

Chapter 2

Conceptualising the International Phenomenon of *Crises*

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Abstract

Given that this book places the interconnectedness of international sustainable development and education particularly in times of crises at the centre of attention, it is impossible to disregard the nuanced nature of this crisis context. Based on a review of relevant literature, this chapter focuses on the following four main areas. First, it analyses the complex nature of the definition of the *crisis*, as multiple attempts to understand the phenomenon of crises and their various classifications have been consensual in recognising that crises are multidimensional and interrelated, that they are integral to the process of change and that they present a range of interconnected factors that distort the normal operation of people, organisations, their relationships, resources, etc. Second, this chapter explains the phenomenon of glocalisation in relation to crises to further detail how intertwined different crises are. When applied to the analysis of crises, the phenomenon of glocalisation is paramount in understanding how locally born crises can trigger globally reaching effects and vice versa. Third, this chapter discusses the impact of crises on international sustainable development. Finally, it is proposed in this chapter that education should be viewed as an important tool in tackling crises and, thus, easing the progress towards sustainable development internationally. This chapter provides

**Education and Sustainable Development in the Context of Crises:
International Case Studies of Transformational Change, 9–21**



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doi:[10.1108/978-1-83797-773-420241002](https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83797-773-420241002)

important contextualisation regarding the evolving multidimensional and intertwined crises against the background of which the discussion in this book embarks on in its subsequent parts.

Keywords: Crises; glocalisation; education; sustainable development; interconnection

2.1. Introduction

This chapter offers a valuable contextualisation for this book regarding the crises landscape. It is impossible to disregard the nuanced nature of the context of ever-evolving, interconnected and multidimensional crises, given that this book locates the intertwined nature of international sustainable development and education particularly in times of crises in the spotlight of inquiry.

The term *crisis* has been quite overused in recent years by scholars, political pundits and commentators. Several global/local events and developments have played a role in the growth of this crisis narrative. In the last decade, the world has faced unprecedented multidimensional and interconnected threats, including several economic crises, a few wars such as in Syria, Afghanistan, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Israel-Hamas war and resulting forced migration globally, more frequent climate change-related disasters, a steep rise of authoritarian regimes, the Covid-19 pandemic, to name just a few. All these events have posed a threat to the progress towards international sustainable development.

This chapter begins by a discussion of a definition of the crisis. It will then go on to explain the phenomenon of *glocalisation* (Robertson, 1992) in relation to crises to argue how interconnected different crises are. Then, it will examine recent major crises and how they have impacted on international sustainable development and education. Lastly, the remaining section of this chapter will discuss the role of education in international sustainable development in the context of crises.

2.2. Defining Crises

The definition of crises has been a controversial and much disputed subject within the field of crisis/disaster management and beyond (Aguirresarobe, 2022; Nabers, 2019). The terms *crisis*, *disaster* and *emergency* are used interchangeably in the literature although there are notable differences between them (Al-Dahash et al., 2016). Below definitions for each term will be discussed to present similarities and differences between them.

There are multiple typologies and definitions of crisis including *regular crises* (Rosenthal et al., 1989) and *creeping crises* (Boin et al., 2020, 2021). The regular crisis definition assumes that there is a crisis 'when political-administrative elites perceive a threat to the core values of a society and/or life-sustaining systems

in that society that must be addressed urgently under conditions of deep uncertainty' (Rosenthal et al., 2001, p. 53). The key characteristic of this type of crises is that they are exceptional situations with a clear beginning and an end (Rosenthal et al., 1989). Another regular crisis definition is related to 'a sudden, negative, and temporally constrained change within a system which threatens to bring about a large and unforeseen transformation of a number of the identifying characteristics of that system and which urgently calls for new approaches and solutions' (Aguirresarobe, 2022, p. 17). An example of a regular crisis would be the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 that brought the world to the brink of a nuclear war due to a dangerous confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union (Allison, 1969).

