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The Rise of Local Politics: A Global Review

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Abstract

Not all politics is local. Not even local politics is necessarily local. The reemergence of local politics is not comparable to the nationalization of politics but is rather an element making multilevel policies more or less interconnected. This global review (not including North America) suggests that the rise of local politics is explained by three set of processes—(*a*) democratization, including protest, (*b*) economic globalization, urbanization, and the deepening of territorial inequalities, and (*c*) decentralization or deconcentration and the rise of local governance and policies. The rise of local politics is not a revival of the past but an element of the politics of scale taking. All over the world, local politics is increasingly about policies, governance, and political choice.

FROM LOCAL TO STATE AND BACK TO LOCAL?

The reemergence of local politics implies a temporal dimension. Historically, most of the ancient world was composed of villages, hence communities with some sort of collective institutions and traditional forms of participation, whatever that meant at various historical points. Over time, the idea of local politics became associated with the rise of the state. From that perspective, China, with more than 2,000 years of core territory and successive dynasties, provides a unique vantage point over the origins of local politics.

The early construction of walls was essential to distinguish the first cities from the myriad villages within the Chinese empire. Initially, conflicts arose between the courts surrounding the emperor and the administrators sent to govern the provinces, i.e., early forms of central–local relations reinforced by the strength and cultural diversity of various provinces. The role of cities was to serve the emperor, but different types of autonomy increasingly formed as a result of trade. Local jurisdictions usually included rural and urban areas. Local politics was often about fiscal issues and local self-management (Rowe 2013, p. 310). Local politics is a long-term feature of the Chinese state, a state more associated with local administration under government control than political decentralization.

Historically, local politics is usually urban. One may think of the Greek *polis*, where citizens (narrowly defined) participated not only in decision making but also in collective work, the corporation, the municipality or the republican city, and then, gradually, in local government. In *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism*, historian Paul Veyne (1992) portrays the competition of interdependent groups that characterized urban political pluralism in ancient Rome, as well as the importance of local public goods, infrastructures, services, taxation, and the republican oligarchy that challenged the de facto sovereignty of citizens.

When the modern state emerged, it became the natural unit of analysis for the study of politics, including institutions, war, political behavior, parties or the welfare state, and the relation between markets and politics. Modern social science in the late nineteenth century focused on the making or consolidation of the state and the making of modern industrial societies. A large body of political science is still today profoundly rooted in "methodological nationalism" (Wimmer et al. 2002) within particular nation-states and their intellectual traditions. Historians and theorists have discussed at length the rise of states together with the gradual autonomous separation of the political sphere or field. With the nationalization of politics, the study of parties, elections, institutions, policies, and societies became a major field of research in Europe, in the Americas, and (after successive decolonization waves) in other parts of the world.

Once the modern European states consolidated, at a time of intense industrialization and urbanization, the term local politics was quickly employed either to describe the resistance of the rural world against urban lives in Southern Europe or France or to sing the praise of local communities that were de facto largely destroyed by the enclosures in England. In Weberian terms, the closure of the state borders and the development of interdependence between social groups paved the way for the nationalization of politics and for the erosion of local political systems, a process reinforced by market mechanisms and the increasing role of the state. In Mann's (1997) words, the state steadfastly "caged" society through warfare and welfare, thereby generating the nationalization of politics. In Europe and in the United States (Caramani 2004, Morgenstern 2017) a body of robust empirical research identified processes of the nationalization of politics in terms of political parties, elections, and national cleavages progressively replacing their territorial counterparts. In the vast literature about the state and national integration, the work of Stein Rokkan was unique as he emphasized the partial integration of the state and the role of territories in state building (Rokkan & Unwin 1983).

In other parts of the world, the colonial inheritance rendered the nationalization process fragile and contested. Local politics there was often defined in terms of exclusion, of the access and rights of different categories of population (often defined by ethnic identities) to infrastructures, policing, control, clientelism, elites, violence and protest, and party mobilization. At first glance, therefore, "local politics" conveys a slightly old-fashioned representation similar to "periphery" (Tarrow 1977). The famous characterization that "all politics is local" reminds political scientists of machine politics and corruption, rural villages and traditional societies, ethnic and cultural diversity, or peripheries lagging behind national modernization or development.

Local Politics: The Politics of Scale

For four decades, the shape of national politics and the structuring of politics through central-local relations has been deeply contested. Consequently, we observe the reemergence of local politics embedded in a more globalized and interdependent world. This trend seems even more robust when detailed research beyond the usual US–Europe suspects is taken into account. The reemergence of local politics has to be understood in relation to the rearticulation of scale, the politics of scale and horizontal relations, a theme developed by critical and political geographers (Agnew 2013, Cox 1997). The control of territory by states is being undermined as national societies and firms are more disconnected from state spatiality and the cycle of globalization that started in the early 1980s and unsettles the "container-like qualities of the state" (Brenner 2003, p. 40). Instead of simply local politics, scholars nowadays emphasize the salience of urban politics (Post 2018); intergovernmental relations and multilevel governance (Hooghe & Marks 2003); new regionalism and territorial politics (Keating 2008); and even the dialectical "glocalization," the global versus the local (Swyngedouw 2004). The conception of local politics has been undermined especially by critical geographers who work on spatial frames independent of political jurisdictions and whose work implicitly criticizes the reification of the local at a time of general urbanization (Harvey 1987), a concern heightened by anthropological research that stresses context, micro relations, alternative political orders beyond statehood, and the politics of everyday life (Bouziane et al. 2013).

