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WHEN A STATE COMPETES WITH ITS PEOPLE OVER RESOURCES. WHAT KIND OF COOPERATION? WHAT KIND OF PARTNERSHIP?

What role for universities and how do they react to this issue?

Abstract

Resources are the key point of our relationship with the planet Earth and the tuning of this relationship is the core goal of every human activity claiming to be sustainable. In this context, there is growing concern over the paradigm on which International Cooperation (IC) is currently working.

Universities have a role to play in shaping and spreading the new “development” paradigm. From this point of view, each component of a university should take action. University cooperation, always in collaboration with civil society, could fill the emerging gap between the states who follow the direction of the global economic system² and populations, more and more in need of the proper tools to get an equally diffused, grassroots ecological development.

This short paper will argue this point of view by presenting a small student association born inside the Faculty of Agronomy in Milan.

1. Background

The Earth provides all that we need to live and thrive. So what will it take for humanity to live within the means of one planet?

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2. “In total, says the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), a think-tank in Washington, DC, between 15m and 20m hectares of farmland in poor countries have been subject to transactions or talks involving foreigners since 2006” (*The Economist*, 2009).

Individuals and institutions worldwide must begin to recognize ecological limits. We must begin to make ecological limits central to our decision-making and use our human ingenuity to find new ways to live within the Earth's bounds. This means investing in technology and infrastructure that will allow us to operate in a resource-constrained world. It means taking individual action and creating public demand for businesses and policy makers to join.³

In this context, there is growing concern over the paradigm on which IC is currently working. Since the 1990s, the model of Cooperation to Development has been through a renovating process⁴, giving birth to coordinated and integrated programs consisting in the coexistence of complementary phases: the research and analysis phases are interlaced with the intervention and the operational partnership actions.

The role of universities in Cooperation has grown, thanks to rejection of the transfer process (technology, financial resources, skills) in favour of an endogenous growth, capacity building through the sharing of knowledge, aiming the development of a new and original cultural synthesis.

University intervention answers:

- The need to improve the efficiency and efficacy of projects (through analysis and research).
- The need to boost the growth of local human capital through training, student/teacher exchanges, agreements between universities (operational partnerships, long lasting interests (Sali et al. 2015)).

One of the very practical results of university participation in development projects has been the processing of new methodologies for intervention based upon the concept of appropriate technologies.

This is a way of conceiving technology transfer which is not modelled on efficiency criteria of industrialized countries, but capable of adapting to local structural constraints. Universities

3. *Global Footprint Network* 2015.

4. "La Conoscenza per lo sviluppo: criteri di orientamento e linee prioritarie per la cooperazione allo sviluppo con le Università e i Centri di Formazione e Ricerca", Comitato Direzionale DGCS 2014.

operate in accordance with their mission and competences. They valorise and qualify cooperation projects, acting as a hinge between problem identification and the programming of solving strategies.

A side feature, that could give a big added value, is offered by the presence, or absence, of students in this field - IC attracts more and more students as a stage for their practical internships. At the same time the experience in IC allows students to face the “delicate theme of human development” on their own skin, as it is a core concern in everybody’s everyday life.

At the State University of Milan, inside the Faculty of Agronomy, a new-born association called “Dévelo” is now carrying the voice of the students who are interested in and who want to get involved in this field.

2. Main issue

The role of universities is linked to the concept of a *territorial approach*, which nowadays inspires IC worldwide.⁵

In this context universities answer the need for more and more locally adapted cooperation, based on “long period, common interests” partnerships aimed at high efficiency capacity-building interventions.

This is the case of partnerships between universities, signed with the overall goal of keeping a collaboration framework open to potential practical ad-hoc collaborations.

If we look at a university as a sample of the educated population who should be able to find new, smart paradigms in the context of the global crisis, it appears clear how the ability of the academic world to fulfil this task relies completely upon the willingness of each component of the university to discuss, interact and push for a community-leading vision, a general asset of values, connected with competences and skills that can withstand

5. Proceeding of the congress CUCS2015, Biconne R., Dipartimento di Architettura, Università degli studi di Firenze.

the global crisis and promote new paradigms of development.

In this light, universities are one of the environments where our ability to reason arrives at the highest degree and where we learn how to face multifaceted problems, comparing different models and behaviours and choosing the appropriate one. This real moment is the one that forces us, teachers or students, to face the consequences of “our way of development”. This is the real moment when we really identify the core issue of IC and where universities really have to be, in order to give their contributions, but also to use the same moment as a chance for people to compare with real, global contexts, with positive consequences on their own training and formation.

University teaching will in fact allow students to approach situations, experiences and researches in various areas of the world and on different problems and emergencies. For example, social sciences studies, specifically the study of development anthropology, allow students to develop a critical point of view, rather than an ethnocentric and a collaborative one.⁶

At the end of the day universities are institutional organisms, with a well recognized social and cultural role, who can elaborate their own strategies in a democratic and transparent way in order to use their credibility to drive their policy agenda (advocacy).

3. Conclusions

Several “memoranda of understandings” have been signed during last year between universities. As we have seen, the universities can provide the IC with labour, knowledge and know-how, but their main role is to shape different models of action, different paradigms for development.

Universities can fill the gap between the need of governments to place public stakeholders inside IC projects and the need for qualified specialists on the ground. Universities could inspire pro-

6. Proceeding of the congress CUCS2015, Casella Paltrinieri A., Facoltà di Scienze della Formazione, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Brescia e Milano.

jects implementation by using their social and institutional mission as a reference. Universities will never take the place of other NGOs in cooperation because their tasks will always be different: the interaction between NGOs and universities in cooperation projects offers important opportunities for sharing knowledge and competencies. Thus academics can increase operational and professional skills while providing NGOs with the possibility to research and exploit innovative tools and methodologies. This relation, if adequately structured, has a huge potential in incrementing the value of partners' works and actions carried out in international projects.⁷

Universities and NGOs can also profitably cooperate in supporting each other in order to provide the governments or international lenders, with a core asset of competences, knowledge and ethical values.

Student participation in this field is essential in order to:

- have young professionals working on the ground, giving their energy and valorising the experience in their training;
- hear the students' voice about researches and actions undertaken by their university;

So, IC is definitely an exchange situation if the research-action is conducted with a participatory methodology. In this case, it allows defining processes, strategies and actions of management, by studying and enhancing the self-knowledge of participants on both sides.

The overall conclusion is about our Association, called "Dévelo", whose role is to act in favour of the academic internationalization, namely regarding participation of students and professors in IC projects and valorise the result of these exchanges in order to make better training for other students and professors in Italy. In fact, empirical research shows that contacts and interactions between different groups are the best way of positively changing possible negative prejudices, and help cooperation.⁸

7. Proceeding of the congress CUCS2015, Domini M., CeTamb LAB, DICATAM, University of Brescia.

8. Proceeding of the congress CUCS2015, Lazzari F., Università degli Studi di Trieste.

Our action is a clear symptom of the willingness of students to get more and more involved in IC and a clear clue of the readiness of students to provide a solid values base in the discussion and implementation of different paradigms of human development.

Further investigation should be addressed to test students' knowledge level on IC and to identify the best practices for them to play their part.

Bibliography

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