Creeping crises, however, have no clear beginning and ending (Boin et al., 2020, 2021). They can be undetected for a long time contrary to the regular crisis definition; creeping crises may provide a significant time for policy makers to address the potential threat before it escalates (Boin et al., 2020). One example of this is global warming and climate change. Defined by Boin et al. (2020, p. 3):

A creeping crisis is a threat to widely shared societal values or life-sustaining systems that evolves over time and space, is foreshadowed by precursor events, subject to varying degrees of political and/or societal attention, and impartially or insufficiently addressed by authorities.

It is clear that both the regular and creeping crises definitions above refer to a threat to certain values and both are focused on the extent of management of the crises. This brings us to the need to juxtapose the terms *crises* as well as two other related terms *disasters* and *emergencies*.

There is no consensus among scholars on the relationship between the meanings of the terms *crises* and *disasters*. On the one hand, it is often the case that the terms *crises* and *disasters* are used interchangeably (Nabers, 2019; Shaluf et al., 2003; Wolbers et al., 2021). On the other hand, they can refer to a different nature of events (Boin & 't Hart, 2007). According to the second approach, *disasters* are sudden, short-term events although their consequences can last for months or even years. For instance, according to Boin and 't Hart (2007), the 2005 Hurricane Katrina and the 2011 Fukushima Earthquake are among the iconic *disasters*, whereas the Covid-19 pandemic can be better defined as a *crisis* as it may require a different analysis and solutions than the former one. *Crises* such as Covid-19 pandemic may not be framed as sudden events, instead an escalation process is part of their nature (Bergdahl & Nouri, 2021). According to some, *disasters* hinder state capacity which requires external assistance to cope with and recover (Coppola, 2015; Moe et al., 2007). Yet there may not be exact boundaries between the two phenomena – *crises* and *disasters* – as they are related (Shaluf et al., 2003). For example, the Covid-19 pandemic did require a lot of countries, particularly developing countries, to seek external assistance in, for instance, purchasing vaccines and supplying personal protective equipment (Chowdhury & Jomo, 2020).

Similarly, various perspectives exist on the meanings of the terms *crisis* and *emergency* and the links among them. Shen and Shaw (2004, p. 2110) put forward a definition that an emergency is a ‘natural or man-made [people-made] situation that may result in substantial harm to the population or damage to property’. Alexander’s (2005, p. 159) related definition of an emergency adds that it is

an imminent or actual event that threatens people, property or the environment and which requires a co-ordinated and rapid response. Emergencies are usually unanticipated, at least in terms of exactly what happens and when and where they take place. However, they can, and should, be planned for.

A tsunami after an earthquake would be an example of an emergency event. However, a hurricane and an earthquake – classed above as disasters which are, arguably, a type of crises – can be also clustered as an emergency, and these can lead to disasters depending on how they are managed and averted (Shen & Shaw, 2004). Evidently, the boundaries among the terms *crisis*, *disaster* and *emergency* overlap and, thus, are blurred (Shen & Shaw, 2004).

Clearly, the boundaries between the terms *crises*, *emergencies* and *disasters* are blurred. A crisis may quite rightly be or turn into an emergency and a disaster. For instance, the 1962 Cuban missile crisis required agile decisions from the American and Soviet stakeholders that would have prevented a nuclear disaster (Allison, 1969). Therefore, if a crisis lacks management by the stakeholders, it may lead to a disaster (Davies & Walters, 1998).

According to various definitions explored above and illustrated by, for instance, Rosenthal et al. (1989), Boin et al. (2021) and Aguirresarobe (2022), the meaning of crises comes down to a major uncertainty, and it requires a reaction by stakeholders such as policymakers to seek solutions. The crises that will be discussed in this chapter and the rest of this book are not necessarily regular (fast-burning) crises. Instead, from the rise of populism/authoritarianism to climate change, these major threats are creeping (slow-burning) crises with no clear end and often leading to incremental policy responses (Boin et al., 2021). All of these crises are also interrelated which brings us to the idea of glocalisation which is discussed in the next section.

2.3. Glocalisation and Crises

The term *glocalisation* has made a scene in the scholarship in various disciplines including political science and sociology in the last decades. In his seminal studies, Robertson (1992, 1994, 2014, 2020) put forward an argument that globalisation is, in fact, *glocalisation*. This term refers to the simultaneous occurrence of globalisation and localisation trends in social, political and economic environments. Thus, glocalisation is about interconnectedness between the local and the global, the universal and the particular.