The scholarly question about the reemergence of local politics is closely associated with the debate about the denationalization political authority (Genschel & Zangl 2014, King & Le Galès 2017), the "uncaging of society" (Mann 1997) and the making of multilevel governance systems (Hooghe & Marks 2003, Sellers et al. 2020). Local politics is one dimension of the reemergence of territories in an intellectual agenda driven in part by globalization processes, together with intellectual projects to conceptualize politics beyond the state (Agnew 2013). This resurgence of local politics signals an agenda of research in terms of policy and spatial differentiation; local autonomy; and the multiplication of political regulations, formal and informal, that political scientists have been late to take into account.[1]

Local Politics and Interdisciplinary Wealth

This article suggests that political scientists were not at the forefront of the analysis of the reemergence of local politics, as they mainly studied it using the central–local framework. In addition, as local politics became more and more urban, political scientists were slower to consider

[1]The extensive American literature on local politics, urban politics, and the governance of the commons is not included because it has been widely reviewed (Mossberger et al. 2015).

the implications of the massive urbanization processes due to the relative disembeddedness of the urban political world from the state world (Le Galès 2017, Magnusson 2013).

By contrast, anthropologists, historians, sociologists, and critical geographers (along with some political scientists) have shed light on formal and informal local political processes in India, Africa, and South America, as well as in Europe. They have enlarged the conception of local politics beyond central–local relations, formal conflict resolution mechanisms, local elections, and the delivery of services. Local politics is an institutionalized political space, articulated in relation to a particular social structure, possibly based upon communities and social and ethnic groups organized through networks and mobilization. The territorial site of local politics is the place of diverse and intense political activities that are more or less structured by governance mechanisms, policy implementation and policy failure, collective action, organized actors, and protest. Local politics regularly includes protest against the state, with the mobilization of rural and urban social movements alike seeking alternative and informal forms of politics, sometimes against the elites of the state. Local politics is also about day-to-day experience, including interaction with public authorities (police, social services, transport, health services) on the one hand and illegal and/or informal activities (squatters, illegal markets, corruption) on the other, which are all connected to the exercise of authority and conflicts. Urban politics in particular is characterized by Magnusson (2013, p. 109) as "proximate diversity, complicated patterns of government and self-government, a multiplicity of authorities in different registers, the infinite deferral of sovereignty, self-organization, and an emergent order, that, though chaotic, is by no means anarchic."

This article first argues that the reemergence of local politics began in the 1970s, when post-1968 social groups mobilized in social movements and invested in local politics to look for alternatives to state authority, the industrial society, and political parties. They also defended the democratization of decision making against bureaucracies, dictatorship, and powerful economic interests in Europe, Latin America, Korea, and India. Local politics became increasingly conflictual and politicized. Second, this article shows how the reemergence of local politics is connected to the transformation of capitalism and the contemporary political economy. The third industrial revolution creates new territorial inequalities, fosters urbanization, and promotes the making of "superstar cities" with left-behind territories (Le Galès & Pierson 2019). The increasing traction of local politics grows in tandem with the reversal of the historical economic convergence between regions within countries. Urbanization and globalization have massively increased territorial inequalities within countries, prompting social mobilization, protest, and resentment. Finally, the long-term trend of various types of decentralization has opened new arenas and allocated more resources to local governments, increasing the importance of local politics and governance. All over the world, local politics is increasingly about policies, governance, and political choice.

DEMOCRATIZATION, PROTEST, AND ALTERNATIVE LOCAL POLITICS

The reemergence of local politics became a theme in the late 1970s in Western Europe and then in Latin America, Korea, and Eastern Europe following the rise of the post-1968 generation looking for political alternatives at the local level. One mechanism at play outside Europe was the mobilization of social movements at the local level against the state, contributing to the politicization of local politics. The autonomy of local politics from the center often provides opportunities and political space to protest, explaining the anxieties of rulers from Napoleon to communist parties in Eastern Europe, as well as in contemporary China, in many African semiauthoritarian regimes, in Indonesia at the time of Suharto's new order, and in Latin America during the reign of the generals. Analyzing communist Eastern Europe, Nelson (1980) stressed

the irony of the governments' attempts to mobilize the population, to foster participation at the local level, and even to engage in decentralization reforms, while limiting by all means dynamics of politicization and risk of protest. This irony is still relevant in many authoritarian regimes.

Local Politics Within and Against the State in Europe

The economic crisis of the 1970s, along with environmental and regionalist ideas, attracted young people who later became active in local politics on the left, feeding protest and opposition to central governments and politicizing local government. Change in central–local relations, a major theme of European political science, was a consequence of both these local mobilizations and the fiscal crisis of the state (Goldsmith & Page 2010, Rhodes & Wright 1987).

In Europe, local politics developed into a subfield of research. Local politics was envisaged as part of central–local politics. Page (1991) neatly and comparatively defined the legal and political elements of localism and centralism. "Local" was associated with local government and the capacity of local elites, within the national polity, to represent their communities and to give direction, and to influence and implement policies. In the south of Europe, including Italy and France, the label "local politics" was combined with *territorio* or *territoires* in order to stress history, daily practices, inheritance of social structures and institutions, the memory of past events, and political access to the center rather than local government. By contrast, in the United Kingdom and Northern Europe, territory was hardly mentioned and was not understood (except Bulpitt 1983). Local government was more prominent due to the tradition of self-government, but political debate at the local level was marginal.

