

ICONOGRAPHIES OF GLOBALISATION

Gianfranco Battisti

University of Trieste, Department of Humanistic Studies, Trieste, Italy
gbattisti@units.it

Abstract

In this paper we assume that there are two ways towards globalisation: one through a regional clustering of states projecting their integration process so as to gradually absorb the neighbouring ones, and another through a multi-centered development acting at the same time on the global arena. The former type is exemplified by Europe's unification, whose final extension, contrary to our expectations, is not limited to the European continent. The latter one appears instead shaped by the activity of multinationals. To describe these processes, both articulated in their phases, we have prepared a series of graphical models, that can be fruitfully used to conceptualise globalisation in the classroom.

Keywords: *Globalisation, European unification, geopolitical models.*

1. INTRODUCTION

From the point of view of classical geography, a globalised world is a paradox: conceptually, a cluster of territories, settlements and even empty spaces give rise to a spatial unit notwithstanding the characteristics that differentiate them. With reference to the traditional spatial unit of our discipline, the entire planet is becoming just one region considered under the functionalistic view.

This is not the direct outcome of an enlarging of the *oecumene*, which is basically compatible with the separatedness of settlement regions as confirmed by history. From their part, regions are traditionally based on the principle of proximity, or better, contiguity. But the globalised world is independent of these factors.

This undermines our consolidated view of geographical spaces reflected on cartography. Hence the difficulties of constructing adequate representations. This explains very well why globalisation is perceived as the most serious challenge to geographical knowledge, to the point that some think it will end up losing its *raison d'être*. Hence a certain difficulty when it comes to teaching globalisation at all levels, not only in schools.

The problems we encounter are of a conceptual rather than technical nature. They stem from the fact that we have not yet fully understood the multifaceted nature of the changes under way. What makes arduous our understanding is in the first place its nature of process, in contrast with our innate tendency to consider the geographical phenomena as eminently static. In this paper we analyse some aspects of the globalisation process, for which we provide synthetic graphic representations.

2. THE PROCESS/ES IN BEING

In a broad sense, the globalisation we are experiencing may be defined as the growing interaction in the global arena of an increasing number of human activities. As we all know, this leads to a clustering of economies and societies, that increasingly limit the role of nation-states.

We know several types of such clusters, which differ as for their specialisation. The most important of them take the form of political associations. These associations represent a sort of "supporting structure" for the world relationships. They are all politically funded and legitimated by independent states. Let's get a look at some of these entities.

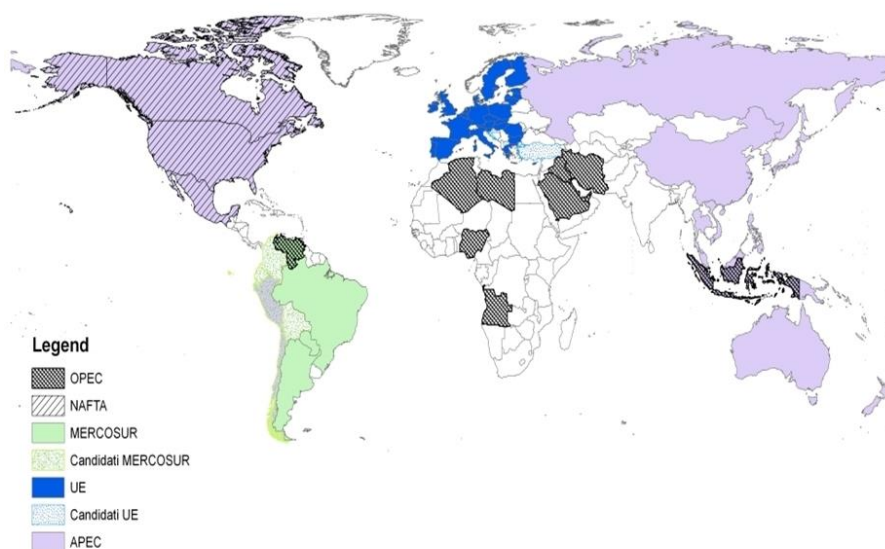


Figure 1. Geopolitical clusters at the beginning of the third millennium.

