

Governing the New Spaces: Between the Local and the Global

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Space is not merely a receptacle for the actions of human beings, but what arises between them by means of their actions. Every society produces its characteristic space. In present-day societies, space has become a fluid, plural and dynamic reality; it has become symbolic, which allows more flexible configurations than when spaces were expected to be exclusive monopolies. These transformations require a new way of thinking about government based on four operations especially applicable to local administrations: representing, bringing closer, mixing and co-operating. These are the main challenges facing a territorial leadership responsible for staying in especially close touch with citizens, making possible the social cross-fertilisation that has taken place in the city and exercising a form of power sharing that is particularly important in the interdependent spaces of today.

Human beings shape not only their history, but also their own geography (Giddens 1990, 88; Werlen 1995), giving space meaning. Space is not a receptacle for our actions, but what arises between us as the result of our actions, so that each society produces its own type of space. I propose to analyse these new social spaces via five sketches which, in my judgement, give a sufficient idea of their current transformations: the virtualisation of the territory (1); the weakness of places (2); the relationship between the local and the global (3); society without a centre (4); and the world without surroundings (5). To say that there are no longer any territories, or places, or centres, or environs sounds a little dramatic, but it is a way of saying that all these concepts need to be defined in a different, more plural and less deterministic way if we want to understand correctly the new relationship between the local and the global.

1. The virtualisation of the territory.

Even though the territoriality principle is solemnly asserted, political space is currently subjected to a great deal of uncertainty (Badie 1995; Innerarity 2003). Financial circuits, commercial exchanges, the broadcasting of waves and images, the migration of people, religious, cultural and language solidarities seem to weigh more heavily than ever on the world's fragile cartography. It is probably an exaggeration to speak of the end of territories, but there is no doubt that the gravity of the national space has given way to a diffuse, ambiguous and versatile space. The world scene just now harbours a set of political, economic and social strategies that contradict the territorial principle. The logics of mobility impose themselves in general on those of territorialisation.

A reduction in the space of the land or the territory fails to take into consideration the extremely varied references to space. The naturalistic conception of territory neglects its status as a social artifice and becomes incapable of conceiving another configuration of the space. That is why, in my view, it is so necessary today to insist on the plurality of the modes of territoriality, even if this forces us to think outside traditional logic, aside from concepts such as competences, borders and territorial integrity. The idea of spatial pluralism or pluridimensional spaces simply acknowledges the fact that our lives are governed by diverse logics, that globalised space is composed of overlappings and interweavings, that today it is possible to constitute diverse spaces in the same place. In the last analysis, it is simply that the political organisation of society includes this experience of a plural, dynamic space that was preceded by the scientific debates about space triggered by non-Euclidian mathematics, the fact that large numbers of people became used to looking at the non-unitarian spaces of

abstract art, the processes of globalisation, modern information technologies and the generalised use of means of transport.

2. Weak places.

Space, in the sense of a material substrate, seems to have become almost irrelevant. Some people deduce from this that time has annihilated space (Harvey 1990, 299), that we live in an atypical society (Willke 2001), in which a "trivialisation of the place" has occurred (Luhmann 1997, 152). At all events, what we experience is a relativisation of distance, of what is near and far, which shakes up fixed and stable localisations. For many operations, distance has become an irrelevant magnitude. As Heidegger noted a long time ago, all the inventions of modern society including the prefix "tele" serve, strictly speaking, to annul distance. The media achieve ubiquity, make an event -real or fictitious- that has taken place somewhere else, simultaneously present in numerous places, whatever the distance. The perception and conception of nearness or distance have been profoundly transformed.

