



ON INSTITUTIONAL PROLIFERATION AND EXTERNAL ACTION: A LOOK AT THE STATE OF EUROPE FROM THE J. CALVIN'S HOMETOWN.

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One of the least controversial claims one could make about contemporary international relations is that complexity pervades the interdependent world we live today. Among other dimensions, one key factor of said complexity has been the development of trans-border governance. A phenomena driven by a reconfiguration of political power, the erosion of the Westphalia order, globalization and the emergence of new powerful non-state actors. All of these changes call for careful analyses possible arrangements that may be adopted with an eye on adapting the external action of the European Union accordingly.



Contributing to a better understanding of the developing trans-national order, and assessing the EU's role within it, was in fact the central concern of the 2018 Summer School hosted by the GEM PhD Program. This year the GEM Summer School – the 18th edition of said event – was hosted at the Global Studies Institute (GSI) of the Université de Genève (UNIGE) in its charismatic home town – which it shares with both historical figures such as J. Calvin and global institutions such as the WTO, ILO or the UN.

Although mainly targeted at PhD fellows, I was given the opportunity to attend this week-long event as an external observer.

Even though still a relative stranger to the academic world, experiencing such an event as somewhat of an outsider, a “fly on the wall” if you will, proved very interesting indeed. The thing I found most fascinating was the obvious passion with which the attending doctoral students engaged with both their colleagues and their own research. The very real levels of personal investment and interest in the summer school's overarching themes were tangible in each of the presentations I had the opportunity to hear and from every single person I had the pleasure of interacting with.

Experts, professors, researchers from the faculties of humanities, law, political, social and economic sciences shared their at times contrasting often transversally connected ideas, on the cosmopolitan realities of today's world. Their lively discussions on global governance and international affairs chimed in with the background noises of a city where over 22 International Organizations gather on a daily basis to take globally significant decisions.



The Summer School gathered some 20 Early Stage Researchers and over a dozen academics from across the social sciences

Geneva has consistently proven to be a hub of international governance. As early as the 16th century, the city emerged as a safe-haven for numerous Protestants thinkers persecuted during the Reformation period, first and foremost among whom J. Calvin. This welcoming tradition and Swiss neutrality provided the fertile environment for the country in general, and Geneva in particular, to emerge as one of the favored home for the headquarters of numerous international organizations. As such the city has become one of the global nodes of the complex multi-level governance system that was discussed and unpacked at this year's Summer School.

As the summer school participants arrived in Geneva in the first days of July they were met by a sun-drenched city of Geneva peppered with various construction sites as great care and energy is still invested in renovating, renewing and securing the headquarters of the many international organizations. These reconstruction and development efforts targeted at the brick and mortar headquarters of many central organizations of trans-border governance today, echo the need for reconstruction and renewal throughout the landscape of today's global governance provisions. As it emerged as a central theme of the summer school, the capacity of international organizations to respond to the need for greater flexibility and adaptation in light of new emerging trends will largely determine their continued relevance. Key in this respect are the changing meaning of sovereignty, participation and (social) justice.

The emergence of non-state actors creates a more complex governance system, re-shaping the relationship between national governments and international bodies with overlapping pressures coming from various more-or-less institutionalized actors. In a context where social and political processes transcend borders, the growing complexity born from the proliferation of international institutions, emerges as a common thread running through many issue we deal with when discussing the externalization of European governance and the internalization of global imperatives. Accordingly, when considering the European union's position and actions within today's world one is also rapidly confronted with the underlying questions pertaining to evolving understandings of sovereignty, participation and (social) justice.



The growing polycentricism observed in many areas of global governance can potentially lead to problematic forms of fragmentation, be it at the global or European level; yet said polycentrism also opens up the platform for political deliberation and debate. It can lead to more issues being discussed addressed in effective ways, notably through a growing number of specialized bodies qualified to regulate and govern specific areas. Additionally, the growing complexity and technicity of governance issues can make both the global and European institutions seem distant, which in turn only increases the need in my eyes to raise ever greater awareness on such European and global issues among citizens so that they might join

the aforementioned platforms for political deliberations on the European and global stages.

In conclusion, a reflection on the etymology of 'proliferating' which comes from the Latin for "rapid and disordered reproduction, multiplication and diffusion of facts, phenomena or institutions" which brings with it obvious challenges for Europe as a whole, be it for its constituent Nation States or the European Union. Over these few days in Geneva I witnessed one of the necessary responses to this challenging situation: effective dialogue – i.e. a desire to confront each other in order to improve, talk and exchange ideas with the aim of reframing the European Union in a changing global environment. It is a challenge but it is also an opportunity, born from the continuous confrontation that should animate the core of European action: to create new connections, new exchanges and opportunities, like the one given to me to travel, thanks to the Erasmus project, and take part in different deliberative platforms where to discuss and reflect on sovereignty, participation and (social) justice in today's world.



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