In our view, globalisation is essentially a process, a geographical process. Its core is the tendency of all living entities to grow and expand over new, contiguous areas.

In this paper we assume that there are two ways towards globalisation: one is geographically, or better regionally based, for the simple reason that it takes place mainly at a local level. In other words, the process is triggered in a specific area, generally characterised by geographical contiguity, where a complex merging and coordination of spatial structures is gradually experienced. We call it "regionally based globalisation" and its best example is the European unification process. This does not mean that the range of the process must be limited to the area involved in the great transformation. A careful analysis of the documents (Battisti, 2015) and the nature of the political bodies involved allows us to clearly understand that there are no geographical limits to the expansion of the European project, which in its essence is a "global" one.

On the other hand we may observe a "globally based" process, which is characterised by the simultaneous development of interactions carried out on very wide surfaces, with the contribution of many different cores. This is the phenomenon generally considered in the literature. Even if mainly driven by the U.S.A., it cannot absolutely be reduced to a simple enlargement of this political and economic entity. So in the last fifty years we have witnessed the simultaneous development of two global dynamics, not to consider the others readable in Figure 1. In this superposition of transformations, the economic and political structures being compelled to adjust to both, we may find the reasons both for many of the troubles the world is still suffering, and for the difficulties we encounter when trying to understand the

globalisation itself. Just to mention the present geopolitical troubles, we ought not to underestimate the inevitable competitiveness that is intrinsic to the different philosophies of these globalisation projects.

In the following figures we will focus on a relevant feature: globalisation may be a spontaneous process, but it is always a politically guided one. Moreover, the variety of global relationships and their nature is however much wider than those we have reproduced in our graphic models. Some of them are unfortunately located outside the perimeter of law, as we have already described elsewhere (Battisti, 2014).

It is the force of economic interests that create such kinds of relationships and the net of linkages developed to bypass the revenue regulations. These latter lie in the domain of public policies, so at the end, to understand our global world we must concentrate our efforts in order to link up the economic ties with the political ones, building up a comprehensive view. This suggests us resorting to economic history, or better, to an economic geography read in the light of history, trying to interpret the phenomenon of globalisation in connection with the economic development.

3. THE EUROPEAN MODEL

In an economic interpretation of social relationships, a state system can in its essence be described with a tripartite model (Figure 2), where the different roles performed by the people are highlighted. The basic assumption is that political consensus is traded against resources¹ and services. In this figure the producers represent the economic sector, made of productive enterprises; the category of political mediators include politicians and the bureaucracy associated with them at all levels of the public administration; finally, there are the men in the street, in all their activities.

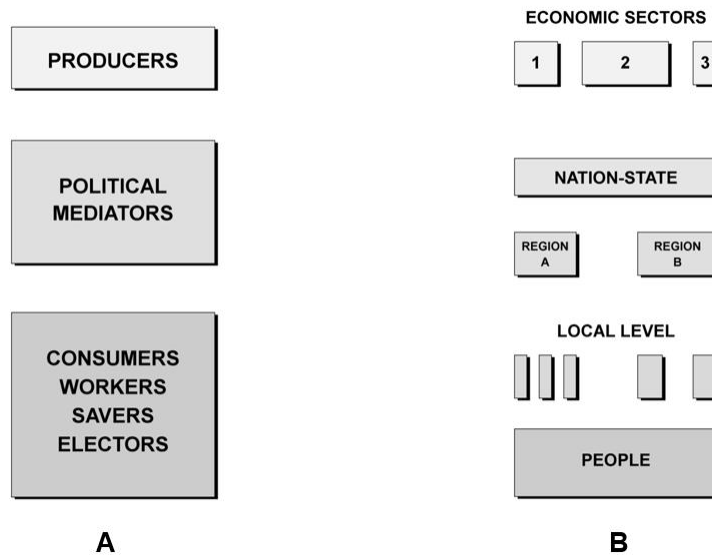


Figure 2A. The actors in the functional model of state. **Figure 2B.** Introducing the geographical complexity of reality. The production world is shared into economic sectors. The state is organised at different territorial levels (state, regions and local communities).

