

Nation States in the XXI Century: Evolutionary Trends

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Abstract

This work collects essays based on presentations at the IX WCSA conference, *GEGNET: A Complex System Vision on Global Governance and Policy Modelling*. The essays deal with diverse subjects, whose common feature is that they shed light on the changes that the Nation state is undergoing in an era of irreversible globalization. The work will be structured as follows: first I will focus on the sociological debate on the Nation state crisis of the Nation state, then I will define the theoretical framework necessary to analyze that phenomenon. Finally, I will use these theoretical tools to highlight the contribution each article has made to a better understanding of the strains Nation states are currently facing. Specifically, I will show how the issue of the Nation state crisis implies a broader level of analysis, related to supranational institutions and treaties, and a local one, related to the importance of regional and city policies and identities.

Keywords: nation state, globalization, bifurcation, complexity

Riassunto. *Gli Stati-Nazione nel XXI secolo: tendenze evolutive*

Questo lavoro raccoglie dei saggi basati su altrettante presentazioni alla IX conferenza WCSA, *GEGNET: A Complex System Vision on Global Governance and Policy Modelling*. I saggi trattano temi differenti, ma accomunati dal fatto di gettare luce sui mutamenti che lo Stato-Nazione sta subendo in un'epoca di irreversibile globalizzazione. Il lavoro si strutturerà nel seguente modo: prima mi concentrerò sul dibattito sociologico sulla crisi dello Stato-nazione, poi definirò il quadro teorico per analizzare quel fenomeno. Infine, userò questi strumenti teorici per evidenziare il contributo che ogni articolo ha fornito per una migliore comprensione delle tensioni che gli Stati-nazione stanno attualmente affrontando. Nello specifico, mostrerò come il tema della crisi dello Stato Nazione implichi un livello di analisi più ampio, legato ad istituzioni e trattati sovranazionali, ed uno locale, legato all'importanza alle politiche e alle identità regionali e cittadine.

Parole chiave: stato-nazione, globalizzazione, biforcazione, complessità

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1. Introduction

As the Guest Editor of this Special Issue of RTSA titled «Nation states in the XXI century: evolutionary trends», I am honored and delighted to write this introductory paper.

This work is a spin-off of the IX WCSA (wcsaglobal.org) conference titled «GEGNET: A Complex System Vision on Global Governance and Policy Modelling». The Conference call said:

Gegnet is a German theoretical concept meaning limitless opening to the possible. The current global economic context of worldwide business and direct foreign investment is comprised of a decreasing number

of huge players named Global Players (GP), such as the European Union (EU), the United States (US), the MERCOSUR, the United African Market, along with Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS). It radically redesigns also the public policies and their scale about digitalization, intangible asset portfolio creation (e.g. patents, licenses, trademarks, copyrights), taxation, public expenditures, international trade regulations and much more. The aforementioned Global Players are already interconnected by digital technological convergence, international treaties and legal transplants: (e.g.) CETA, NAFTA, MERCOSUR, WHO, WTO, OECD, UN, ILO, WIPO, African Union. So, the linkages among Canada, the US, and Mexico under NAFTA; the EU under the CETA, and the South countries in Latin America under the MERCOSUR are shaping a legislative fabric where free trade, technological standardization, and shared human rights policies are converging towards congruence. The emerging key challenge is enormous and evolutionary, particularly for those who are responsible and in power of direct foreign investment flows. For instance, the recent treaty between the EU and Japan is a fine piece of evidence for the argument of international technological and legal convergence. To sum up, the network of treaties wrapping up our planet is shaping a spiral convergent trend, pushing forward the shift from international to supranational lawmaking through the setting up of a transnational agenda for global governance and policy modelling. The internal differentiation of the law system is creating different types of Global Players, more or less improving the complexity and variety inside the law system, which are the keys of evolutionary systems. Law convergence among Global Players is strategic in this changing scenario and the Mediterranean area reveals to be a special hub between Europe and Africa, while Southern EU at large is also a special hub with Central - South America. These hubs are offering variety in a huge catalogue for law shopping from Spain to Malta, from Portugal to Brazil, from Cyprus to the redesigning of the North Africa and – driving further – the emergent East African Federation. The key evolutionary challenge and paramount goal of the WCSA Conference is to be the host for innovative lawmaking/policy modelling, legislative implementation, institutional redesign, and economic development also by citizenship expansion. We will work on shaping a triple helix of (1) legislative design, (2) free-trade alignment, and (3) digital standardization.