Within this framework, local politics was conceptualized in terms of local government, interest group competition, and pluralism, with the local political process expressed on two dimensions: first, the leftovers of nationalization processes—led by elites, institutions, wars, political parties, and market-making mechanisms; and second, the more or less depoliticized arena of competition for local government. In the first meaning of the term, local (or regional) politics suggested cultural economic backwardness, inheritance from the past, and the mobilization of groups creating distinctive political arenas in an effort to resist nationalization processes. In the second meaning, local government was an ambiguous type of political organization, rooted within a national political system in order to deliver goods and services and to implement national policies (King & Pierre 1990). The world of local politics comprised local bureaucracies as extensions of national bureaucracies with some autonomy, more or less democratic over time. Simultaneously, local government reflected the choices of citizens and communities, with local participation shaping debates, ideas, and policies while helping resolve conflicts and direct local priorities. In classic liberal theory—for instance, for John Stuart Mill or Alexis de Tocqueville—local democratic politics brought together communities where citizens could express local needs. It fostered the education and participation of citizens and could be instrumental against the dark forces of the centralizing state.

In Europe, the revival of the local perspective was led by sociologists, particularly in Italy and France in the 1970s, later in the United Kingdom. The understanding of the local was redefined in contrast to the rich vein of sociological community studies in the United States and the United Kingdom, in particular following Tönnies's [1957 (1887)] famous *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* dichotomy, translated as community/society. Although Tönnies imagined the coexistence of the two, most social scientists of his time (Marx and Weber among others) predicted the end of local communities with the rise of capitalism and the modernist European nation-state. In Italy, a generation of scholars developed an original intellectual tradition combining political economy and sociology that was in part a reaction to Banfield's (1958) classic characterization of Italy as a "backward society." In the Weberian and Polanyan tradition, Bagnasco (1977), Trigilia (1986), and

Mingione (1993) compared different localities in Italy and then in Europe to show, beyond government and parties, the local dynamics combining networks of small firms, state failures, family relations, clientelism, informal relations, middle classes, noneconomic sources of economic development, the governance of poverty, and local welfare. Rather than talking about locality, they deployed the language of "territory" as a way to untangle the question of territory from the question of the state and to think about local politics within but beyond the state. Their approach undermined the nationalization of politics and emphasized local social and political regulations and autonomy.

In France, a second wave of original research rehabilitated the local in opposition to the community studies tradition and the statist tradition. A vast research program explained the entanglements of the local and national politics in France, the limits of national politics, and the dynamics of local politics and politicians at the heart of the French political system tersely labeled "tamed Jacobinism" (Grémion 1976). A different conception of local politics emerged: It was not merely the leftovers of national politics but particular systems of power relations possessing their own dynamics and autonomy. That particular research influenced the transformation of central–local relation studies into the study of intragovernmental relations between organizations, connected for example by policy networks in the case of Britain (Rhodes 1988).

In France, after 1968, the expansion of the welfare state created many job opportunities in the public sector for scores of students. Lower middle classes from the public sector became the innovative social group of the 1970s, inventing new cultural practices and new gender relations, influenced by the ecologist movement. Many decided to live in rural areas and small towns and were mobilized in community organizations and local politics, armed with an ideology prioritizing the local; "*Vivre et travailler au pays*," i.e., "to live and to work in your local village," was their rallying cry. Geographers and sociologists wrote about "the end of the city" (Chombart de Lauwe 1982). The local—meaning the world of small towns and rural areas—was politicized by new conflicts between modernist farmers and ecologist newcomers, a story repeated in many countries. Against the dominant Marxist sociology of the time, and the statist view of French political scientists, in 1978 a group of sociologists started a comparative research program about "localities" in different parts of France (OCS 1987). These scholars stressed the key role of this new young social group in reshaping local politics not only in small towns but also in cities, ultimately training new political elites from the left. This transformation paved the way for the movement of decentralization reforms adopted by the national left-wing government after 1981, which included many local mayors.

The reemergence of local politics was therefore the result of the strategies of the post-1968 generation looking for alternatives. From there, political scientists developed new research on central–local relations, the circulation of political elites from local to national and vice versa, and the differentiation of local political regulation in different regions across European countries (Balme et al. 1994). But urbanization struck back. After 1981, the world of local politics became mostly urban, with the rise of regional capital cities enjoying considerable demographic and economic growth.

The Rise of Urban Social Movements

The rise of urban social movements also followed the 1968 upheaval in Europe, particularly in Germany, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland (Castells 1983, Pickvance 2003). The surge was part of a movement to democratize politics at the local urban level. It was rooted in the contestation of the capitalist structuring of the city. Urban social movements argued for urban political changes. They were defined as collective mobilization of urban populations (distinct from political parties), aiming to change policies, oppose urban planning operations and projects, and defend

their interests and their neighborhoods by means of a wide range of actions. They put forward issues of collective consumption, inequalities, and public services; articulated demands in terms of quality of life, opposition to planned physical changes, and the search for transparency and democratic participation in local government; and mounted challenges to existing elected representatives and parties. Urban or local social movements trained a number of activists who went on to become leaders of socialist or ecologist parties in many parts of Europe in the 1980s. They brought new ideas and politicized local government from Sweden to Spain.

In the United Kingdom, the same dynamic was at play, but the centralization movement initiated by the Thatcher government after 1981 gave rise to ferocious political conflicts. The generation of post-1968 activists had become active in urban politics. In London, Sheffield, the West Midlands, and Liverpool, this new urban left tried to implement forms of "local socialism" against the Thatcher government, politicizing issues of local economic development, gay rights, gender equality, and discrimination (Gyford 1985). The reemergence of local politics in the United Kingdom first took place within the central–local framework, but the 1980s conflict generated mobilization, protest, politicization of issues, and the search for local political alternatives. The radical neoliberal prime minister Margaret Thatcher abolished the Greater London Council controlled by her nemesis, the socialist Ken Livingstone, while structurally undermining the power, tax resources, and autonomy of local government (King 1989).