In Figure 2B the model is partitioned into different functional elements, which but only partially reveal its complexity. First of all the production is divided into the classic sectors of activity, secondly the public administrations are geographically clustered following the levels

¹ With the term "resources" we consider every kind of economic goods, money included.

we generally meet in each country.

All these are elements of a state system, and are linked to each other by the flows flowing through it. Bottom-up flows convey political consensus from the electors to the appropriate level of administration. In reverse, the political system sends flows of services to its political base. Other resources reach in a bottom-up flow the economic system, coming both from the people and from the political sector. The resulting scheme is readable in Figure 3.

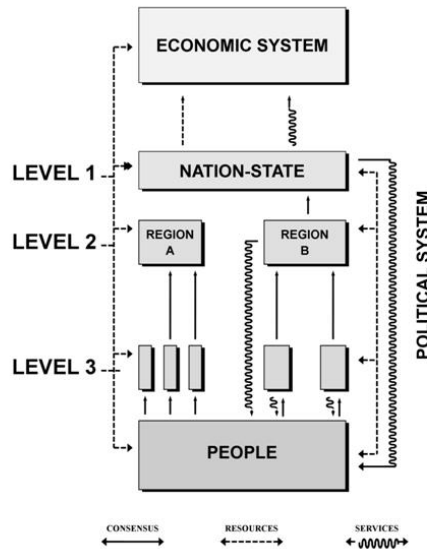


Figure 3. The fundamental relationships that shape a country system.

The replication of this model to a variety of states, linked together by international commerce in the classical way, is reported in Figure 4. We have originally divided the entire process into twelve steps, but here some of them are omitted for reasons of space.

Note that in the international arena the trade-off is developing at two levels. The nation states are connected through the ties among their own producers, who generally are not free to sell abroad without a permit or the intermediation of national importers. The matter is regulated, besides other more political questions, by intergovernmental agreements, that is at the political level.

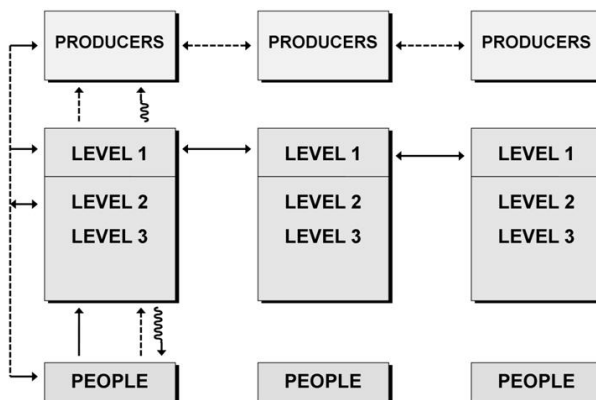


Figure 4. The system of flows that historically holds together national systems

With the beginning of a unification process, we experience the birth of a new level of government, located at the top of the preceding ones (Figure 5A). This is bound to take the control of the entire system, seizing for itself some functions and adding its sphere of action

towards the different levels of power to that of the existing states. (Figure 5B)