Within this framework, the aim and scope of this special issue can be presented and summarized as follows:

The current global economic context of worldwide business and direct foreign investment is comprised of a decreasing number of huge players named Global Players (GP), such as the European Union (EU), the United States (US), the MERCOSUR, the United African Market, along with Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS). It radically re-

designs the public policies and their scale about digitalization, intangible asset portfolio creation (e.g. patents, trademarks, licenses, copyrights), taxation, public expenditures, international trade regulations and much more.

This network of treaties wrapping up our planet is shaping a spiral convergent trend, pushing forward the shift from international to supranational lawmaking through the setting up of a transnational agenda for global governance and policy modelling.

The key evolutionary challenge and paramount goal of the 9th WCSA Worldwide Conference is to be the host for innovative lawmaking / policy modelling, legislative implementation, institutional redesign, and economic development also by citizenship expansion. We will be working on shaping a triple helix of (1) legislative design, (2) free-trade alignment, and (3) digital standardization.

Nevertheless, this work is not a mere proceeding publication. The authors involved were pre-selected as conference speakers, then selected as contributors; furthermore, the published papers have passed a Double-Blind Peer-Review process.

Namely, the contributions of this special issues are related to one of the major issues in the contemporary scientific debate: the crisis of the Nation state.

Within this framework, this work will proceed as follows:

first, I will focus on the sociological debate about the crisis of Nation state, then I will set the theoretical framework for analyzing that phenomenon. Finally, I will use those theoretical tools to highlight the contribution that each paper provided to a better understanding of the strains that Nation states are currently facing.

2. Ulrich Beck: a milestone

Although the idea of a possible crisis of Nation states had emerged occasionally in the 20th century sociological debate (Touraine, 2007), the early systematic reflection on this subject is Beck's work *What is Globalization* (2000b), which contains a vivid and robust description of the problem.

The title of the introductory chapter, «The national state caught between world economy and individualization: what is to be done?», effectively anticipates the main thesis of that part of the work: since the fall of Berlin Wall, the economic and financial changes commonly included in the category “globalization” not only have caused important political turmoil, but have been even affecting the characters of the main collective actor of the Modern Era: the Nation state.

More exactly, due to both technical progresses and political choices, financial capital can instantaneously move across the world. Therefore, should national states issue unfavorable fiscal policies, the main actors of every national economic system – big corporations – can immediately move economic resources in other areas of the planet, where economic politics are “less hostile”.

This new economic scenario considerably reduces, in Beck’s view, the possibility of action that national states had in the past: first of all, the redistribution of wealth that took place in the second half of the 20th century through robust welfare systems is progressively losing its financial basis. Second, the political representation process is turning slightly meaningless: while in the past decades democratic states could grant granted a political balance between the – divergent if not opposite – interests of a number of social layers, in a globalized world, states cannot provide any longer representation to labor interests, while capital can do without state’s representativeness (see also, Ranis, Vreeland and Kosack, 2006).

Yet this is not the main consequence: as a matter of fact, Beck assesses that

Managers may transfer the administration of transnational companies to southern India, yet send their children to the top publicly funded European universities. It never crosses their mind to move to where they are building up jobs and paying low taxes. For themselves they demand high-cost political, social and civil rights as a matter of course, while torpedoing the public finances that support them. They go to the theatre. They enjoy well-cared-for nature and landscape. They romp around the still relatively crime-free cities of Europe (Beck, 2000b, p. 7).