We have gone from a conception of space as something relatively stable to a rather fluid configuration of social relationships: from places to spaces. The social models that have recourse to the metaphor of fluidification abandon the understanding of space as something fixed and static, and insist on concepts such as opening, multiplicity, processuality, difference and co-existence. Among them, Bauman's (2000), expressed in the image of "liquidity", stands out. Bauman reminds us that modernity was an enterprise for colonising space, as something that could be conquered and enclosed, over which it was possible to mount guard and which could be delimited with signs saying such things as "No entry". Wealth and power have traditionally been heavy, voluminous and immobile magnitudes that grew with their expansion in space and had to be protected precisely by defending the space they occupied. But liquid, unlike solid, things, can hardly ensure their own shape. Where it can best be seen that power has become extraterritorial is in the fact that space has lost its classical value as a barrier and protection. With the fluidification of space, the difference between what is near and far, and the difference between civilisation and the wild world, has been eliminated. Space is no longer an obstacle to action, distances do not count and lose their strategic meaning. If all places in space can be easily reached, then none of them is privileged.

All space has become symbolic, which allows for more flexible configurations than in the period when spaces were expected to be exclusive monopolies. A multiple, relational space enables more open commitments to be made than when territory was a fixed, objective and rigid dimension in the lives of human beings and societies. The politics of territory now has the chance to benefit from processes that free political spaces from the old homogenous configurations and makes a new territorial pluralism possible.

3. The relationship between the local and the global.

Nobody denies that over the past several years present-day societies have experienced some extremely significant changes, many of which are the consequence of a redefinition of the tensions between the local and the global. Social and political spaces have undergone a radical evolution, which has to do, among other things, with the fact that the scale of economic activity no longer corresponds only to states. What is being produced is a new definition of territory on the basis of a readjustment between the local and the global. One has not won out over the other, but they are waging a battle to redefine their articulation, the nature of the encounter between the local and the global in the new circumstances.

The frequent inability to recognise the dialectical nature of the relationship between the global plane and the local plane, coupled with the tendency to consider the relations between actors in terms of absolute winners and losers, has given rise to interpretations that provide little explanation and less guidance. In contrast to these unilateral models, concepts such as

"glocalisation" and "frangmentation" have been especially appropriate in that they warn us there is no immediate subordination of the local to the global, but a complex relation of cause and effect between global flows and the resources associated with the local scale. The forces of centralisation and decentralisation operate in an interactive process, articulating a network within which they are both simultaneous. This does not mean nothing has changed as regards the way places are constituted and relate to the rest of the world. Globalisation represents above all a closer relationship between localities and global dynamics.

The thesis of the end of territories is exaggerated. Of course there are flows that cut across territories and question an idealised vision of the local sphere. But this does not rule out the social and political possible construction of territories as social and political actors. As Ash Amjin says, "to think that global flows represent domination and transformation, and that the local represents tradition and continuity is a mistake, because it means denying the interaction between them as well as their evolutionary logic. In this sense, for example, the question of whether or not a city or a nation is threatened by globalisation will probably depend on the elements of interaction between the identities and the internal capabilities and external influences, and not on the ability of the city or nation to avoid the connection with global flows. So, being a place in the world is more a matter of how this connectivity can be negotiated or taken advantage of and not so much how to resist it or shut oneself off from it."

4. A society without a centre.

The trend in the present-day world is towards the disappearance of centres and the formation of networks; construction will not be on the basis of the model of the old concentrations, but will have the appearance of a network. The organisational principle that is at the origin of this reticular configuration is the multiple and variable relationship of a potentially infinite number of decision centres; their spatial transposition is no longer centralisation, but a network that becomes denser. Networks -traffic, communication, information- are an essential element of a civilisation that expands by multiplying the possible relations and reciprocal dependencies between subjects that are spatially and socially remote from each other. The history of the configuration of these networks is a history of gradual multiplication or densification. The networks become denser as the participation of potentially annexable elements that are already connected in a network system increases.