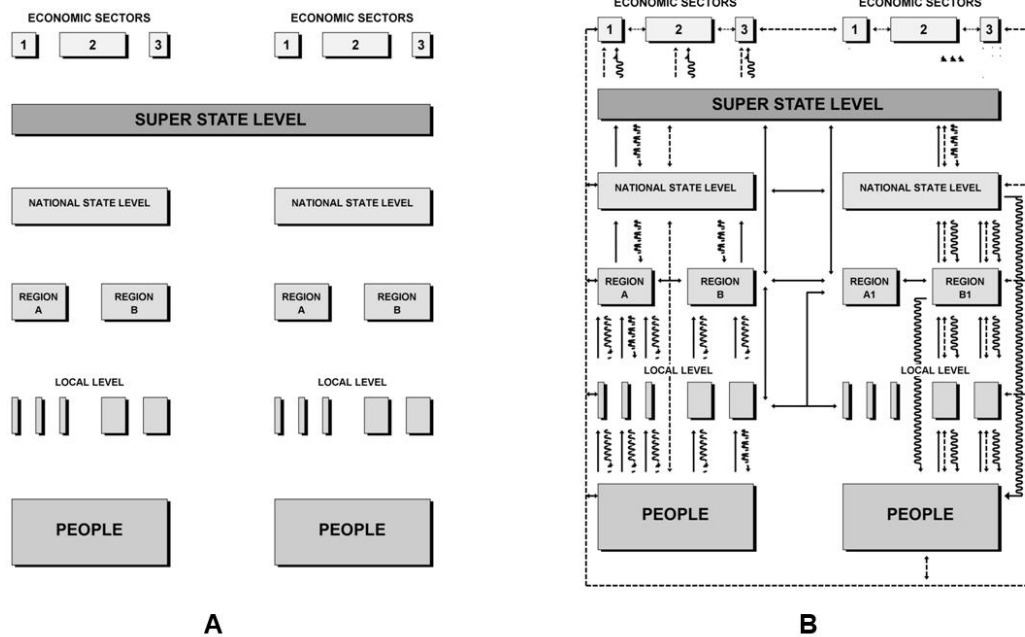


Figure 5A. The first stage of the unification process. **Figure 5B.** The functional linkages of the system.

Up to now, the "superstate level" in the European Union is fragmented among a great deal of institutions and authorities, the most relevant of which are the European Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament, who share the legislative and executive power. To these we should add the European Court of Justice and, only for the core countries who adopted a common currency, the European Bank. As we all know, the integration of these bodies into a coherent and efficient system of government is far from having reached its goals.

Neglecting the problems at the top, the system as shown in Figure 5B is entirely connected. Here we have summarized the final stage of the European integration project, which is also a distant prospect over time. The model is based on the logic of European regions and therefore provides a very wide devolution of powers to sub-national levels of government.

What we want to emphasize is precisely the legal capacity to dialogue within all political/administrative districts, both at their level and in relation to the upper and lower levels, as well as with the "super state". Once the national state, which has already given up its monopoly of foreign relations, has also lost its monopoly over regulating local constituencies, it in fact ceases to exist as such. It is thus transformed into a sort of clearing house for requests at the national level, its main role being reduced to the selection of the representatives to be sent to the level of "super government".

4. A MORE COMPREHENSIVE VIEW

The argument in this work is that globalisation, contrary to the view of Wallerstein, is a very old process, which passes through well-identifiable phases. In every one of them it expresses its particular model of globalisation, which is the result of the features of its spiritual and material culture. Of great importance is the role of the environment in which it has to develop. In this context, the width of the space gradually involved plays a crucial role. We

can then recognize different moments in which a decisive "enlargement" of the relationship spaces occur, that will affect many people subsequently.

In the fourth and fifth centuries B.C. we have the Greek expansion in the Mediterranean, and in the area later called Middle East. This phase is then followed, from the second century, by the expansion of Rome. From the seventh century A.D. it will be the turn of the Arab world, until the emergence of the European peoples leaving Mediterranean in the fifteenth century, now free to spread over the oceans. At first it is the turn of individual nations (Portugal, Spain, Holland, England, France) to expand with the creation of vast colonial empires. Then in the XIX century comes the organised exploitation of the colonies run by the industrialised countries of northern Europe.

Let us come again to the essence of globalisation. For it in the literature we can find a variety of definitions in disciplines such as economics, political science, sociology, history, etc. As geographers, we ought to stress that it is a geographical process, whose core is the tendency of all spatial organisations to extend as far as possible in order to include the smaller organisations located in their vicinity. In so doing they reshape, moulding themselves and the others into a new, bigger entity.

