INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE UNIVERSITY: DE-CONSTRUCT TO RE-CONSTRUCT WITH DIFFERENT TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE

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Background: the reality of international development cooperation (IDC)

Before embarking in words and concepts open to different interpretations, some background information is needed. First of all, I'm using the term international (or global) development in the holistic and multi-disciplinary context of human development, i.e. the development of a greater quality of life for humans, and not simply economic growth. Secondly, the Development Aid Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (DAC- OECD) defines international cooperation as a broad concept that encompasses all kinds of activities carried out jointly and in coordination by two or more sovereign States and/or by these and international organisations, whatever their area or aim. According to this definition, international development co-operation (IDC) may involve processes related to financial aid, governance, healthcare and education, gender equality, disaster preparedness, infrastructure, economics, human rights, environment and other. In this sense, it is specifically composed of institutions and policies that arose after the Second World War and mainly focus on alleviating poverty and improving living conditions in previously colonised countries. IDC may then be defined as a form of international co-operation that makes contact between countries with different levels of development seeking mutual benefit. A distinction should be made between IDC and international development aid. In fact, "To co-operate implies sharing work or a task, doing something with others in a coordinated way, in conformity with a plan, and to a certain degree, voluntarily, encouraged by some type of mutual interest or benefit, which may be established as well between unequal partners, as between equals. Aid is something different from co-operation. It still has a social content, since it presupposes a relation between partners, but it does not imply sharing. [...] In principle, one can help someone who is passive or even someone who refuses to be helped."

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The term IDC is therefore used to express the idea that a partnership should exist between donor and recipient, rather than the traditional situation in which the relationship is deeply asymmetrical and dominated by the wealth, power and specialized knowledge of one side. In reality, the term "development cooperation" is often used interchangeably, as a euphemism for "development aid"; whatever that is, its achievements on records are hard to digest. After several decades of what is known as Official Development Assistance (ODA) accompanied by plenty of rhetoric of cooperation and partnership, 1.22 billion people, the equivalent of 20.6% of the population in the developing world, live in extreme poverty (under $1.25 a day). In 1970, the world's rich countries agreed to give 0.7% of their Gross National Income as official international development aid, annually. Since that time, their actual promised targets were rarely met. Furthermore, aid often comes with a price of its own for developing nations, i.e.:

- aid is often wasted on conditions that the recipient must use overpriced goods and services from donor countries;
- most aid does not actually go to the poorest who would need it the most;
- aid amounts are hindered by rich country protectionism that denies market access for poor country products, while rich nations use aid as a lever to open poor country markets to their products;
- large projects or massive grand strategies often fail to help the vulnerable as money can often be embezzled away.

A possible conclusion is that, looking for solutions to the current problems of poverty and underdevelopment one cannot expect that these will be from aid or from international co-operation as it has been understood so far. Much wider and coherent policies are needed at international level, embracing international trade and investment, environmental protection and technical innovation, migration and arms control. On the other hand, although condemning the "aid system" for its inefficiency is legitimate, to say that the inhuman life conditions of billions of people are a consequence of the failure of the "aid system" is short sighted and the hypocritical search for an easy scapegoat. "Reforming the 'aid system', which is not a 'system' but a sort of cauldron containing almost anything, from good to bad and worse, is a long and slow process. What remains is the unbearable injustice of the iniquitous inequalities between those who have and those who have not. What remains is the intrinsic goodness of the idea that those who have must promote a change leading towards more justice, towards a more bearable human condition for all." What this change should consist in, and how it should be achieved, is the real issue facing IDC. We can speak about four modes of IDC, i.e. financial cooperation, food aid, humanitarian aid and technical co-operation. To narrow our approach I shall focus exclusively on the last.

Universities and IDC: what universities should be doing

Universities are regarded as key institutions in the processes of social change and development. They not only, in fact, serve as centres of production (through research), reproduction (through education) and implementation (through assistance and services) of scientific knowledge. They are as well integral part of society, engaged in a 'social contract' governing their mutual relations.

In addition, during periods of radical change, universities and their constituencies have often played an equally important role in creating new institutions of civil society, in promoting new cultural values, and in educating members of the new social elites. Academic institution shave also been a favourite instrument for promoting Western world values and the neo-liberal ideology in the developing world as in the case of the Rockefeller Foundation and other large philanthropic initiatives.

In recent years, universities have acquired an increasingly important role in IDC as part of a process that has led to the increase in the number and types of social actors providing international support for greater equality and human, sustainable development. We have gone from a situation where only a few specialized organizations, such as international non-government organizations (NGOs), United Nations agencies and private foundations, were devoted to the task, to one in which many other institutions and social groups have begun to engage in development cooperation programs and projects in various fields and in different countries. This has given rise to a great diversity in cooperative efforts and working methods. In this context, it is not surprising that contradictions and problems have arisen in the way IDC is understood and applied into practice.

