

## GLOBALISATION

A term that refers to the acceleration and intensification of mechanisms, processes, and activities that are allegedly promoting global **interdependence** and perhaps, ultimately, global political and economic **integration**. It is, therefore, a revolutionary concept, involving the *deterritorialisation* of social, political, economic, and cultural life. It would be a mistake, however, to view globalisation deterministically.

Just as there are powerful forces of integration at work through the shrinkage of distance on a global scale, so there are forces of disintegration as well.

Globalization has certain identifiable characteristics, although there is no consensus in the field about any of them! In the first place, it involves a growing consciousness of the world as a single place. This is reflected in phrases such as 'the global village' and 'the global economy'.

Few places are more than a day's travel away and communication across territorial borders is now almost instantaneous. In 1980 there were about 1 million international travellers per day. In 2000 more than 3 million people crossed territorial borders as tourists each day.

Second, new information and communications technology have improved access to overseas markets and streamlined both the production and distribution of goods and the trade in foreign exchange. Third, human beings are becoming more and more dependent upon one another as problems such as **global warming**, the international drugs trade, and **terrorism** can only be managed through greater cooperation at a supranational level. Fourth, some observers argue that globalization is erasing cultural differences. Sociologists, for example, like to talk about the *Coca-Colaisation* or *McDonaldisation* of global culture.

Finally, some observers claim that the **sovereign** state's capacity for independent political action is weakened by globalization. This is especially true in the area of economic policy. The idea of a domestic economy hemmed in by well-defined borders and managed by the state is now obsolete. Today, domestic economic policy is subject to global market forces. The state has little effective influence or control over these forces. Any state that tries to exert its influence risks disinvestment, capital flight, and recession. In short, globalisation involves a radical transformation of existing economic and political structures in international relations. It involves an aspiration to think and act globally and an

acknowledgement that humanity cannot effectively be ordered along geographical lines. To talk about globalization, then, is not only to embark on a description of the present, but involves a comprehension of the forces shaping the future. In this sense it is a multifaceted, complex, and dynamic concept.

The causes of globalisation are many. Among the most important are liberal **capitalism** and the revolution in information and communications technologies. Liberal **capitalism** simply refers to the conjunction of liberal values (freedom, **human rights**, individualism, and democracy) with an economic system based on the market. This world view is widely held to have triumphed over **communism** and the idea of a planned economy, resulting in an international environment conducive to the free movement of capital and goods.

There is no agreement among scholars as to the origins of globalization. It has been dated as far back as the dawn of Western civilization.

Some look to the origins of the modern state system for signs of globalization, while others speak about the significance of the laying of the first transatlantic telegraph cable in the mid-nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, what distinguishes globalization today is the intensity and the speed at which these changes are occurring. This is easily demonstrated by the rapid increase in the number of non-governmental organizations. At the beginning of the twentieth century there were around 170 in existence. Today the figure stands at around 5,500. Interestingly, around 1980 the figure stood at close to 2,500. That represents a 100 per cent increase in 20 years. There is no doubt, then, that the 1980s were a crucial turning point in the history of this concept.

Evaluations of globalization vary enormously. For some, it is a code word for American **hegemony** and the liberation of multinational corporations from effective control and regulation. This is a complaint which has accompanied the rise of 'anti-globalization' movements in recent years. For others, it is a potential force for prosperity and greater equality through the expansion of capitalism. Some liberal activists have interpreted it as a vehicle for the promotion of universal human rights and world peace, while some cultural specialists view it as a pernicious force threatening the survival of local cultures and ways of life.

It is true that not everybody benefits from globalization. To take full advantage of globalization requires both capital and access to technology.

Many states in the international system have neither. A large proportion of the world's population, for example, does not have access to the telephone. Being 'on the net' is not something which makes a lot of sense to those living in the poorest parts of the **Third World**. In other words, globalization may not be global after all. At best, its spread and impact is uneven.

From the perspective of the **OECD** countries, there are many unresolved issues with respect to globalization. Among them is its relationship to democracy. If globalization is indeed weakening the ability of states to make autonomous economic and political decisions, then one might argue that globalization is a dangerously anti-democratic force.

*See also:* **capitalism; casino capitalism; clash of civilizations; end of History; global warming; multinational-corporation; regionalism**

*Further reading:* Baylis and Smith, 1997; Holton, 1998; Hurrell and Woods, 1999; Kiely and Marfleet, 1998; O'Meara *et al.*, 2000; Scholte, 2000