This incorporation takes place in space, and the new organisation covers the sum of the space occupied by the former ones. We can think of a sort of living organism, like a mould, which spreads by "eating" a variety of contiguous organisms. This allows it to grow in dimension with no definite limit. In principle, it could grow to include the whole planet, that is to say we are considering not a global organism, but the preconditions to its birth, namely a process tending towards wholeness. This is to say, globalisation is a process addressed to the globe. Human history is an encyclopaedia of such processes, which recur throughout time. They reveal some stable characters, while others may vary in space and time.

We can easily appreciate that some characters change according to their physical environment while others are influenced by the human environment. What is very important is the stage of development of the communities involved, especially from an economic point of view. There are no doubts that globalisation is deeply correlated with economic development. This suggests to make use of the Petty's law – the three-sector hypothesis – developed in the 30's by A. Fisher, C. Clark and, later by J. Fourastié.

As in the previous paragraph, to simplify our analysis we have chosen to take into consideration only one kind of organisation. In the wake of F. Ratzel (1897) let us focus on the sovereign state. It is of course a generalisation, just to take into account all kinds of political organisations endowed with a self-government which is the result of an economic apparatus directed by a space-based community once it has achieved a minimum level of sustainability.

We all agree on the fact that each stage of development gives rise to a different kind of state. As a consequence, the growth process we call "globalisation" also takes different paths. In Figure 6A we are confronted with the first model of globalisation, the classic one. It is based on the extension of the state, which appears when a state simply incorporates its neighbours. This is a classic kind of growth, peculiar to a community which lives on agriculture and grazing. No wonder if it is at the base of Ratzel's anthropogeography. Notwithstanding his sensibility to factors linked to the technological revolution, such as the trans-oceanic migrations, his geographical vision is clearly focused on the problems of agriculture-based communities.

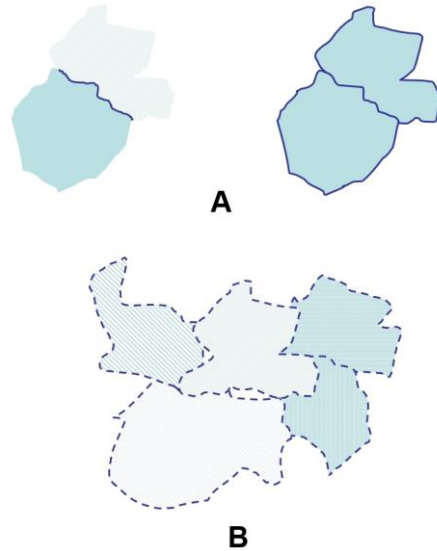


Figure 6. Models of globalisation. **A.** The extension of the state. **B.** The making of the empire.

The relevant element of growth is here the amount of arable land, so the extension is functional to this end. Mankind has experienced this process since the onset of the agricultural revolution. The practical problems following the scarcity of arable lands as well as all natural resources, at the basis of Malthus essays dated 1798 and 1830, are still worrying mankind notwithstanding their nature of outdated beliefs (Clark, 1973).

The second model of globalisation is the making of the empire (Figure 6B). It is a variant of the previous model. It comes into existence whenever a growing state takes control of deep-rooted spatial organisations with a tradition of self-government and self-identity that prevents it from adopting a form of direct annexation. So the growing state becomes the leader of a sort of cooperative of states, linked by different legal ties and working somehow together as a system of states.

In Figure 7A we consider a variation to this model. The colonial empire reproduces that kind of spatial organisation which has been adopted by the European powers from the XVI to the XX century.