Education in general, including higher education, is an essential component of the process of expanding opportunities for freedom to people and societies and for human development. As a result, strengthening the university system and promoting access to the higher education are essential objectives of universities engaged in IDC. Similarly, a role universities might play in IDC is to work together to try and resolve the difficulties and contradictions related to poverty-alleviation policies and development paths, and to promote research in fields related to these goals, such as gender equality, strengthening women's capacities and autonomy, environmental sustainability, peace, health and quality of life, within a common framework of human rights and social justice. From this perspective the place of IDC within the university system cannot be regarded simply as one of the functions of a generic process of international collaboration between universities of the North and the South of the planet, a sort of exotic appendix to embellish academic institutions and their faculty's CVs.

Universities entering the IDC system should aim at enriching humanly and academically the people who participate in this effort and the structures that compose it, in a spirit of selfless commitment to solidarity. This may be facilitated by adopting the 'decentralised cooperation' approach, which embodies the principles of solidarity and equitable and sustainable development among peoples, founded on participation, promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms by strengthening capacity and powers of decentralized actors and in particular of the most disadvantaged social groups. Decentralised cooperation is founded on commitment of citizens, government, NGOs, associations and local groups, trade unions, cooperatives, businesses, and educational institutions, including universities. Decentralization and participation are the key words. "Non-state actors and local authorities in development" is a specific European Commission's thematic programme aiming at encouraging non-state actors and local authorities, both from the EU and in developing countries, to get more involved in development issues.

As an essential part of the university's social commitment, therefore, IDC cannot be understood like a sort of extra- curricular activity or be limited to individual obligations. It should rather be integrated into all activities that characterize it. This means that the university should be institutionally involved in this role and support it with technical, human and financial means, avoiding to delegate tasks only to more socially conscious individuals and groups, or allowing it be considered simply as a moral option of an individual nature, alien to academic work and institutional activities. In short, universities should emphasize the identity and importance of IDC activities through their recognition as a statutory objective of university work, their inclusion in strategic plans, the creation of institutional bodies to promote and manage them, and the existence of tools and dedicated funds for their implementation.

Universities and IDC: what universities have been doing

Although the theme of IDC has long been on the agenda of government agencies, NGOs and institutions, in a number of Italian universities only in recent years it has begun to be viewed as an important aspect of the educational and research processes. Despite a variety of undergraduate and post-graduate programmes on development-related issues being quickly born, IDC's progression into university life has often been a slow process and no clear policy on IDC have been spontaneously generated. This can develop only by a series of organizational strategies, a central administrative agency is needed to coordinate, plan, manage, evaluate and monitor the various actions and, finally, programmes and international activities are only generated within a meaningful international framework of education, cooperation and interchange.

Mobility, above all, is the area in which universities have incorporated international cooperation in their activities. It should be noted, however, that to have a significant number of foreign students coming from poor countries or to hold training courses on IDC-related topics does not necessarily mean for an institution 'to do' IDC. Moreover, the activity "international" is hardly perceived as an axis cross-cutting all the undertakings of the academic institution. More frequently it is seen as a space of action of the university, which does not connect directly nor visibly improve the quality of processes. Neither, in the end, there seems to be a clear definition of what the desirable levels of investment are or should be, based on the characteristics of institutional support projects and the benefits expected from the IDC. Instead, IDC is often perceived as an object of unnecessary expenditures, an obligation or merely an activity of prestige (for some), and certainly regarded as one of the least needed in times of budget cut- backs.

A number of universities have successfully incorporated IDC in their institutional structure, have a dedicated office with a definite plan of action, and carry out a series of international activities. But can it be said that they really 'do' IDC? So, what are the reasons why universities have been weak in, or indeed absent from the whole system of IDC? Might it be because another actor filled their role? Is it perhaps a short sighted and distorted understanding of the institutional role and social responsibility of the university that prevented a more forward-looking and comprehensive interpretation of the true mission of the university? The academic institutions are well positioned

for cooperation and technical assistance with all that this implies (i.e. research, development education, human capital formation, etc.), but they need to carve out a more important space in the arena of IDC and adopt a more committed and solidary approach than many NGOs have shown in the past decades. The question is how can they be supported to embark in such a transformation amidst the storm brought about by the current globalization process?

IDC and the internationalization of the university

As globalization continues to evolve, universities are called upon to modify their policies and programmes to respond to the changing realities and avoid losing social relevance. A guided process of internationalization is widely viewed as a way of helping them in this task. According to Knight, the internationalization of a university is "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions [i.e. research, teaching and services] or delivery of higher education at the institutional and national levels."