United Kingdom geographers and sociologists initiated comparative research programs on localities, mostly urban, in order to analyze social, economic, and political localization processes, i.e., how some social groups and some economic and political activities became relatively autonomous from the national level and were organized around local rules and resources (Cooke 1989, Harloe et al. 1988). Local politics was low politics but related to the decline of local communities, (working-class) local mobilization, policy failures, and the perhaps abortive search for local economic development. Mobilizations against the state by actors ranging from squatters to environmentalists took hold at the local level, both rural and urban, and fed the dynamics of contest and politicization of the local level (sometimes regional). In the authoritarian regimes of Spain, Portugal, and Greece in the 1970s, those movements proved crucial to the democratization process.

Democratization Waves and New Openings for Local Politics

The dynamics of local politics supported by strong urban social movements did not last in Western Europe.[2] Yet social movements, sometimes class-based, sometimes locally based, with close links to left-wing parties, were crucial in contesting South American military dictatorships (Goldfrank 2011) as well as regimes in Korea in the 1960s and 1970s and in Africa in the late 2000s (Branch & Mampilly 2015). Some movements were class-based, some antiausterity, and some were specifically urban social movements protesting housing conditions in barrios and favelas in most large Latin American cities. Dynamics of mobilization supported the rise of left-wing urban governments, for instance, in Brazil (Baiocchi 2003).

Democratization in different countries led to the opening of new political spaces, in particular at the local level, that fostered the dynamics of local politics. However, from the 1980s onward, this was not just a central–local game. Rather, it was quite comparable to processes of globalization, the denationalization of authority, and the localization of politics and identity making. Local civil society organizations have moved beyond national politics to develop horizontal connections across

[2] By contrast, urban social movements became more widespread in Eastern Europe, for instance in Prague and East Berlin.

borders at the local level and also to connect vertically with international organizations from developmental banks to transnational nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and social movements.

The rise of local and urban social movements challenging parties (though linked to them in loose ways), as a key force in the reemergence of local politics, was also crucial—especially in Latin America, secondarily in parts of Asia and Africa, and to some degree in Eastern and Southern Europe (Schuurman & Van Naerssen 2013). Nonlinear and incomplete processes of democratization (Geddes 1999) have created the conditions for the strengthening and the vigorous politicization of local politics (Harriss et al. 2004). In numerous cases, the democratization process has been associated with forms of decentralization in local politics because it allowed opportunity to protest, for instance in the case of austerity cuts or food riots in Casablanca or in Latin America (Walton & Seddon 1994), urban development projects bringing together the repression of the state and aggressive private developers in Korea (Shin 2018), and later grassroots mobilization in postcommunist Eastern Europe (Jacobsson 2015).

The democratization waves of the last 30 years or so have sometimes led to the rise of oligarchies, for instance in Asian cities and localities, comprising public and private actors enriching themselves through land acquisition in rural areas, privatizations of public assets, evictions, and the displacement of informal housing to build middle-class housing and equipment (Shatkin 2017). The local politics of protest has mobilized against the privatization of infrastructures in Chile, the mismanagement of infrastructures in Beyrouth, shopping mall construction requiring the eviction of the population in poor areas of Mumbai and Johannesburg, and urban mega-projects for the cosmopolitan rich elites in Lagos and Luanda. Scholars of the Arab Spring also had to revisit local politics to understand the overall dynamics (Bouziane et al. 2013).

The local political life of many metropolises is based upon conflicts and mobilizations about mixed neighborhoods and race; contestation with the police about the use of public space by drug users; and interethnic, religious, xenophobic, and class conflicts (Blaser Mapitsa 2018). These struggles include both the most progressive and the most conservative interest groups and mobilization agendas.

Changing the Lens: Rediscovering Local Politics in Africa

Focusing on African politics, a group of political scientists trained in history has tried to go beyond limitations of the traditional political science and anthropology literature (Fourchard 2020). Protest and democratization have also changed the way scholars look at local politics. In Africa in particular, transcending the anthropologists' interest in tribalism and simple case studies, scholars have looked at the making of the postcolonial state. A good deal of the literature about local politics focuses on rural politics in particular because of the ambiguities and conflicts over land use and land ownership that have been growing over time (Lund 2008). According to Boone (2014), land tenure regimes are the pillar of the making of the rural political order and local political arenas. Scholars also emphasize the overlapping of various state agencies, local government, local traditional authorities, local associations and organizations more or less recognized by public authorities, quasi-vigilante groups, traditional chiefs, all sorts of local associations, family networks, religious authorities, and individuals variously related to law enforcement. Competition between them can result in the making of "twilight institutions" (Lund 2006, p. 686).

These researchers are inspired in part by historians and anthropologists who have revisited African history with a focus on local and urban politics articulating national government, local political dynamics, and colonial rule (Cooper 1983, Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan 2003). They criticize a political science literature that had studied African politics and local politics with concepts and methods directly derived from Europe or the United States. This led to the never-ending

list of alleged failures—characterized as imperfect democracy, violence, or chaos—that mostly reflect a normative view ignoring the political trajectory of Africa, its social and ethnic groups, and the legacy of colonialism. These accounts do not follow the neo-Marxist overarching perspective on the neoliberalization of local politics. However, they also distinguish themselves from classic anthropology, with its immense variety and emphasis on the uniqueness of each experience, and from a simple postcolonial perspective, including the attempt of intellectual entrepreneurs to reject existing theories in order to reinvent social science and political science by including the Global South and praising new localism.