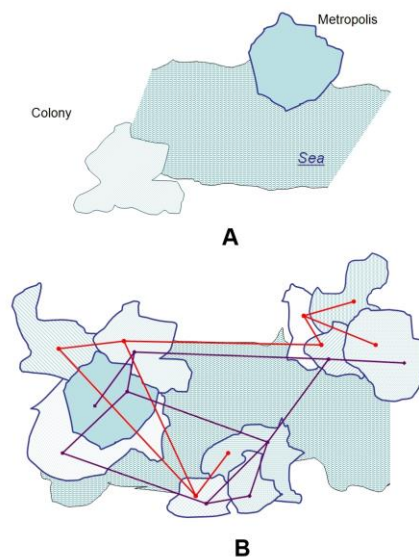


Figure 7. Models of globalisation. **A.** The colonial empire; **B.** The present globalisation

The subjected states are located at a great distance from the metropolis and because of the

oceans in between there is no continuity in space. The set of territories are kept together by military strength which allows the development of economic ties, such as flows of commodities and manufactured goods. Through the time, cultural links such as the use of a common language and the adoption of the same model of institutions also take place.

It is the phenomenon revealed by Wallerstein, who invented for it the name *world-economy*. It suits very well the mercantile/industrial stages of economic growth (Wallerstein, 1974, 1980). Its characteristics are:

- a more pronounced worldwide geographical dimension;
- a complex international distribution of production, based on the concentration of manufacturing in the European countries.

The system reached its peak in the second part of the XIX century with the partition of almost all Asia and Africa among European powers.

The following step to present-day globalisation is readable in Figure 7B. Here we consider the space of the organisations as a summing up of sets of formally independent states (as there are no more colonies on the earth) and of the nets of multinationals. The latter extend their economic ties all over the planet despite its political division.

What we perceive is the coexistence of states and giant firms, which get more and more powerful compared to states. This forces us to abandon Ratzel's view or, to use the concept used by political scientists, to altogether dismiss the Westfalian perspective (Buzan and Little, 2000).

This figure highlights a transition from a grid based on areas (the states) to a net based on dots (the firms' locations). A transition, one might conclude, still to be completed. Our opinion is, however, that it will never be completed, because political units, weakened as they may be, cannot be completely eliminated. This is in the interest of the firms itself: only states (including local ones) have in fact the power to supply a legal basis and enforce it, not to forget the necessary support from public finance so often needed by private enterprises. This is what we are experiencing in the present economic crisis, when states are forced to support not only banks but also all kinds of private concerns to help them survive the storm.

In general, what multinationals most need is a big market where to buy and sell products or services. Nowadays the dimension of each single market largely exceeds the capacity of a single state, however large it may be. This is precisely the reason why the nation-state no longer can be a container suited to support an autonomous economic system. So these systems are being progressively dismantled and relocated over a variety of areas, often very far and generally quite different from each other. This leads to the present crisis of sovereign states which are unable to stop the flight of what were once considered "their" economic units and to prevent the "invasion" of foreign competitors.

The fact is that the enterprises find it too expensive to pay for the political control of territories only to run their affairs. In geographical terms this explains the shift from a geometry of areas towards a geometry of dots, easily linked together through linear relations crossing borders and countries by means of the modern facilities of communication.

We need larger markets, in the end. The most visible consequence is the birth – all over the world – of great associations: nation-states enter a process which begin at an economic level to turn later into a political one. Or at least they try to do so.

5. THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

Let us return to the evolutionary processes in production. In any economic sector, the continuous rise of the break-even points compels the entrepreneurs to compete on a

worldwide market to ensure continuity of operation. This means that no country in the future will be able to host all kinds of activities, with the possible exceptions of China and India. It is no surprise: countries like Switzerland or the Netherlands have never developed a car industry, an enterprise for which they surely lacked neither capitals nor technology. Simply, the size of their internal markets has since the beginning been too small to enable a profitable scale of production. Following an economic approach, we can now understand how much of the romantic movement towards the birth of nation-states during the XIX century was functional to the incipient process of industrialisation active in different areas.