Therefore, Globalization is undermining «the territorial orthodoxy of the political and the social, posed in absolute institutional categories, which arose with the national-state project

of the first modernity» (Beck, 2000b, p. 7). As a matter of fact, in a globalized scenario, the wealthiest citizens can legitimately refrain from any contribution to the progress of the societies where they live: they have the right to deprive their own countries of big amounts of financial resources, while they can elect political representatives, let alone run as candidates, as well as receive public services (security, wealth, etc.).

In short words, what is at stake are not only the National States' action capability, but even the pertaining civil societies¹.

Within this framework, Beck assesses that this rights and duties unbalance is likely to trigger heavy conflicts:

The social barometer is therefore showing a rise in conflicts, including between virtual and real taxpayers. Whereas TNCs² can escape the clutches of inland revenue bureaucracies, small and medium-sized companies (which create a large share of new jobs) have to cough up more and more as the screws are turned on them. It is an irony of history that the very losers of globalization will in future have to pay for everything – from the welfare state to a functioning democracy – while the winners of globalization post dream profits and steal away from their responsibility for future democracy (Beck, 2000b, p. 6).

Thus, the scenario that Beck depicts, does not simply foresee heavy financial crisis for Nation states, but even dramatical changes of citizens' reciprocal expectations, as well as of the pattern of the relationship state-citizens, that has characterized modernity (see also Beck, 2000b).

In other words,

In this pitch-dark view of things, economic globalization merely completes what has been driven forward intellectually by postmodernism and politically by individualization: namely, the collapse of modernity. The diagnosis points towards a capitalism without work that will create unemployment on a huge scale; the historical association between market economy, welfare state and democracy, the Western model that integrated and legitimated the Nation state project of modernity, is thus destined to break down (p. 24. See also Beck, 2006, pp. 3-4).

¹ See also Beck (2000a); Beck and Levy (2013), about the link between Nation-States changes and risk society.

² Transnational companies (author's note).

3. Debate on Nation state

Summarizing the above chapter, the main Beck's thesis seems to be that Globalization and Nation states are perfect enemies and the success of the first necessarily means the collapse of the latter.

It is clear that this has not happened.

As a matter of fact, no doubt that Globalization is nowadays stronger: in spite of the 2008 crisis, since international trade has increased and, as above showed, so has the number of international commercial treaties³.

On the other side, the number of national states is far from being reduced: all those existed in 1999, when Beck published his work, still do and they seem far to be collapsing (Holton, 2011, p. 97 ff. See also Arxer, 2008; van Kersbergen, Lieshout and Lock, 1999).

As a matter of fact, as Beck himself (2006a, p. 166 ff.) shows, it is possible for the States to face financial globalization by changing long-term strategies of internal and external organization (see also Chernilo, 2007, pp. 15-16).

In short words, the explanation is that Nation states can still fit to globalization – at least in this phase of globalization.

As Morselli (2018, p. 672) states: «in an age of globalization, the countries that have grown the most are those that have developed an institutional apparatus capable of coping with the transition from a Nation state to a world society. At the same time, the countries that have been left behind are those whose institutions have not adapted to the new trade policies, deregulation, and privatization imposed by globalization».

Within this framework, it is important to highlight that in the last twenty years, the Globalization process has implied unprecedented economic growth for China, India and other countries; let alone the processes of nation building that have begun in several parts of

³ In 2008, the total value of global trade was 16,496,984 million US dollars; in 2020 it was 17,812,107 million US dollars (<https://data.wto.org>). The same source shows that Covid pandemics has just slightly reduced the amount of international trade; indeed, in 2019 the amount was 19,284,167 million US dollars.

the word, like Iraq, after the very end of colonialism (Berger, 2006; Bergen and Weber, 2006), while Western states (namely European), that, on the contrary, have been tackling big political and social instability just because of their economic decline⁴.

4. Epistemic Aspects

From the above considerations, it emerges that Beck's intuition, even if scientifically brilliant and logically robust, refers to a complex object – the relationship between Globalization and Nation state, which does not fit to linear previsions.