The internationalization of higher education is however inevitably affected by different views of the world. On the one hand, it may be seen as the institutional process by which universities can compete on a global level to achieve a competitive advantage in the global market of higher education. Another way to see internationalization is as an example of global cooperation, of international and intercultural sharing in an ideal "global village". A third model of internationalization aims at social transformation through a critical analysis that rejects the supremacy of the market and recognizes the reality of marginalization of populations produced by the neo-liberal globalization. Regardless their ideological position, the existence of different models indicates that universities are organizations based on values and, as such, able to facilitate a transformation of the social order. Be it explicit or implicit, the choice of the model is itself of great importance as it raises the question of the social responsibility of the university in its various expressions. It is apparent, for instance, that for the second and third model the concepts of cooperation, collaboration, solidarity, sharing and fairness are crucial.

The natural outcome for the universities engaged in a process of internationalization should be the development of a "global perspective". According to the Development Education Association, acquiring a global perspective in education means becoming aware of the ties that exist between our lives and that of others in the global context; increasing the understanding of the economic forces, and social policies that affect our lives; developing the skills, attitudes and values that enable us to work together with other people from different countries and cultures in search of a more just and sustainable world. In short, the "global citizen" is one who sees the world and its inhabitants as interdependent and works to develop the capacity to promote its own interests as well as those of the most disadvantaged populations, anywhere.

The Commission on the Education of Health Professionals for the 21st Century, chaired by the Dean of the Harvard University School of Public Health and the President of the China Medical Board, maintains that the root of the failure of medical education in creating this type of professionals is the poor attention of curricula to the 'global dimensions of health'. Part of this

'culture of indifference' is reflected in the lack of awareness of the importance of the university as a fundamental social institution. Hanson has explored the main issues related to how individual courses and their instructors might foster what she calls "engaged global citizenship". Reporting on a 6-year outcome evaluation, she discusses the impact and potential of transformative pedagogies. Building on Paulo Freire's pedagogy whereby education is viewed as never neutral and having either an instrumental or an emancipatory purpose, she acknowledges that "if educators do not encourage the oppressed (or the learner) to question, to challenge, and to see the exercise of unjust power as problematic, they enable the oppressed to accept it, adapt to it, and engage in its reproduction." And she asks, "How can educators in a university setting utilize both the internationalization process and their course curricula to catalyse personal and social transformation and foster global citizenship?" She quotes Bond and Scott as arguing for a model of internationalization that may counter "a naive tendency toward the promotion of what they call intellectual tourism, involving the application of traditional academic knowledge and practice to new cultures with no attention to critical self-reflection or the discourse of development." Educators are then encouraged to do more than create international placement opportunities or just use global examples.

What is needed is "not only culturally sensitive professionals or clinical practice, but also personal transformation and extended understanding of, and commitment to social change", particularly in a field like medicine and health where renewed global emphasis is emerging on the social determinants of health, health inequities and social accountability. Such an approach calls for recognition of the reality that globalization leads to increased marginalization of significant groups of people around the world. This calls for a model of internationalization that is mainly about prioritising those research and educational activities that increase knowledge and awareness of inequalities both within and between nations. An internationalization that is "guided by principles of mutuality and reciprocity." Universities supporting social transformation models of internationalization should then introduce educational practices that facilitate learning outcomes beyond the walls of classroom learning and professional practice, and leaders and educators who work "tactically inside and strategically outside of the system".

In conclusion, this model of internationalization may provide a fundamental contribution to universities wishing to engage into IDC equipped with a global perspective. On the other hand, abundant literature shows that exposure of teachers and students to field-based IDC creates new skills and generates special sensitivity to appreciate diversity, combating prejudice, manage change and the dynamics that shape society.

CSI and IDC

The Centre for Studies and Research in International and Intercultural Health (CSI) at the University of Bologna is an academic centre founded in 2006 by a small group of health activists unhappy about the pervasive lack of social commitment in medical practice and education. The aim of CSI is to reaffirm health as a "fundamental right of individuals and interest of the

community"[1], to address the power relation between the medical profession and the community as a potent determinant of health, and to engage in working practices for addressing it. By adopting a self- reflective approach, the CSI has been explicitly developing counter-hegemonic methods, and providing a participatory, non-hierarchical academic workspace managed by unanimity, open to faculty, students, health professionals and anyone sharing common goals. Currently it is composed of more than thirty volunteers and scholars from different areas (public health, medical anthropology, economics, and other), is delivering a solid package of participatory and multidisciplinary teaching, and is engaged in community-based research in collaborations with health promoting institutions, at home and abroad. The main problems encountered are related to the conservative attitude of the faculty when confronted with the need for change; the difficulty of health professionals to effectively address in-house power relations; the obstacles perceived by physicians to embrace multi-methodological approaches and to work in multi-disciplinary teams.