The origins of the term *glocalisation* derive from Japanese economists’ global marketing strategies (Robertson, 1992, 1994, 2014, 2020). In other words, glocality

can be defined as ‘experiencing the global locally or through local lenses (which can include local power relations, geopolitical and geographical factors, cultural distinctiveness, and so on)’ (Roudometof, 2016, p. 401). In this vein, Robertson critically debated the concept of globalisation arguing that globalisation, in fact, encourages diversification instead of standardisation (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2012). Several other scholars have also examined glocalisation (e.g., Bauman, 1998; Ritzer, 2003; Roudometof, 2016). While for Ritzer (2003, pp. 193–194), glocalisation is about local cultures’ adaption of global features, for Bauman (1998, p. 70), glocalisation is associated with increasing global inequalities happening as a result of globalisation. Roudometof (2016, p. 403) defines glocalisation ‘as the refraction of globalization through the local’. Therefore, global events have glocal dimensions (Roudometof, 2016). For instance, the reactions to the news of the 9/11 were divergent across different societies (Roudometof, 2016). Another example would be the management of the Covid-19 pandemic with varying types of policy solutions in different countries (You, 2020). With regard to these, glocalisation is also relevant for the crises literature considering how different crises hinder issues such as the international sustainable development.

The research to date has not focused on the interconnectedness of local and global crises. Understanding the link between local and global is crucial, considering the emerging issues of the last decades from climate crisis to economic crisis. A global crisis can have different consequences in different parts of the world. Climate change is a global crisis. Yet, it may trigger local issues in different ways. For instance, in the Asia-Pacific, climate change results in extreme events such as increasing floods and storms (Beirne et al., 2021). In East Africa, rising temperatures have caused severe droughts and famine (Devi, 2022). In Australia, rising temperatures are becoming an increasing threat to forests (Abram et al., 2022). These local consequences then will shape reactions and policies of the countries at the global level. In a similar vein, a local crisis can become global and shape the global responses by the international actors. For instance, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has triggered global reactions, illustrating how Russia is increasingly becoming a global threat.

Different types of crises (including disasters and emergencies) are a threat to human existence and the planet. Crises have an impact on all three integral and interrelated aspects of international sustainable development (Hummels & Argyrou, 2021) by, arguably, both hindering sustainable development and at the same time necessitating the search for solutions to the problems. Crises are likely to create additional economic, political and social vulnerabilities which will halt the process of positive change. For instance, South Asian countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal are already facing major issues of poverty, health and education (Mall et al., 2019). An additional crisis is likely to further paralyse economic prosperity, environmental protection and human development. Less vulnerable, in other words, developed populations and regions are also subject to decline in terms of the elements of sustainable development. The multidimensional crises that the European Union (EU) have faced is illustrative of that. The European financial crisis, the populist/authoritarian pressure and others have revealed vulnerabilities of the EU and Europe that each led to damaging consequences

of individual countries (Kushnir et al., 2020). Overall, we cannot separate international sustainable development from the recent global developments. The next section looks at these major events in more detail with a focus on education which has been emerging as a tool for sustainable development.