African local politics has to be understood with respect to globalization trends, historical trajectories, central–local relations, and local and urban governance. In terms of methods, scholars have developed comparative subnational research, comparing various urban or rural settings in different African countries. Local policies provoke protests and mobilization that are rarely acknowledged within the depoliticizing agenda and discourse of international organizations and NGOs. Beyond grassroots movements, comparative local/urban political research shows the role of party politics in the everyday life of cities and rural areas. Beyond analysis of local politics in terms of clientelism, local politics in Africa is characterized by the mobilization of different groups (ethnic, social, or religious) by political parties and political entrepreneurs mostly within cities, and by strong political competition between parties. The policy side has also gained attention with the importance of the surveillance and control of the population, and of policing activities, day-to-day interactions with different bureaucracies, the strategic use of traditional authority (the chief) or the legal court system, religious institutions, and the politicization of infrastructures and services. Local politics is less about electoral behavior or participation to express preferences and more about the governance of cities in particular, the mobilization of different groups, conflict-solving mechanisms, circulation of population, and policies and instruments to include or exclude different groups (Bekker & Fourchard 2013). Exclusion, police, violence, riots, gangs, poverty, and slums are contemporary dimensions of local politics that are not limited to the African context. Within slums, collective mobilization of low-income groups has been a resource for protest movements and dominant political parties alike. The rise of multiparty elections in many African countries and local mobilization at the neighborhood level has given a voice to the urban poor and raised the importance of local, often urban politics. Various types of brokers between local leaders, party branches, and segments of the bureaucracy have specialized and developed specific political roles to mobilize people for elections or enroll them in protest activities.

These themes echo a large body of research about urban and local politics in India (Desai & Sanyal 2012). Beyond the clichés of India as a republic of villages, a large body of anthropology has analyzed communities and villages, sometimes at the risk of reifying the local community, self-government, and traditional forms of authority. Research progressively moved into the articulation between traditional local institutions (villages), representatives from the state bureaucracy, and local elected institutions (Jayal et al. 2006). As in Africa, the interest in local politics has shifted in two directions: (*a*) the hybridization between traditional structures of authority and the legal institutional apparatus of government and (*b*) the rise of local and urban governance.

GLOBALIZATION, URBAN CAPITALISM, INEQUALITIES: A POLITICAL ECONOMY OF LOCAL POLITICS AND TERRITORIAL INEQUALITIES

There is now increasing evidence that the post-1989 transformation of capitalism should be analyzed as a third industrial revolution combining (*a*) a wave of far-reaching technological innovations comparable to the second industrial revolution of the 1860s; (*b*) a shift to globalization processes, particularly trade; (*c*) the financialization of the economy; (*d*) a restructuring

of the labor market benefiting the highly skilled workforce; and (*e*) the rise of inequalities and the concentration of wealth for the super-rich. Unsurprisingly, beneath those forces, there is a major reshuffling of territorial production of wealth, inequalities, and poverty. Some parts of the world (mostly in Asia) have enjoyed considerable growth and increased their wealth while others dealt with contrasting evolutions. In particular, two major transformations are significant to this reemergence of local politics: the urbanization cycle, including the making of superstar cities (Le Galès & Pierson 2019); and increasing divergence between regions and territories within states, further evidence of the declining territoriality of the state, i.e., the capacity of the state to exercise its authority on a given territory. The reemergence of local politics is in part a response to increasing territorial inequalities.

The global economic crisis of the 1970s and early 1980s entailed the industrial decline of entire regions in Europe and in the United States, while industrial productions boomed in China, Asia, and Latin America. At first, some hoped that the local scale might become the alternative to industrial towns and cities. In Italy, Bagnasco's (1977) research on the "three Italies" identified different types of social and political regulation—social and political formations, in their words—to understand local politics rooted in their own social and economic systems, distinct from the national scale. Local politics became increasingly central in scholars' work on industrial districts, where local politics (including parties) and governance sustained production and helped to explain differences among localities and regions in Italy and beyond (Burroni 2005). In this tradition of research, local politics was mostly about small and medium-sized Italian cities and the countryside surrounding them within regions. This approach became very influential, not only all over Europe and in Latin America but also in the United States (Piore & Sabel 1984). Economic geographers led the way in identifying various forms of local innovation clusters, fostered to some extent by local politics, from California's Silicon Valley to the furniture networks in Denmark, the movie industry in Los Angeles, the City of London, and the high-tech district of Bangalore. Over time, scholars emphasized the role of local formal and informal institutions, public policies, and elites' networks and often used the vague language of partnership and governance to include some political processes.

With the exception of the Italian case, the role of local districts in global capitalism during the 1980s remained limited in Europe (Crouch et al. 2004). The local became predominantly urban. A massive movement of urbanization took place with the rise of cities and metropolises in Asia, particularly in China and India, and later in Africa. The majority of the world became urban, with fast-growing metropolises and small cities (also in Africa) and the urban revival in Europe and later in the United States (Storper & Manville 2006). Beyond the spectacular rise of very large metropolises with several dozen million inhabitants—Tokyo, Delhi, Shanghai, São Paulo, Mexico City, Cairo, and tomorrow Lagos or Kinshasa—most of the urbanization takes place in mid-sized metropolises or small towns and cities. In already largely urbanized parts of the world, cities and metropolises that did not face industrial decline enjoy economic and demographic growth. This is surprising, since the turn to the local in the 1970s was explicitly anti–big city, and many cities faced demographic stagnation or decline (including London and Paris), not to mention the spectacular bankruptcy of New York.