The centre's privileged position has been conserved to a considerable extent, but it is also true that there are very powerful trends at work in the opposite direction, particularly in the old Europe. These forces are the result of the pressure of the modernisation processes whose real condition is the densifying of the networks. The density of the networks linking us without centrality grows exponentially as the possibilities of going from one place to another without the need to make a detour through the centre grows. In the modern communication networks, all the participants are potentially connected to each other. The consequence of this densification is the disappearance of the centrality of the system. People do not speak to each other through centres (or central telephone exchanges). At all events, the central exchange is a geostationary satellite that does not represent any privileged social place. The connections among the network's elements are made without any centrally given consent, are frequently of a transnational nature, ignore borders and shape different interests from those defined centrally.

Of course, in the network society many centres survive, but their function has altered considerably in a scenario in which the new centrality must be conceived and exercised differently, beyond the old centre-periphery determinism, as pluricentrality.

5. A world without surroundings.

All the explanations put forward to clear up what is meant by globalisation are contained in the metaphor that the world has been left without surroundings, without margins, without outskirts, without outlying areas. Global is that which leaves nothing outside itself, that which contains everything, links and integrates so that nothing remains loose, isolated, independent, lost or protected, safe or condemned, outside it.

The production of goods has been less decisive in this process than the defence against certain ills: the risks threatening without distinction and requiring common strategies. For Beck globalisation essentially means the experience of the civilisatory self-threat that abolishes the mere plural juxtaposition of peoples and cultures, and brings them into a unified space, in a cosmopolitan unity of destiny (2002, 37-38). David Held spoke, in a very similar sense, of "overlapping communities of fate" (2000, 400) to indicate that the globalisation of risks gives rise to an involuntary community, an unintended coalition, so that nobody is left out of this common fate.

Most of the problems we have are due to this circumstance or we experience them as such because we find it impossible to avoid them or tame them by setting boundaries behind which to externalise them: destruction of the environment, climate change, food risks, financial storms, emigrations, new terrorism, etc. These are risks that cannot be confronted with a strategy that limits or ignores them, as they get around any externalisation, whether spatial, temporal or social (Beck 2004, 37). When surroundings existed there was a set of operations that made it possible to have those marginal spaces. One could flee, turn one's back, ignore, protect. The exclusiveness of what was one's own, one's own clientele, reasons of State, made some sense. And almost everything could be solved through the simple operation of externalising the problem, transferring it to a "surrounding", out of sight, in a far-off place or another time, towards the future. A surrounding is precisely a place where to peacefully deposit unresolved problems, waste, a rubbish dump.

Challenges and opportunities of local government

This configuration of social space which I have dealt with schematically here on the basis of five metaphors logically requires another way of thinking about local government. I have synthesised this, employing the rather impressionist method I have used so far in four operations I regard as being especially applicable to local administrations: representing, bringing closer, mixing and co-operating. In my view, these four operations pose the main challenges facing a territorial leadership with the responsibility of staying in especially close touch with citizens, making possible the social cross-fertilisation that has occurred in our cities and exercising a form of shared power that is especially important in those interdependent spaces I have just sketched.

a) Representing: territorial leadership. Territory is something that to a large extent is constructed. Politics can "invent" a space, innovate it -as is done with other realities and human productions-, assert it, give it a meaning, put it in circulation. Local leadership consists essentially in making that territory exist, conferring an image on it, over and above sectorial policies, the diversity of levels, social agents and authorities. Pierre Bourdieu (1987) revealed the symmetry presiding over the principle of political representation: the group makes the representative, but in turn the representative makes the group exist, even if only due to the fact that he mentions it, speaks about it, in its name.

A premise for exploring the possibilities of local government consists precisely in not reducing their actions to competencies and power, but starting off by looking at other no less important dimensions of territorial leadership. Thinking about local affairs also requires doing

so outside of the exclusiveness of power. Politics is not only action, but also evocation (Marc Abélès). There is a politics beyond power, in the traditional sense of decision, competence and control, in symbolic actions that represent and mobilise. This is a leadership that lies not so much in decision-making power as in the capacity to symbolise and articulate. In order to discover this range of possibilities, it is necessary to free oneself from the restrictive conception of power defined only as a set of "palpable" political resources and look at the ways on which leadership can produce new representations of the territory.