In terms of geopolitical reconstruction, the delegitimation of national states on the part of the "big market" in turn causes a deligitimation by internal producers, who are progressively losing their trust in the capacity of the government to help them remain on the market. The process is working at both levels: while the main enterprises simply try to escape the constraints of the state to find their fortune in the wide world, thus reducing the resilience of the country economic system, the small and medium size ones are unable to do so. Their reaction must then be an address to the category we have called "political mediators" in order to get some relief.

Not surprisingly, the "populist" revolution is linked (not only in Italy) to the initiative by small-and medium-sized enterprise backing new political movements (Bonora and Coppola, 1997). At least at the beginning, the economic dimension commands the geographical extension of people's support. Once freed from the grasp formerly exerted by enterprises operating at the national level, the territories are enabled to fight so as to regain increasingly larger spaces of political autonomy. Smaller regional identities on whatever scale (no matter if actually existing or only perceived) previously constrained within a national state begin a process of secession, at least at the cultural level (Andreotti, 1995). The internal conditions favouring secession are always linked to the economy, in a double way. Economic crises often help to aggregate (and disaggregate) people's consensus, but it is not always the case. In Spain, the present revival of Catalan separatism is explained by the different performance of the economy both at national and regional level. Critical to the success of such movements is external consensus, i. e. the attitude of hegemonic political powers.

Consensus in turn is likely to be gained at a time of reduced international tensions, when small states (especially buffer ones) may disintegrate at a low cost to the international community, although obviously not always at a low cost to the disintegrating community itself. See Yugoslavia, the GDR, Czechoslovakia, or Belgium in the XIX century. Quite different are the present cases of Cataluna, or the possible disintegration of the United Kingdom because of Brexit.

We are therefore discovering that globalisation – a process aimed at the merger of the whole world – is at the same time accompanied by an apparently contrasting phenomenon of legitimation of smaller territories – at the regional scale - a process that it itself is promoting.

We have seen in § 3 a mechanism of promoting devolution inside the European Union.

These processes, the nature of which is essentially political, could be considered a small scale repetition of the very same process of ethnogenesis, now a privileged subject of study by sociologists and political scientists,² which has led to the emergence of nation-states. The case of the Republics born from the ashes of the former Yugoslavia is emblematic.

At a closer look, we find that behind all this there is always first a territory with its specific features, then a region as we are used to recognise it in geographical terms. If you look better at the territories protagonists of these consciousness-raising process you can often have a glimpse at the "losers" of history, namely some of the regional states who lost the race for

² See the Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism at the LSE.

leadership in the process of national aggregation, as if they were dead rising from their graves.

They are the "disappeared nations, sometimes characterised by a "suppressed language", as described in XX century literature. These geographically-based communities can now find new reasons for living in a world that in the long run has proved too large to be organised by multi-nationalised economic/political entities.

6. CONCLUSIONS

At present, the great question is the outcome of these deglomerative forces in front of the globalist pressure exerted by the great protagonists of history, like the USA. Particularly important is the reversal of the trend that is occurring in the last few years following the global economic crisis broken out in 2007. The re-emergence of protectionist demands in both the USA and the European Union, the "big market" whose absorption capacity made possible the economic development of the third world, is betting on a further development of globalisation. The big question now is: are we dealing with a process that is being deprived of its driving force?

Again, this is manifested at two geographic levels. Globally, there is the failure of the attempt carried out by the Obama administration to unify the OECD area with the construction of a large shopping area centered on the US, using the two transatlantic and transpacific treaties. At a lower level there is the decision of the UK to leave the European Union, a precedent that at its worst could lead to the disintegration at least of the latter, if not of both these geopolitical entities.

The result is a great uncertainty about the future, which in turn is increasing the difficulties scholars encounter in their effort to scientifically frame the topic of globalisation. We could maybe apply to globalisation what Schumpeter argued about the entrepreneur, namely that his historical role in the economy can be clarified only once it no longer exists as such. In any case, it is presently the opinion of most economic operators that the interconnection within global economy has reached such a deep level that a return to a world of basically self-contained systems is scarcely credible.

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