2.4. Recent Crises Around the World and Their Impact on Sustainable Development

The world order has been confronted with various crises in the recent decades. These multidimensional and interconnected crises have challenged the world's progress towards sustainable development, which is crucial to review before speculating about the role of education in solving these problems. Climate change, economic crises, authoritarianism, populism, wars and the Covid-19 pandemic, to name a few, have threatened human existence and its well-being as well as the planet. In the economic realm, for instance, several financial crises hit the United States in 2007, leading to the bankruptcy of the global financial services firm *Lehman Brothers* in 2008. This triggered the European debt crisis of 2009. EU policymakers responded to the crisis with the structural adjustment programmes which were implemented by countries like Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain (Parker & Tsarouhas, 2018). The European debt crisis has had social, economic and political consequences on the EU member countries as well as their nearby states and on the process of European integration. Citizens across the EU have lost trust in the European institutions and became dissatisfied with the EU, especially those who were hit hard by the crisis (Frieden, 2016; Roth et al., 2011). The economic crisis and subsequent structural adjustment programmes and the lack of further integration process increased opposition to the EU (Usherwood & Startin, 2013). The outbreak of the war in Syria led to a humanitarian crisis causing millions of people to take a refugee in neighbouring countries including Jordan and Turkey as well as to Europe (Stockemer et al., 2020). There has been a prominent surge of refugees coming to the EU borders during the post-2015 migrant crisis in Europe, putting a pressure on the countries of first entry, such as Greece and Italy (Landström & Ekengren, 2021). This was aggravated by thousands of refugees dying in the sea or going missing after arrival (Landström & Ekengren, 2021). Inhumane conditions of refugee camps often caught attention (Panebianco, 2022). Political debates have increasingly been shaped by populist narratives, making migration a priority in EU policymaking (Grande et al., 2019). The rise of populist and authoritarian forces has created a crisis of democracy and legitimacy not only in the EU but across the world. The 2016 BREXIT referendum was marked as the Eurosceptic victory (Usherwood, 2018). Populist voters around the world are found to be dissatisfied citizens who are unhappy about the workings of democracy. This can be observed in countries such as Brazil, France, Greece, Mexico and Turkey (Kaltwasser & Van Hauwaert, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic came as a shock across the world, first identified in an outbreak in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019. The pandemic caused various waves of public health measures across the world (Amin et al., 2022). Together with these, climate change vulnerability has been increasing day by day causing a threat to

human existence in many forms, including droughts and famine in East Africa (Kemp et al., 2022). Crises are not limited to these developments. Many others, including the takeover of power by the Taliban in Afghanistan (Akbari & True, 2022) and the invasion of Ukraine by Russia (Kurapov et al., 2023), have posed a threat to democracy and legitimacy.

The above are only a few examples of the ever-emerging crises the world has recently been facing. Many crises are, arguably, interconnected, given the phenomenon of *glocalisation*, presented earlier. Many scholars have alluded to this idea, such as in the work of Pescaroli et al. (2018, p. 159) on ‘cascading crises’ and Losasso (2022, p. 7) on ‘interconnected crises’. The crises discussed above are multidimensional, meaning that some of these crises have stemmed from the consequences of the others. Additionally, some crises have reinforced each other. In other words, there is no clear division between these different events emerging locally or globally. Some argue that the economic crisis and the so-called post-2015 migration crises in Europe played a significant role in the mobilisation of the populist parties across Europe (Taggart & Pirro, 2021). These threats have also affected the climate change crisis making countries more vulnerable to climate-related disasters due to political polarisation and dysfunctional resource allocation. The consequences of climate change are expected to continue reinforcing forced migration (Kaczan & Orgill-Meyer, 2020). Also, there is a link between far right/anti-democratic right and climate change (Forchtner & Lubarda, 2022). The Covid-19 pandemic has contributed into already existing problems the world had been facing. It started as a health crisis and then turned into a global economic crisis (Ozili & Arun, 2020).

2.5. The Role of Education in International Sustainable Development in the Ever-Existing Context of Crises

Quality education is one of the 17 United Nations’ (UN) sustainable development goals (SDGs). Progress in improving education has been challenging especially in the regions with high social and political instabilities (Agbedahin, 2019). This is particularly problematic, given the role of education in reaching the SDGs (Becker, 2018; Merritt et al., 2018).

There can be various ways that crises negatively impact education and, consequently, restrict its potential in supporting international sustainable development. For instance, academic freedom has suffered in Turkish academia due to Erdogan’s authoritarian regime in Turkey (Doğan & Selenica, 2022). Similarly, Hanson and Sokhey (2021) argued that higher education can be a tool for authoritarians to instil their ideas in the wider society, such as in the case of Kazakhstan. Economic crises and their consequences can place pressure on education across the world. Giroux (2015) argues that the rising cost of education leads to low-income and ethnic minority youth to be left out from schools. Wars have been one of the major stumbling blocks for both specifically education and sustainable development in general. One example is the gender apartheid in education under the Taliban rule in Afghanistan (Akbari & True, 2022). Climate change-related displacement will continue negatively affecting formal education and lives in

general of the impacted populations, with over 140 million people being expected to be displaced in 2050, according to World Bank data (Rigaud et al., 2018).