One of local governments' most important functions is precisely to represent a specific space, to embody it, to exercise symbolic leadership. Such leadership is difficult in a context of extreme economic and cultural deterritorialisation, inventing categories and supplying facts to support them. The territory can be strengthened by a feeling of belonging, as an expression of a social link. Local and territorial powers are not only functional, but also affective, the spokespeople of emotional communities.

In fact the idea of governance, compared to the model of a relatively stable institutional framework, refers to the processes of the recomposition of public action, to procedures for co-ordinating in a fragmented and unstable context. Territories can and should be led: a leadership is not so much an authority as an orientation that confers meaning, sets out a forward-looking project and establishes modalities of co-ordination among the actors co-operating in the project. In short, it enables collective action where before there was no more than a set of unco-ordinated actions.

b) Bringing closer: proximity government. Representative democracy constitutes a complex relationship between governors and governed marked by the tension between two contrary logics: a logic of proximity which forces politicians to keep in touch with and listen to citizens, and a logic of distance that invites them, on the contrary, to keep themselves away from them. The result of all this is a contradictory tension weighing on the job of being a politician: they must, at one and the same time, stage daily contact with the electorate and take on board the language of general interest; politicians are required simultaneously to cultivate closeness and a prudent safety distance.

For some years now this tension seems to have been resolved in favour of the primacy of proximity. Calls to proximity have been multiplied: local justice, local policing, local democracy. Political action has conspired against geographical, social and technocratic distancing (Le Bart / Lefebvre 2005). "Proximity" is a recurrent term, a magic word, that poses the obligation for those who govern to appear near and submits them to the pressure of ubiquity: politics as the art of being there. Opinion polls mobilise the categories of closeness and distance to evaluate those who govern. That is why the intimidating monumentality of which Bataille (1974) spoke is not fashionable. Nearness and transparency are imperatives that govern political styles at all levels, from the forms of communication to the architecture of public buildings.

This is the context in which people speak of "local democracy" (Blodiaux, 1999). The local, a place of proximity, is regarded as the scale on which the coherence and integration of public action are established. The local has been elevated to an ideal space for citizen reconquest, the same space that had been considered at other times as a place of particularism and identitarian rootedness. Proximity appears as a reserve store of unifying, pacifying, involving solutions, a refuge in a world regarded as devoid of references, impersonal, complex, anomic. Relations of proximity correct the verticality of social relations and impersonal social rules, judged as being too general. Proximity seems to "localise" the social, immediacy and direct reciprocity at the heart of specific groups and situations. The concrete

involvement of individuals in a group is conceived as the paradigm of real, effective and direct socialisation.

But the very idea of "proximity politics" gives rise to various questions that must be taken into account so as not to exaggerate its virtues. To begin with, the idea of proximity should not be an excuse for wrenching away from political action coherence in broader spaces and temporal horizons. Similarly, it must be borne in mind that proximity has a lot of artifice, of media-constructed effect, about it. And, on the other hand, proximity is not a physical magnitude or an undisputed dimension, especially in our virtualised and mediatised spaces, without territorial determinism, in a globalised world of increasing mobility. A large part of social struggles are waged around the expectation of proximity and its definition. Proximity has become the central ideology for which multiple actors work on their own legitimisation. But what, properly speaking, is the most proximate? How are nearness and distance defined?

The matter of proximity policies eventually poses for us a major question. Is it simply a circumstantial ideological argument to make sure that nothing changes in the way authority is exercised or does it reveal a new paradigm? Of course, these phenomena can be analysed as the consequence of a disturbing dissolution of the general interest favoured by the retreat of state action and by increased individualism, but it can also be understood as the access of local power and civil society to the general interest. In this latter case, the fragmentation of politics would correspond rather to a broadening of the spaces of deliberation; it would reveal then that society does not accept having an abstract and centralised conception of the common good imposed on it. When the idea of politics as the will and ability to govern seems to be escaping from our horizon, the issue of proximity has, to begin with, the value of starting from the local situation the work of modulating the community and feeding the social link.

c) Mixing: places for strangers to live together. The idea of public space is closely linked to the reality of the city, to the values of citizenship and the horizon of civilisation. I would like to examine now briefly what the urban space, in a broad sense, consists in and the way in which the values of citizenship can be realised in a globalised space.