In other words, no doubt that Globalization has been affecting Nation states traditional nature and functions (Beck, 2007, pp. 288-89; Beck, 2013), but this process, which is far to come to an end, could produce different outcomes in different contexts (Gleick, 1987; Prigogine, 1978; Prigogine and Nicholis, 1977; Prigogine and Stengers, 1984; Ruzzeddu, 2008).

As a consequence, while Nation state is far from disappearing from sociological focus, theoretical and empirical tools are necessary to comprehend its evolution in the next future.

Within this framework, once more Beck's works – especially the most recent – emerge as pivotal, even though a distinction is necessary.

⁴ In Western states, the political instability is related to a perceived loss of sovereignty due to Globalization. Actually, as Brinkman and Brinkman (2008) show, the erosion of sovereignties. See also Levy (2006, p. 188 ff). Galli (2019) explains the electoral success of the political forces that claim for a new national sovereignty (sovereinism), with some social groups' need for a protection from globalization. Although Galli mainly focuses on the Italian case, he seems to reject the idea that a supranational sovereignty, different from global economic trends, can exist. Galli's position can be the object of critics from two points of view: the first point of view is about facts happened prior to his book publication: e.g., despite the promulgation of the Italian Constitution in 1948, Italy's membership to NATO as a WWII defeated force, has always affected the country's strategic choices. This condition was common to many other countries of Western Europe. More recently, also being a member of EU has affected the member's states sovereignty: the strict financial politics that have followed the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, drastically stopped the southern member States from increase their public debts; in spite of this, none of those countries left the Union: the consequences would be unbearable. The second point of view is about facts following Galli's book publication: during the COVID pandemic the EU has become the main actor to support national economies recovery, by stating the amount and the conditions to receive financial supports. It is also worth noticing how, in March 2020, the European Commission forced Germany, that had forbidden the health supplies export, to cancel this decision.

As a matter of fact, Beck provides two kinds of considerations: on one side, he criticizes methodological nationalism, on the other proposes cosmopolitanism as the new core epistemic concept.

About methodological nationalism, he states that «The Nation state, which attempts to deal with global risks in isolation, resembles a drunk man, who on a dark night is trying to find his lost wallet in the cone of light from a street lamp. To the question: Did you actually lose your wallet here?, he replies, “No, but in the light of the street lamp I can at least look for it”» (2007a, p. 288). This vivid metaphor once more suggests that currently Nation states are far to disappear from the global scenario (see also Chernilo, 2006; de Beukelar, 2019).

On the other side, Beck claims for new epistemic approaches to understand what the role of the state is going to be like in a globalized world⁵, as well as develop policy strategies for coping with global phenomena, especially inequality (Beck, 2006a, p. 25 ff.; 2007b; 2016, p. 262 ff). With this aim, in later works, Beck (2012; see also Beck and Sznaider, 2006) develops his famous epistemic approach known as “methodological cosmopolitanism”.

Now, this approach is a quite complex notion and somehow not suitable for direct empirical research: as Beck (2016, pp. 261-262; see also Martell, 2009; Blok and Selchow, 2020) assesses:

At present, the politics of the ‘world risk society’ is an extraordinarily intricate terrain, composed, among other things, of co-ordinated national mechanisms, bilateral and multilateral agreements, inter-, trans- and supranational institutions, transnational corporations, private charity foundations, and civil society groups.

Therefore, in this work, I am rather going to focus on one single part of Beck’s theory: the possible evolution of the Nation state. With this aim, I will base upon the systemic approach, namely the notion of “bifurcation” (Prigogine and Stengers, 1984, p. 160 ff.), which refers to any system – no matter if natural, artificial or social – evolution through time: a bifurcation is given, whenever two different states of a system are equally likely to emerge in the future, so that no foreseeing is possible on what state will come true. Thus, a

⁵ Beck (2008), the author proposes a model of globalization, in which the main actors are global, supranational players.

systemic comprehension requires to describe both the possible states that might happen in the future.