As discussed in the above sections, crises have constituted threatening the progress towards international sustainable development. However, we could also pose a question about whether crises can be seen as an opportunity for policy changes towards sustainable development and whether education can be used as a tool in this process. Scholars argue that education can be used as a soft governing tool to attain other goals of international sustainable development (Kushnir & Nunes, 2022) such as gender equality, climate action, tackling poverty and others. Therefore, education can be a useful tool for reversing the negative consequences of the crises we have discussed previously. Focusing on education would help developing resilience towards potential crises and emergencies. Below are a couple of examples to illustrate ways in which education can overturn negative consequences of existing or future crises.

One important way is to focus on environmental education. It is significant to prepare societies to cope with climate-change disasters through education and learning (Hoffmann & Blecha, 2020). For instance, in regions that are vulnerable to extreme events such as fires, relevant information and resources can help societies to reverse negative impacts. Another example can be about focusing on green education practices worldwide to slow down and ultimately prevent the adverse effects of human behaviour on the environment, which threaten the existence of future generations. For instance, green university campuses have been implemented in Malaysia in the recent years, focusing on indicators such as food waste management, CO₂ emission management and others (Anthony, 2021).

Strong digital education is another illustrative way of education withstanding some crises and not compromising the learning of those involved. The transition to online teaching and learning that occurred during the pandemic as well as the invasion of Ukraine by Russia has shown that change can happen rapidly when needed, but it has also showcased weaknesses in resourcing and skills in many places around the world (Kurapov et al., 2023; Lennox et al., 2021). Indeed, such crises necessitate and enable changes in education systems to happen quicker than in normal times (Bojović et al., 2020; Langlois et al., 2020; Sá & Serpa, 2020). Evidently, such crises that necessitate education move off-campus present coping strategies for similar future events. They show that sector planning and budgeting needs to be more resilient (Lennox et al., 2021). Scholars recommend that educational stakeholders need to have sustainable and viable strategies to keep everything stable when crises emerge (Burgos et al., 2021).

Another way how education can aid international sustainable development is by serving as a tool for promoting democracy. Kushnir (2021, 2022) discusses this in a particular case of the role of the European Education Area in EU integration in the recent context of crises. These crises inspired the authors of the European Education Area to appeal to its education as an instrument specifically for EU deepening – one of the aspects of EU integration which is about the strengthening of the relationships among its member states. In particular, the European Education Area ‘has been a driver in the development of a common European identity and European economy, the EU as a socially-just society and the continent of progress’ (Kushnir, 2021, p. 301).

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter has provided a valuable contextualisation for this edited book regarding the ever-existing crises landscape. This book places the interconnectedness of international sustainable development and education particularly in times of crises at the centre of attention, thus making it impossible to disregard the nuanced nature of this crisis context.

Multiple attempts to understand the phenomenon of crises and their classification (e.g., [Boin et al., 2020](#); İyüer, 2008) are consensual in recognising that crises are multidimensional and interconnected, they are integral to the process of change and they present a range of interconnected factors that distort the normal operation of people, organisations, resources, relationships among all of these, etc. The interconnectedness of crises is reinforced particularly by the increasingly developing links between the global and local context – in [Robertson's \(1992, 1994, 2014, 2020\)](#) terms *glocalisation*. When applied to the analysis of crises, the phenomenon of glocalisation is paramount in understanding how locally born crises can trigger globally reaching effects and vice versa.

A few examples of the crises that (different regions of) the world has been facing recently have been provided above and are further explicated in the rest of this book. What is crucial is that these major crises that we have faced have highlighted an important role of education in coping with these threats to humanity and the planet. Relying on education as a tool for development is key for coping with ongoing and potential crises, whether they are about democratic values or/and physical threat. In times of crises, education policies can foster change to adopt new realities. Societies can be made more resilient and flexible to these threats with the help of education.

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