Sociologists have always defined the city as a place for strangers, the most appropriate sphere for developing a culture of difference. Cities are the best places for this mixture produced by the movement of human beings and which exposes them to combination and novelty. In the polyphony of the city human beings have acquired the experience of diversity we now have.

In what does this strangeness of the inhabitants of the city consist and why does such a marked heterogeneity occur in it? In the first place, it is something that has to do with its spatial layout. The Chicago School established at the beginning of the 20th century three distinctive characteristics of the city that have now become a commonplace: heterogeneity, density and size. In the city, all the elements -inhabitants, buildings and functions- are in close proximity, "condemned", so to speak, to reciprocal tolerance. This obligation, in the course of centuries, has led to the set of rules we admire as the city's historical culture. The size of its population, the density of its buildings and the mix of social groups and functions, the unencompassable juxtaposition of poor and rich, young and old, native and foreign, its intergenerational composition, all this makes the city a place of communication, of division of labour, of experience of difference, of conflict and innovation. Cities are places in which strangers regularly encounter each other, where it is possible for people who do not know each other to live together, so that a community of strangers grows up (Lofland, 1973). Most of the norms of the big city serve to maintain distance: not to have to greet others, not to

interfere in a conversation, not to have to pay too much attention, are things that make spatial closeness bearable. Imagine how annoying and even ridiculous the opposite behaviour would be. The function of these rules consists in controlling unwanted relations, in protecting one's own and other people's privacy. Goffman (1973) called this informal ritual that organises the diffuse interactions of the public space and turns the city, according to Montesquieu's definition, into a place of relative and generalised indifference, "civil inattention".

It is evident that today this form of city no longer exists and that our urban spaces display a very different appearance: without any counterposition between the country and the city, without compactness and with different types of segregations, without centre or density. Thinking today about the conditions for the possibility of urbanity probably requires doing so outside of the traditional idea of the city. Urbanity is more than the most classical, European form of the city; it is a way of life, an attitude, a civic culture, that might perhaps be realised in another scenario and probably could no longer be realised except in another scenario.

When there were no cars, or telecommunications, or information media, the spatial density of the big city was necessary to bring about the major economic, political and cultural innovations we owe to it. Anyone who wanted to take part in this great opportunity "had to be there". But that has become superfluous. When the centre/periphery model is abandoned, when the centre is everywhere, local implantation changes its status; each point is a centre in the network's multiple intersections. Each local point involves the global network; conversely, this is nothing without the multiplicity of singular places. Modern societies hardly need spatial centrality. It is important to understand this in order to conceive the new public space that is opening up for us beyond the old architectural paradigm and inviting us to think about the city in another way. Emancipation from nature and the community, self-government and social integration are goals that no longer require the form of the city: political opinion is created essentially through the media and not in the squares and streets; democratic organisation is no longer the exclusive property of cities, but of an organisational principle of states; with globalisation, the market is no longer an urban place; the difference between private and public is found equally in the countryside; it is possible to live away from the power of nature also outside the city. This loss of political, economic, social and civilisatory specificity is the reason why the physical form of cities has disappeared into the present-day urban agglomerations, but also explains the impossibility of restoring urbanity by means of a planning-based intervention.

Is it still possible to speak of social integration, urbanity or public space in the current circumstances? I think it is, but on condition that the values of urbanity are distinguished from the old representation we have of the European city. Urbanity (citizenry, civilisation) is something more than the form of the European city and more, even, than the urban way of living. The hopes of freedom, self-fulfilment, integration must in turn be freed from the traditional form of the European city. The project of urban life has been delocalised and the city has become a symbolic value; the traditional form of the European city is today simply a metaphor whose content is realised in the democracies that work, in fair trade, in the humanised global spaces, wherever the co-existence of those who are different from each other on the horizon of a really common world is possible.