In the evolution of Globalization, “bifurcation” implies that the evolution of Nation states is equally likely to produce changes at a supranational⁶ level and at a regional level (see Hameiri, 2009).

5. The Global direction

Dominici’s paper provides a theoretical support to the idea of national states’ changes that are in progress: it is true that the

world-economy has been progressively de-potentiating the mechanisms and the devices pertaining to democratic regimes, and all of this has profound repercussions, not only on the structures and hierarchies of the global production system, but also, and above all, on the entire architecture of rights and protection regarding people, and specifically, workers. In an overall framework of general weakening of the welfare systems, what results is the transition from a work-based society to a society based on risk [...], heralding the final triumph of the political economics of insecurity, where uncertainty and vulnerability become, not only economic, but above all, existential conditions.

Coping with those problems, though, does not imply an impossible way back to national sovereignty, rather

defining long-term, transnational policies – this is mandatory, because all of the systems are more and more interconnected and interdependent – investing significant resources on complex instruments that will be able to contrast the new inequalities and asymmetries that are standing in the way of openness, dialogue, of coming face to face with the OTHER from OURSELVES, of solidarity, of the very realization of such important, ambitious projects.

⁶ I use the word “supranational”, rather than “global”, to stress the uncertainty that affects the notion of globalization. As a matter of fact, authors like Colombo (2010, p. 232 ff.), suggest that the emergence of supranational bodies like the European Union, means a slowdown of globalizing process: although wider than Nation states, those bodies, being oriented through specific-albeit very large- areas of the planet, show no worldwide scope.

Petroccia and Ferone show the evolution of Nation state from a political and cultural point of view, by focusing on the bounding of the European Union:

European society, in a context of global interdependence, tends to overcome old distinctions and dichotomies and to develop lifestyles reorganized within the transnational framework, stimulated by a process of cultural adaptation from below that produces a multiple identity, composed of different values and chosen lifestyles that co-exist peacefully. The EU is conceived as a manifestation of the reflexivity that characterizes late modernity and a cosmopolitan society, open to the variability and permeability of its territorial boundaries, to the multiplicity of its citizens' belonging and based on values such as inclusion, the enhancement of different cultures and the opportunity for participation.

Within this framework, European Union is the most representative example of the fact that Globalization is not affecting only national institutions and decision-making process, but also national identities and other every-day-life issues.

6. The local direction

On the contrary, the following papers focuses on cases, in which National states changes are affecting local realities. Fortunato and Guarascio, actually, have not observed changes in local realities; they show how cases of weak central administrations can cause the emergence of new patterns of social economies. Namely, «A weak government regulation leaves room for other forms of regulation, which may be market and community-based. This could give rise to the formation of solidarity-based economic organizations, creating spaces of collaboration among the actors of economic action and promoting inclusion. In this typology, for example, Italy has longstanding legislation on cooperation and volunteering» even if «In a context of weak government, where private market regulation is strong, it is likely that traditional for-profit commercial organizations centered on a single economic regulation will materialize. The entrepreneurial vocation has an inventiveness to catch up with public inter-

vention, therefore a strong impact on the context, with an impact on the conditions of the surrounding territory».

Roblek, Bach and Meško focus on direct e-democracy both at a national and local level in five European countries. Besides the differences among each country, it is worth watching how direct e-democracy is generally common at the local level, rather than national:

All five countries have access to public information at both national and local levels. Only in the field of e-participation, in Greece, Italy and Croatia, at the local level, is much more developed than in Austria and Slovenia. In Austria, only the city of Vienna stands out with its website. In Greece, we have to mention the city of Trikala, where the first began with developing e-participation platform. Unfortunately, at the local level, except for necessary information and e-service, Austria and Slovenia are not offer its citizens e-participation solutions. At the national level, all countries provide only basic options for informing and commenting on proposed draft legislation.

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