Our examples of agency from below were black universities in South Africa and community colleges in the US. Glonacal extended well beyond the World-Class University segment.

We did not realise this at the time but in its open ontology; in its multiple and dimensional (scalar) spatiality, and in its focus on 'scale-jumping' (Marston et al. 2005) and relations between scales; in the notions of scale as both strategically constructed by agents grounded and practised by real agents, not an abstract external force; the glonacal paper paralleled much of the then current thinking about scale in geography (e.g. Lefebvre 1991; Massey 2004; Massey 2005; Herod 2008; Watkins 2015). Our rejection of a zero-sum relation between the national and the global (and between state and market) looks good in

retrospect. It is interesting that we grasped through raw observation of higher education theoretical precepts developed by other social scientists in the same global setting.

We also anticipated certain directions in higher education research (which is not at all to say that we created those developments). The glonacal paper highlighted the importance of research on the effects in higher education of pan-national organisations, and on trends and drivers in the different forms of international education, especially cross-border entry. International student mobility became the object of an immense research literature in the next twenty years, some of it locked in national containers and some with a larger sense of national/global space. The glonacal paper also highlighted the global stratification of institutions, beyond single nation hierarchies (Marginson and Rhoades 2002, p. 301; see also Marginson 2006). A global hierarchy was soon to be constructed by the ranking systems that began in 2003 and 2004. On the debit side, we over-estimated the potential for the evolution of global academic labour markets. Mobile academic labour is an important factor in many national systems but those systems have largely resisted structural convergence. Training, recruitment, access to foreigners, career progression, structural promotion hierarchies and tenure arrangements are both nationally robust and nationally distinct, though in doctoral education there has been movement in some countries towards North American norms. Fortunately, though, we steered clear of the then e-learning bandwagon. At the time the glonacal paper was written, there were major investments in online only e-universities. These proved to be uniformly unsuccessful in attracting enough students (Marginson 2011). MOOCs were a latter development and flourished because they were primarily supplementary to face-to-face education rather than a cheap substitute for it.

Critiques, limitations and extensions

Amid the utilisations of the glonacal paper and/or its ideas in higher education studies (e.g. Valimaa 2004; Enders 2004; Horta 2009; Oleksiyenko 2019; Komotar 2021), and studies in education with a similarly open ontology and spatial sensibility (e.g. Ishikawa 2009; Resnik 2012; Freidman 2018), there are useful criticisms and developments of the argument.

In his critique of the glonacal paper Jones (2009) questions the use of the institution as the primary unit for 'local'. He notes that 'there are major differences in the degree to which different units within the same institution are internationalising, and the degree to which they are active in the global environment or responding to global pressures' (p. 464). The same comment could be made about local engagement with national policies or agencies. There is variation at the level of disciplines and their organisations, and indeed at the level of individuals. One example is the global research system, where disciplines and sub-disciplines differ markedly in the weight of global connectedness and the type of national embeddedness (Marginson 2022b). At the least, this suggests the need for two different local dimensions or scales: institutional and disciplinary. Another case for multiplication of scales is the pan-national region. The glonacal paper mentions regional factors at several points, for example higher education cooperation within the framework of the North

America Free-Trade Area (NAFTA), but treats the pan-national region as a subset of relations beyond the nation, blending with world-spanning global relations. This was not quite right. In a set of chapters on regionalism in higher education Robertson et al. (2016) demonstrate that regional relations take many forms, and that in Europe the regional scale is highly potent in higher education and research. As a regional agent the European Union operates in some respects like a sovereign nation-state and in other respects as a federation of states. However, elsewhere in the world, with the partial exception of Southeast Asia, regionalisation in higher education is much less advanced than is the case in Europe.

In an important paper titled 'Beyond the "national container": Addressing methdological nationalism in higher education research', Shahjahan and Kezar (2013) build on the glonacal argument to both strengthen the critique of methodological nationalism and discuss the connections between global, national and local activity at the level of day-to-day campus practice. They find that methodological nationalism conceals unequal power relations in the global higher education space, and masks the potential for responsibility to non nationals, and shared global problems such as poverty and ecological sustainability. It also means the effects of pan-national organisations and corporations in higher education are under-scrutinised. Naidoo (2010) also takes up the theme of geopolitics. She states that

> Theoretical frameworks … which emphasise the simultaneous significance of global, national and local forces on the development of higher education offer a powerful conceptual frame. However, while this provides an understanding of the relationships between systems of higher education and globalisation, it does not explicitly address the role of higher education in development (Naidoo 2010, p. 81).