This reemergence of local politics as urban politics is partly explained by the competition between cities, often fostered by the state to attract capital and educated populations (Harvey 1989), which leads to more or less entrepreneurial urban modes of governance or regimes well known in urban politics (Le Galès 2002, Stone 2005).

Rapid urbanization is related to, but not solely explained by, the transformation of capitalism through globalization. In short, the growth of metropolises, especially in the United States and Europe but also in Asia, was related to the rise of high-skilled jobs in finance and in technological

sectors and services. The transformation of the labor market and the urbanization of this new capitalism led to the massive concentration of skilled labor and wealth creation in global cities (Sassen 2001), and also in a large number of mid-sized cities such as San Francisco, Stockholm, Bangalore, Monterrey, and Vancouver, which further attracted finance, visitors, investment, and skilled labor. Over time, this dynamic has created important inequalities between regions and between territories within countries. As Kemeny & Storper (2020) demonstrate, after 1945, interregional inequalities decreased quite dramatically in the United States (similar evidence exists in many European countries and China). But divergence has increased and interregional inequalities have flourished especially since the 1980s, a period characterized by the making of superstar cities and left-behind territories (Le Galès & Pierson 2019).

Those inequalities are reflected in a different set of indicators including housing. National average price variation is increasingly vapid. In some localities and some regions, prices have gone down. In superstar cities, prices have rocketed, not in line with the average income but in line with the increasing income of the college-educated population and property. This mechanism can be found in New York and Los Angeles, of course, but also in Lisbon, Prague, Seoul, and Beijing. Massive inequalities have also developed within those superstar metropolises with an important population of poorly paid workers, migrants, illegal workers, part-time workers, and struggling lower middle classes.

Those interregional inequalities and the rise of prosperous cities and urban regions combined with the decline of others (as indicated by loss of jobs and decreases in residents' income, assets, and life expectancy) to institutionalize a new, territorially based cleavage between the educated middle class, located mostly in dynamic cities, and the declining working class, located in former industrial small towns and mid-sized cities. Essentially, we see the territorialization of the cleavage between the winners and losers of globalization identified by Kriesi et al. (2008; see also Ford & Jennings 2020). The 2016 US election, like the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom and the more recent elections in Poland and Brazil, revealed profound territorial differences contributing to the rise of antiurban populism and conflictual local politics.

The differentiation of cities and metropolises is also social. Services and highly skilled populations are concentrated in cities and metropolises, leading to sometimes differentiated political behavior, influenced by more liberal or cosmopolitan values. In contrast to national responses and attitudes, the inhabitants of metropolises may be more inclined to support both the development of redistributive social policies and the reception of migrants and refugees. Bauböck (2019) imaginatively envisages forms of urban citizenship complementary to national citizenship to give rights to transients, mobile people, and migrants. Long a classic theme for American politics, this question of the integration of migrants within cities (and sometimes smaller towns), and the conflicts around it, is now a global issue. Its resolution contributes to the politicization and the dynamics of urban policies in Osaka, Dakar, and Johannesburg and throughout Europe (Kraal & Vertovec 2017).

Urban citizenship thus illustrates how local politics becomes urban politics connected to transnational issues. But it is a contested landscape. Elites also have more bellicose agendas. Many metropolitan elites promote extreme surveillance and segregation of the poor, the privatization of common goods, and speculation. Other activists seek progressive forms of radical local democracy (e.g., in Porto Alegre, Barcelona, and Delhi) to attain better natural resource management and the integration and protection of migrants through opposition to the national state by designating sanctuary cities (Bauder 2017).

However, demographic growth does not always go together with economic development. In many poorer countries, the large metropolis does not coincide with strong economic development and wealth creation, but rather with overcrowding, a lack of infrastructure, and illegal and informal labor market activities. In Bogota, Dakar, Djakarta, and Lagos, there are undoubtedly

some elements of economic development comparable to other large metropolises, including the attraction of a new young population, the abundance of capital (for some precise corners of the megapolis), and the development of transnational connections. But large groups of the population are living in informal settlements, with little infrastructure, scanty services, and high levels of violence and poverty. Informal urbanization is the most important growth dynamic in particular in African and Asian cities like Dhaka in Bangladesh, Cairo, Lima, and Manila; but refugees, informal migrants, and floating populations are also part of the urban settings in Los Angeles, Shanghai, and Paris. The informal city is a major part of any city (Fischer et al. 2014, Simone 2014). Political processes also take place in slums, including choice of brokers and party mobilizations, as in India (Auerbach 2016).

The privatization and liberalization of the economy (whether or not neoliberal) promoted by major international organizations and large transnational firms have at times reinforced the resources and political capacity of those firms to influence local politics and to develop major industrial or real estate projects, which in turn led to the rise of rural or urban movements against those powerful groups. The liberalization of the economy, for instance in some African countries and in India, has also weakened clientelist links between villages or urban neighborhoods representatives and state representatives or political parties. Consequently, Fourchard (2020) identifies different forms of territorialization of politics. In engaged neighborhoods, autonomous political organizations and rules are created, which contribute to a distinct reterritorialization of politics, and forms of local politics that break with the classic models of central–local relations. By contrast, the urbanization process with the triumph of (some) cities also garners opposition. In rapidly urbanizing countries, different forms of rural politics are gaining salience by opposing land grabbing, the privatization and financialization of land or water, the displacement of people, or the making of infrastructures usually initiated by groups of entrepreneurs, bankers, and state representatives. In China and India, the classic understanding of local politics in rural areas is shifting as a result of social change and decentralization or deconcentration reforms (Roy 2013). Similarly, the use of funds for development projects is increasingly debated, even in rural China, though within the limits set by the Communist Party (Tsai 2007).