How then to conceive the "new urbanity" (Häussermann / Siebel, 1987) in the dematerialised city of the future (Mitchell, 1995 and 2001)? We are probably seeing an universalisation of the urban way of living that can at the same time make itself present in very diverse ways. Urbanity as a way of life can be realised anywhere. What is left of the city is urbanity's ubiquitous value. The exercise of the values of urbanity is no longer conditioned by the city as its exclusive place.

d) Co-operating: shared power. We live in an age in which political power -states and governments, but also local administrations- are in trouble, faced with difficulties no less serious than those that accompanied, in the origins of the modern era, its process of constitution. Politics is weak in the face of the powerful competition from financial flows and the media powers; its own space is lost in the unprecedented formats of globalisation and the particular demands posed by the processes of individualisation.

A common feature of diverse social processes is that they increasingly go beyond the political limits, both territorial and functional and sectorial limits. Local actions produce more and more external effects on other communities, local politics gets caught up with external politics, the processes of globalisation shape new regional spaces. All this leads to public tasks no longer being able to be carried out within the traditional institutional limits. In a society in which the interdependences between territories and levels are increasing, the need for co-ordination grows.

It is therefore a question of saving power by making it co-operative, of transforming politics so that it can fulfil the functions we assign to it. In fact the idea of governance has been gradually gaining currency over the past few years to characterise a new way of governing. These are forms of co-operation among different actors, of integration, trust and legitimation, that appear as an opportunity for conquering new spaces for the configuration of politics, where before all that could be seen were obstacles to carrying out a politics oriented towards the general interest. As a way of governing, it questions the traditional idea and instruments of political action, which especially affects public administration, which has the function of identifying and implementing public policies.

There are more and more political spheres (think of environmental, transport, health or housing policies) in which those who act in an authoritarian manner are condemned to perplexity or inefficiency. Most of the political problems we are faced with are of a cross-cutting nature, which enhances the need for co-ordination. Politics could be understood as an "organisation of interdependences" (Mayntz).

The idea of governance provides a new approach for public administration whose features might be summarised as follows: 1) a clear hierarchical scale and an indisputable delimitation of the spheres of power no longer makes sense; 2) governing is a combination of procedures in which, as well as unilateral decisions, there is also trust, co-operation and market; 3) the processes are more important than the structures (Rosenau/Czempiel 1992; Rosenau 2000), so it is the logic of the issues at stake that determines the way in which the different agencies involved are articulated.

In the first place, it is necessary to realise that complex systems cannot be governed from a hierarchical vertex, which would mean a simplification that fails to match the wealth, initiative and expertise of its components. What is called for is not so much a reform of the administration as a review of the tasks of the State. It is not a matter of the State's withdrawing from the decisions it has to take, but of agreeing them in interaction with other social agencies. The form of co-operative government differs as much from the hierarchical model as from the one that recommends delegating to the market precisely because it does not shy away from decision-making, although it insists on taking decisions within a process of co-operation.

As much co-operation as possible, as much hierarchy as necessary could be a maxim for good government and good administration. What has run out of steam is not politics, but a certain form of politics, specifically that which corresponds to the era of a territorially delimited and politically integrated society. The modifications in politics are required by the

deep-going transformations in society, characterised by a polycentric architecture (Polanyi). Politics must make the move from hierarchy to heterarchy, from direct authority to communicative connection, from the central position to a polycentric composition, from heteronomy to autonomy, from unilateral control to polycontextural involvement. It must be in a position to generate the necessary knowledge -ideas, instruments or procedures- to moderate a knowledge society that operates in a reticular and transnational fashion.

Co-operative power appears today as the chance to save the State from its inefficiency and its insignificance, to reclaim politics and, at the same time, to transform it profoundly.

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