TGCI Interview with Parag Khanna: A Global Citizen Leader Examining Connectivity



Parag Khanna is a leading global strategist, world traveler and best-selling author. He is a CNN Global Contributor and Senior Research Fellow in the Centre on Asia and Globalisation at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore. He is also the Managing Partner of Hybrid Reality, a boutique geostrategic advisory firm, and Co-Founder & CEO of Factotum, a leading content branding agency.

TGCI: I'm so glad you can do this interview with us. I just finished reading your new book—*Connectography*—and recommend it as "must read" for global citizens. For those who haven't read *Connectography* can you summarize your book's major thesis or theme and its key messages?

Parag Khanna: The book's purpose is to reimagine how life is organized on earth. It paints a picture of a networked urban civilization that transcends traditional geopolitical organizational frameworks that were built around nation-states and borders.

This new global civilization is the result of two megatrends that have been growing exponentially for thousands of years. The first is "connectivity" between peoples and nations. We now have connective infrastructures—transportation, energy and communications—that globally link us more powerfully than ever before. Our increased "connectivity" represents a triumph of flow over friction and of functional geography over political geography.

Urbanization is the second megatrend that is organizing the way we live. By 2040 two-thirds of the world's population will be living in cities. We are becoming a planet of city-dwellers. We live in a world where increasingly people have more in common across geography than within it.

TGCI: You highlight infrastructures in transportation, energy and communications as major factors influencing global connectivity. Can you summarize why each of these is so important and the global connectivity roles that they play?

Parag Khanna: Sure. In terms of transportation we now have iron Silk Roads that have replaced the Eurasian silk roads of ancient times. You now can cross Eurasia by rail in a week, by plane in half a day. Eventually we will have roads and rails that go under the sea and across mountain ranges and link the entire planet, as well as non-stop flights connecting all cities. This heightened transportation connectivity is encouraging people around the world to demand greater mobility rights, for example having less visa restrictions. It is fostering greater travel and increased migration of peoples.

Global energy connectivity is here to stay despite the continued geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and elsewhere. All countries have growing energy needs that require a global energy marketplace. Worldwide energy demand and increased infrastructure have led to advances in production, increased energy supplies, and falling prices. Today the US is an energy exporter selling oil to China and Middle East countries helping meet Asia's growing energy demand.

Communications technologies provide us with the most universal form of infrastructure. Soon everyone in the world will have access to a mobile phone. There will be people using phones

where there are no roads or electricity grids. Cyber civilization expands along digital rivers and tributaries much as human civilization has grown along natural ones. Connectivity brings individuals the choice to belong to other places than those they do or to have loyalty to multiple places at the same time.

TGCI: You make the point that we should see all three infrastructure channels as part of a single system of global connectivity.

Parag Khanna: Yes, that's right. The three systems work together to connect us. They give rise to the growth of global supply chains that engage circuits of people working across borders. So gradually places such as garment production centers in Dhaka and Addis Ababa begin to feel almost detached from their own country even as they become key drivers of its growth; they belong as much to the global supply chain as they do to their own nation.

TGCI: After reading your book I felt exhilarated by the picture of global civilization and global community that it paints. Then yesterday I received an email from a colleague who works for the World Federalist Movement (WFM) that brought me down to earth. Here's what he had to say:

"I was reading Einstein on Peace for a while again this morning—the clarity of so many great intellectual and political leaders in the late 40s appears miraculous in this 2016 year of Trump—but, like WFM, they were all bulldozed by extreme nationalism and militarism and demagogues of their day."

So how do you explain this seeming global trend towards militarism and demagoguery in the face of connectography?

Parag Khanna: Part of this can be explained by people responding negatively to their own difficult local circumstances. Many of these people have been ignored by the current political system and their needs certainly need to be addressed. But they are a minority and should not be looked upon as the mainstream voice of their countries. Unfortunately, in many countries you have populist leaders who prey on peoples' fears and give a slanted account of the impact globalization is having on their lives.

In contrast, recent surveys by the BBC, Pew and others make it clear that the millennial generation has a different point of view. Millennials are more open to connectivity across borders. They express a desire for more openness and transparency in life. They are more tolerant and accepting of social and cultural differences.

TGCI: After reading your book one comes away with the impression that the nation-state is no longer needed. Is that true?

Parag Khanna: States and borders are the embodiment of a certain kind of friction that can be a good thing. We need borders to help keep out things like terrorists, pathogens, and nuclear weapons. The flow of borderless connectivity and the friction of traditional borders are the yin and yang of our planet. Both are needed. It is best to follow a middle way.

TGCI: Have you given further thought about what sort of governance can best support a connected world?

Parag Khanna: As the world gets more connected I think we are going to see devolution of governance responsibilities to cities and regional associations. Cities will need to strengthen their governance systems as their growing populations demand economic opportunity, a social safety net, and a sustainable environment. Diplomacy and political/economic relations between cities will be extremely important as a vehicle for promoting trade, ensuring peace and stability, and creating global urban learning networks. Diplomacy among cities—what I call 'Diplomacity'—will become an important factor in the creation of global peace and security.

I also think we'll see a continuation of a trend towards greater regionalism in the world. Regional groupings representing each of the major continents and geographic zones will become stronger and engage in a series of economic, political and even military relationships with one another.

TGCI: How is the world going to deal with what seem to be an ever growing number of failed states?

Parag Khanna: The more that regions are able achieve internal integration, the more the needs of their weakest members get elevated and need to be addressed. Failed states or countries-in-crisis, like Afghanistan, can best be bolstered and supported by other countries with which they are regionally aligned. For example, the EU is dealing with this issue as it tries to find a solution for the fiscal problems of its southern members.

TGCI: Your book also talks about the values of a connected world, and you sometimes use the term "modernization" as an essential value. Is modernization really a value, and what other values do you see to be important in a connected world and why are they important?

Parag Khanna: Increased connectivity between peoples and global supply chains leads to building of communities across borders with shared values. For example, increased foreign investment can expose corrupt practices among governments and business and lead to greater efforts to combat such corruption. The internet can promote the values of transparency and open communications.

Human rights treaties don't connect us. But let's say I am a purchaser of a laptop and you are a miner of cobalt. As I become more aware of how my product is made I develop a greater understanding of, and compassion for, the dangerous health and safety conditions in which you work. This leads me to be more committed to improving working conditions for those participating in my laptop computers supply chain across borders. Connectivity enables the empathy that guides our ethical evolution. The touchstone of morality in a global society is leveraging connectedness for utilitarian ends: achieving the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

TGCI: Do we need leaders who embrace the ideas expressed in *Connectography* and move us forward in that direction?

Parag Khanna: Unfortunately at the moment we don't have many leaders who stand up for global connectivity. Instead we have leaders who scapegoat connectivity and globalization, and are trying to turn their countries inward. We are in great need of leaders who are educated about the complexities of the global system, the merits of a connected world, and the paths for building sustainable connectivity at all different levels of society.

TGCI What's your next project?

Parag Khanna: I would like to do a book or series of articles on the governance systems and leadership is needed in a complex connected world.

TGCI: Thank you.