It is an understated but telling point. As noted, the glonacal paper does mention the open potentials of agency in the global South, and it also discusses the problem of English language bias, noting the strong incentives in non English speaking systems to engage in global publishing in English. However, that is all. On the other side of the coin nearly all of the examples of growing cross-border activity are drawn from the Anglophone world; and in the account of global potentials there is a positive and at times exuberant tone, typical perhaps of Anglophone agents exploring the new potentials of an Americanised world, but without regard for the ambiguous and often negative effects of cross-border flows in post-colonial and non Euro-American settings, or the role of Whiteness in the neo-colonial global hierarchy (Shahjahan and Edwards 2021). As Yang (2014) argues in relation to China:

> To non-Western societies, modern universities are an imported concept. They originated from Europe, spreading worldwide from the mid-19th century to the present time mainly due to colonialism. Even the countries that escaped colonial domination adopted Western models as well. The European-North American university model has never been tolerant toward other alternatives, leading to the inefficacy of universities in non-Western societies, on whom a so-called 'international' perspective has been

imposed from the outset. What is lacking is an appropriate combination of the 'international' and the local. Within the contemporary context of Western dominance, internationalisation of higher education in non-Western societies necessarily touches on longstanding knotty issues and tensions between Westernisation and indigenisation. This is particularly true in China, a country with a continuous history of fostering unique cultural heritages for thousands of years (Yang 2014, p. 153).

This is also true of Japan. I should emphasise that the glonacal heuristic is compatible with a critique of neo-imperialism in higher education. The core of the heuristic is innocent in relation to configurations of power and can be attached to many possible accounts. My point is not that glonacal is outdated in the more multi-polar and less Euro-American dominated world that we now inhabit, but that if we wrote the paper now, in the discussion of the ideas and examples we would be more sensitive to global hegemony and injustice.

Concluding thoughts

There are other changes I would make if I wrote the paper now and perhaps Gary would have more. I would correct the false impression of scale invariance (Katz and Ronda-Pupo 2019) created by the metaphor of 'planes of existence' and the diagram in the paper, in which the global, national and local 'planes' look the same as each other. Geo-spatial scales are not the same as each other, and nor do they replicate each other at different levels of size, fitting one inside the other like the Russian *Matryoshka* dolls. My research on global and national science has emphasised for me that the global, national and local dimensions or scales are notably heterogeneous, different, in relation to each other (Wagner et al. 2015). In science the global scale is primary in knowledge while the national scale provides the resources and infrastructure. The global connections between individuals and research groups are essentially bottom up and unregulated. There is no normative centre or boundary in global science, though there are dominant or leading norms and institutions. In national science the normative centre is the nation state, politics and policy are in command and the boundaries are those of the nation-state (Marginson 2021). The rules are different.

This heterogeneity between the global, national, local and in some cases also regional scales is a source of both complementarity and also tensions. Cross-scalar relations in higher education and science work until they don't. In the development of science in China, that country effectively used international collaboration, and the building of national capacity, to augment each other (Marginson 2022a). In contrast, in the decoupling of scientific relations between the US and China, national strategic agendas trump global collaboration (lee and Haupt 2020). Another example of tensions between on one hand global relations in higher education, on the other local sensibilities and national policy, is the reductions of mobile student numbers in Denmark and the Netherlands. If the glonacal paper was prepared in 2022 we would have many more examples of multi-scalar relations to explore analytically. I would also hope to explore in more depth the antinomies of sameness

and difference, the contrasting tendencies to homogenisation and heterogenization, in the global scale. That matter is much discussed in the globalisation literature but we scarcely addressed it. And in addition to our discussion of agency, and global markets, we could have said more about the potentials of cosmopolitan cultural relations in the unregulated global space.

Nevertheless, I am proud of what we achieved in the glonacal paper. The glonacal idea has stood up well. We have not had to continually revise its definitions and meanings, as in the long-running discussion of 'internationalisation' led by Jane Knight and de Wit. The 2002 paper remains relevant. In its open ontology, and the emphases on multiple existence and identity, and multi-scalar relations, and in the focus on the potentials of agency, we were ahead of the time. There is now a larger understanding of these perspectives. Our refusal of the one-way economic determinism beloved by economic departments in government, and our assertion of the globalising role of higher education and knowledge themselves, would not be agreed by all, but in my work since 2002 I have found these insights to be crucial.

Higher education continues to be the meeting point between global, reginal, national and local forces, activities and relations. There is now more scalar tension than there was. The national has been reasserted in important ways, while global convergence continues. Research collaboration is still expanding and I think that post-pandemic student mobility will also see further growth. The glonacal agency heuristic still provides a useful perspective and set of tools for scholars and students who want to understand this complex and ever-changing landscape.

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