DECENTRALIZATION REFORMS CONTRIBUTE TO THE TERRITORIALIZATION OF GOVERNANCE AND THE SALIENCE OF LOCAL POLITICS

Decentralization Waves

Scores of decentralization reforms all over the world have opened new arenas for democratic local politics. Local governments have acquired more resources, and elections take place for all sorts of local officials, including mayors.

For four decades, several waves of decentralization (in the 1980s in Latin America and Europe, in the 1990s in Africa) have been characterized as a quiet but resilient revolution combining decentralization, deconcentration of central government's administration and budgets, federalism, devolution, and the emergence (or revival) of local government and local politics in about 750,000 municipalities in the world. According to OECD and SNG-WOFI,[3] subnational governments account for 24% of public expenditure and 37% of public investment in the world. In OECD countries, the figures are 40% and 57%, respectively, and are slightly higher within the

[3] The World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment (SNG-WOFI) initiative covers dozens of indicators for more than 100 countries (**http://www.sng-wofi.org**).

European Union. Decentralization reforms have become a veritable industry; the vast majority of countries have initiated some form of decentralization or deconcentration. Preparing the next decentralization reform has become a permanent feature of most democracies, indeed a lodestar for many politicians.

Decentralization reforms aim for numerous political goals: to improve accountability and reduce corruption; to increase political competition, thus making politicians more responsive to citizens' preference; to increase the effectiveness of policy implementation; to enable citizen participation in the policy process (Selee & Peruzzotti 2009); to prevent authoritarian temptations in central government; to stabilize democracies; and to improve the quality of public expenditure and the fairness of the fiscal system (Faguet 2014, Grindle 2007). However, almost as common as enthusiasts for reforms are the doubters whose work identifies signs of failure and even contradictory consequences of decentralization reforms in different contexts and at different times (Bardhan & Mookherjee 2006, Cheema & Rondinelli 2007).

Four explanations interpret this chaotic record of decentralization/deconcentration reforms in different parts of the world. First, decentralization has been seen in many contexts as a way to prevent the government's concentration of authority and reduce the risk of authoritarianism. From Brazil to Greece, South Africa to India or Poland, decentralization reforms accompanied the transition toward democracy. Second, international organizations from the World Bank to the European Union to United Cities and Local Governments have long been active supporters of decentralization reforms, following the rise of new public management theory, a means to achieve leaner and more efficient public administration. The World Bank conditioned its loans upon governance decentralization, with a huge impact in Latin America and later in Africa. Negotiating its enlargement with 10 new member states joining in 2004, the European Union required far-reaching decentralization reforms and drove a very strong reemergence of local politics in Central and Eastern Europe (Swianiewicz 2014). The pressure to decentralize was also reinforced by numerous NGOs, as decentralization and the strengthening of local government facilitated their access to decision making.

Third, decentralization reforms have often been initiated by state elites with two goals in mind. One was to decentralize shortcomings: to shift blame (for economic crisis, for lack of healthcare funding, etc.) and to offload some responsibilities and budgets, often social services, to lower tiers of government in order to protect their own legitimacy (Pickvance & Préteceille 1991, Loughlin et al. 2012). More generally, many decentralization measures come in the aftermath of severe economic and social crisis. In Indonesia, the decentralization reforms following the demise of the Suharto regime were seen in part as a strategy to withdraw from the economic and social crisis (Schulte Nordholt & van Klinken 2007). That was also the case in Italy, France, and many African countries (Dickovick & Wunsch 2014). Such reforms may slightly reinforce local governments, but they also reinforce state actors' capacity to exercise control at a distance. In some cases, decentralization is explicitly initiated to allow for some local autonomy and to strengthen an authoritarian regime (Boone 2003), for instance in Iran (Tajbakhsh 2020). Finally, some federalism and decentralization reforms were designed to manage conflicts at the periphery and to drive down the risk of secession.

Whatever the reasons for these reforms and whatever the limitations and failures of their impact in many settings, most of the time they have provided opportunities for the expansion of local politics. The first result is usually a new complexity in intergovernmental relations, due to various forms of multilevel governance. Deconcentration, increased federalism, and decentralization commonly transfer some resources—funding, bureaucrats, elected officials, political legitimacy—to the local level. For national political actors such as parties, those local resources are also opportunities, hence the reterritorialization of political parties.

Local Politics: Policies, Participation, Governance

Decentralization reforms had many consequences: the territorialization of political regulation, more effective implementation of policies, the localization of parties, the empowerment of citizens. They have also led, possibly at the same time, to the making of local oligarchies and rentiers, corruption, and the waste of resources. Reforms can stimulate local governance capacity (Cabrero-Mendoza 2000) or reinforce the governmentalization of local politics, to use the concept of Michel Foucault (2007). In Europe, the rise of local autonomy and capacity, measured in fiscal, legal, and political terms, has been spectacular over the last 30 years (Denters & Rose 2005, Goldsmith & Page 2010). In China, local governments enjoy some autonomy to promote economic growth (Hsing 2010) and the creation of infrastructure. In mid-sized cities and in large metropolises, budgets have increased; policies have been implemented to improve transportation, education, health, and housing, or to remove street vendors and to build new neighborhoods. Brokers, elected politicians, experts, bureaucrats working for NGOs, development bank representatives, neighborhood groups and local communities, business organizations and trade unions, state representatives, churches, and invariably mafias are part of the incomplete reinvention of local modes of governance. As always, those local policies create clienteles and victims. They formally and informally articulate networks of actors, as Paller (2019) shows, for instance, in Ghana. Many localities and cities all over the world are now governed in part at the urban level, with implemented public policies, protests, budgets, conflicts and negotiations with the central governments, money from development banks, and implementation failures. The rise of local governance means that the access to services is also more debated and organized at the local level. For large groups, access to services is the main channel by which to be connected to politics, to know about public authority, and possibly to mobilize in order to raise the voice of the poor (Bénit-Gbaffou & Oldfield 2011, Guarneros-Meza & Geddes 2010).