As an academic body, CSI views research and teaching as a tool for social change and health promotion. CSI's general approach to IDC is embodied in the title of an elective course, "The destruction of certainties", offered only once and then incorporated into CSI's regular teaching. In order to be able to support IDC, the argument goes, the university should, firstly, open itself to complexity. In the words of the sociologist Edgar Morin, "[T]he 20th century produced gigantic progress in all fields of scientific knowledge and technology. At the same time it produced a new kind of blindness to complex, fundamental, global problems, and this blindness generated countless errors and illusions, beginning with the scientists, technicians, and specialists themselves. [...] Fragmentation and compartmentalization of knowledge keeps us from grasping 'that which is woven together.' [...] It means understanding disjunctive, reductive thought by exercising thought that distinguishes and connects. It does not mean giving up knowledge of the parts for Knowledge of the whole, or giving up analysis for synthesis, it means conjugating them. This is the challenge of complexity..."

What is needed is a trans-disciplinary and multi-methodological approach, which relies on the contributions of both social sciences and humanities and natural and biomedical sciences. A model of internationalization that brings together an international network of practices for human development is most suited to provide universities with the tools necessary to address IDC's current, complex issues such as global coordination, the power of "new global players", donor dependence and the role of "beneficiary" national governments. Secondly, teaching and learning in the university should be focused on "processuality". Universities which have committed themselves to a meaningful IDC should be unwilling to propose their own, turn key outcomes to less endowed partners; they should rather join their partners' experiences by participating, through teaching, research and field projects, to their struggle to reclaim their right for a self-directed, human-oriented development. Thirdly, to suitably and credibly enter into equitable IDC with poor partner countries, most often former colonies, universities should make all efforts to denaturalize historical processes, and analyse their impact. The "aid system" is a case in point.

[1] Senato della Repubblica, Costituzione della Repubblica Italiana, art. 32 http://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/istituzione/costituzione_inglese.pdf.

As mentioned earlier, development aid to poor countries, often benevolently presented as IDC, is usually charitably given and thankfully received on the basis of solidarity, economic interests or political affiliation. What used to be a donors "hidden" agenda (i.e. mere self-interest) today is widely acknowledged and unashamedly disclosed. Less debated is, instead, the extent to which donors reflect on, feel accountable (on political, ethical and legal grounds) and conscientiously accept full responsibility also for the unintended effects of their well-intentioned interventions. Fourthly, it is therefore paramount to deconstruct current IDC's mainstream narrative in order tore-construct it with different type of knowledge. For example, IDC is often an instrument of creation of economic, political, cultural or simply healthcare dependence. This is where the role of universities would really be unique and priceless by, for instance (a)developing mechanisms to hold donors and powerful Northern partners into account; (b) providing knowledge and expertise to support national leaderships and strengthen local capacities; and (c) studying and learning from South-South collaboration both bi-laterally, between emerging powers and low-income countries, and multi- laterally, through clubs and coalitions, perhaps one of the least explored areas by academics.

Conclusion

Linking his personal experience of deinstitutionalisation of psychiatric hospitals in Italy to that of IDC, Luciano Carrino, a former IDC official at the Italian ministry of foreign affairs, offers the following inspirational comment: "[It is important] to stimulate critical thinking, making it the main instrument of work and at the same time giving it a sort of ethical value [to refrain from being] complicit in inhuman acts and from falling into the deception of clichés and science. [...] The motivation for what we did first of all was ethical, but we also had the belief that, in this way, we would have approached more the ability to better treat the patients."

According to Carrino, building an international network of practices against social exclusion has political and technical values. A political value of the network is the fact that it serves to give strength to groups which, if not connected, would remain more easily unheard and vulnerable. His technical value is in the fact that today, more than ever, it is not enough to have the desire, the "good intention" to help a community in trouble. Rather, people themselves must know what actions are actually able to change their situation. To empower them, IDC's partners should know how to reduce their dependence on strong groups. What is important therefore is not to provide people with answers, but with the means to organize themselves and produce solutions to their problems by analyzing their own needs and set their own priorities through a participatory approach. The outcome of such a process is that partner communities regain confidence on their capabilities and build higher self-esteem. They realize that the solutions are in the community not in the IDC.

In order not to be reduced to a mere transfer of knowledge and technology or to a sterile, neo-colonial exercise of charity, IDC activities should be integral part of an internationalization strategy oriented toward social transformation and involving a process of "deconstruction" of the many clichés and stereotypes that make up the current, conventional "underdevelopment" and

"development aid" discourse. Probably the most difficult task for universities engaging in this process is to build an institutional ethos and provide a learning framework to students and faculty as well "to keep awake critical thinking, to avoid fall into the illusion of having solved all problems, to be able to be irreducibly consistent, in action, with the ethical impulse that unites us all as human beings."

NOMENCLATURE

CSI Centre for Studies and Research in International and Intercultural Health
IDC International Development Cooperation
DAC-OECD Development Aid Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ODA Official Development Assistance
NGOs Non-Governmental Organizations

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