Institutional reforms have opened the floor for the making of collective agency—for better or for worse. Local politics includes corrupt police, drug cartels, churches, some trade unions, rich business leaders and private developers, small mafias running the waste services, the drug market, and the informal bus system (Feltran 2020). Local governance failures are becoming increasingly important (Kersting et al. 2009).

The rise of democratic experiments, from neighborhood participations to local referendums or participatory budgeting, has attracted much interest—particularly in Latin America (Campbell 2003, Baiocchi et al. 2011), which exemplifies the wealth of local experimentation taking place in different parts of the world. Local political initiatives are not new, but ideas about the new municipalism are on the rise, reviving the ideology of localism.[4]

CONCLUSION

The reemergence of local politics is not comparable to the nationalization of politics but rather an element in the making of multilevel policies that are more or less interconnected. A first major point of this review is that three processes—(*a*) democratization, (*b*) urbanization and the third industrial revolution, and (*c*) decentralization—amplify local politics in an interconnected and rescaled world.

[4]Influenced by the writing of Murray Bookchin (1995), the left-wing "new municipalism" movement sees municipalities as places of experiment against the neoliberal trend, connected through transnational networks (as opposed to parochialism), linked to activists and social movements that want to take back control and bring back democracy. The "Fearless Cities Summit" at Barcelona in 2017 gave an international audience to the movement.

Asia might be a relative exception, since the Chinese state remains firmly in control of the local autonomy organized to foster economic development and of the competition between cities and small towns to raise revenues through development. In India, despite the decentralization reforms since the early 1990s, politics remains organized at the level of the states and the central state. Village politics seems to remain relatively traditional, and the rise of urban politics in the fast-growing cities is hampered by the lack of resources and the failing of the decentralization process. The persistence or even strengthening of authoritarian governments, for instance in Vietnam and Cambodia, limits the reemergence of local politics.

In Latin America, by contrast, the three processes that have been at play for the last three decades strengthen the reemergence of local politics. The wave of experiments in participatory bureaucracy at the local level has been well documented and its importance somewhat exaggerated. Less measured is the long-term impact of decentralization [with contrasting dynamics as shown by Falletti (2010)] and the capacity of urban governments, particularly in medium-sized or large metropolises, to develop a range of large-scale public policies contributing to major change for part of the population. Marques's (2021) volume about São Paulo bears testimony to this major transformation. Local and urban governments and local politics have become more autonomous. The change is particularly spectacular in Africa, but as argued, this may be because of the new perspectives brought by a different group of political scientists.

In Latin America and Africa, the transformation of local politics may help us to conceptualize politics more widely. In Europe, the reemergence of local, urban, and regional politics has been robust, with four decades of well-documented increasing autonomy, discretion, budgets, political legitimacy, and political conflicts (John 2001, Heinelt & Kübler 2004), including recent forms of recentralization tried by the nation-state in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis—for instance in Poland, Italy, France, Hungary, and the United Kingdom.

A second point of this review is to emphasize that the transformation of local politics in urban terms paradoxically has led to the revival of rural politics, for instance in India and China. Although political scientists have developed conceptualizations of nested polity and multilevel democracy, conflicts are rising about the rescaling of the economy, social groups, and political dynamics. At a time of major changes, taking into account the reemergence of local politics (and transnational connections) is a way to make sure that part of the political science literature does not get disconnected from major cultural, social, or economic transformations undermining some classic way of thinking, for instance within the national framework. As mentioned in the Introduction, there may be some alignment in cities and the making of territorial cleavages.

A third point is to underline the limits of local democratization processes. Despite all the hope of those in favor of decentralization and democratization, there is no automatic connection between these two, nor do they necessarily lead to progressive politics. The reemergence of local and urban politics opens different political spaces and opportunities for groups wishing to make their voices heard, in particular disadvantaged groups; but being heard remains a political struggle, and there is no shortage of rentier behaviors, and corruption, not to mention local oligarchies combining private and public actors and using a new institutional framework to exclude others (Hicken 2011).

Looking at local politics is a way to revisit debates about states and societies, albeit organized at a different level, and the limits to political regulation. What scholars of local politics show, together with anthropologists and sociologists, are those limits—or, in different language, what is not governed at the local level. The reemergence of local politics is linked to policy failures, a multiplicity of actors operating at different scales (the globalization of gangs, for instance), and various informal and illegal activities (from policing to the management of garbage) with intense political activities beyond the realm of the state or legal institutions. The reemergence of local politics

may reinforce democracies, increasing the relevance and the legitimacy of politics to organize societies. However, it sometimes also signals the decreasing salience of the state, the marginalization of political regulations, and the shrinking role of democratic politics in the making and change of contemporary societies. The climate crisis, even more than the spread of viruses, exposes not the reemergence of local politics in isolation but decisively the reshuffling of scale, interdependence, and circulation, and the difficulty of organizing and analyzing politics in this world polity.

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