

Searching for Sustainable Living Different Approaches, Shared Vision

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The Directors' meeting of EADI was the occasion for an interesting conference at Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic. The main theme was possible contributions to more sustainable ways of living. This very broad theme resonates with the discussions on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were established by the UN just before the conference in the autumn of 2015. The seventeen goals can be grouped into several large categories of issues. The first five refer to improvements in the lives of all people, with a particular focus on the poor and vulnerable. The next two refer to the access and availability of two strategic basic resources - water and energy. The next three refer to economic growth, infrastructure, and inequalities within and between countries; issues underpinning development processes. SDG 11 is unique in focusing on cities and human settlements, recognizing the effect of global urbanization patterns of recent years in which the global population is now primarily urban. The next four SDGs focus on issues of environmental sustainability, acknowledging different types of ecosystems, the effects of production and consumption patterns, and the impact of climate change. The final two SDGs focus on the means of reaching the goals, by acknowledging the impact of conflicts, injustices, and the importance of global partnerships in implementing the goals effectively. The presentations at the Olomouc conference were wide-ranging, and all addressed the groupings of SDGs as suggested above in different ways.

Several presentations addressed issues concerning the ways in which people's lives can be or are being improved, with the focus mainly on the strategies households use in order to do so. Mackova and Kysucan presented the broad historic pattern of human mobility as an asset for improving wellbeing and they moved away from the current negative discussions on migration. They showed that migration is as old as humanity and suggested that current discussions on migration could be more usefully focused on regulation rather than prevention. Novacek, Kladivo and Mederly presented their work on a new index which is oriented towards the future challenges people face (a state of the future index). This is an interesting initiative in contrast to the range of indices currently being utilized, such as the Human Development Index and the Multiple deprivation Index (HDI, MPI), as it allows assessments to be made in the future as regards which interventions were most useful in retrospect.

The issue of access and availability of strategic basic resources was taken up by Zoomers, who discussed the issue of the global land rush and how we should interpret it. She described the issue of countries who import large amounts of food and therefore have started offshore agriculture in order to gain more secure access to the food imports they require. She showed how analyzing this issue has many pitfalls, ranging from a lack of data to the ways in which existing data should be interpreted. For instance, in analyzing the

effects of a land rush on the countries where off-shore agriculture is located, the amount of land is a less strategic indicator than an indicator linking the amount of arable land to population density and agricultural productivity. But her presentation showed that focusing on two resources in the SDGs, such as water and energy, should not preclude paying attention to other globally limited resources, such as arable land, with its implications for basic food security.

Baud addressed several issues falling within the remit of SDG 11, which uniquely focuses on urbanization and human settlements. She focused on the implications of the use of digitized and spatial knowledge management by local governments, the private sector and civil society organizations that local governments work with. Debates on ‘smart cities’ ignore the large-scale investments that are needed to supply the spatial data infrastructure to make cities ‘smart’, nor do they address the issues of accountability and access for citizens to the information used. However, Baud showed that the build-up of good information and knowledge from citizens can change internal processes within governments to make them more efficient, less corrupt, more effective, and able to provide opportunities for effective interaction with citizens. The latter however, depends on the political ‘space’ given to relationships between governments and citizens and on the recognition of community-based knowledge.

Finally, a number of presenters took up the issues of international cooperation and donor choices, with two interesting perspectives. The first concerned how research strengthens the role of donors. Vincent, working at the French Development Agency in the Research and Development Department (AfD), showed how the French agency stresses the importance of research and knowledge in influencing thinking about development challenges in its partnerships with other institutions. The Research department is included in the AfD’s operational budget, which indicates the importance given to its activities¹. The Agency works with a wide range of partners in co-constructing and promoting research and knowledge exchanges, among whom EADI’s network is considered strategic for cutting-edge research, exchanges among scholars, and dissemination to a wider audience. Vincent showed how research on financial issues influences their strategies. ODA is becoming less important to developing countries, in comparison to direct foreign investment, remittances and private debt, as external sources of finance.

However, the most recent European Development Report (2015) shows that domestic public resources are emerging as by far the largest source of finance for developing countries. This implies that research focusing on increasing domestic tax revenues in developing countries and improving banking systems is a strategic topic. As developing countries mainly draw their revenues from taxation of (multinational) companies, issues such as bank secrecy, tax havens, and profit shifting are of major concern to developing countries. This is also reflected in the work done by the network dealing with issues of tax justice, coordinated by Martina Neuwirth, previously an EADI Executive Committee member, which held a conference in Vienna in January 2015 on Tax Justice for Social Justice².

The conference brought together activists, practitioners and scholars from many countries. They discussed several issues concerning tax justice; such as how the fiscal rewards of globalization are distributed among and within countries, and to what extent new international regulatory frameworks can support developing countries in dealing with multinational companies, tax competition among countries, tax evasion and corruption. Vincent concluded that, although the financial support for tax systems in ODA was less than 0.1% between 2004-2012, this is an essential area for donors to support, together with a focus on fighting tax havens, bank secrecy, and the promotion of fiscal responsibility within the private sector.

The second perspective concerned the ways in which the various ‘new’ EU member states have dealt with issues such as their new roles as donors and with international cooperation. Horký-Hlucháň showed that central and Eastern European countries took different routes regarding international cooperation, depending on whether they had become EU members or not³. Those that had, developed two main discourses; linking their work to the MDGs (now SDGs) and focusing on Africa, or focusing on human rights (e.g. Poland). Horký-Hlucháň suggested that the new member countries have a unique contribution to make to EU discussions on development cooperation, as a result of their own recent transition processes; the experiences from their transition could be translated into useful guidelines for other transitions as suggested to developing countries in development cooperation programmes. However, there is little recognition of the eastern European experience among EU donors at the moment, which may be a missed opportunity.

Pavlík provided an interesting case study of the Czech Republic, which shows how one of the ‘new’ EU members has dealt with the transition from being a recipient of aid from various European programmes to becoming the largest donor of development aid among the new EU member states. Originally Czechoslovakia, the predecessor of the Czech Republic, was a development aid donor under the Soviet controlled aid regime, and this also included military aid. In that period Czechoslovakia was not autonomous in its decisions concerning aid, and they were centrally controlled. In the subsequent process of accession to the EU, the Czech Republic became the first country to once again become a development aid donor. Pavlík however, also discussed the aid that the Czech Republic received in its process of accession from the PHARE programme, which assisted it to build up its institutions according to the EU requirements for accession (as well as those from other European and international institutions). The development aid policy of the Czech Republic is quite focused and follows key areas of the SDG goals, and has a designated development agency to oversee the programme.

The Olomouc conference provided interesting perspectives on global and development issues, and brought together scholars working on global issues from various perspectives. It also showed that the history of the ‘new’ EU member states can provide a twist to the SDGs by including experiences from their recent ‘transitions’ in order to inform ideas concerning the current transformations on which all of us are working.

References

Ondrej Horký-Hlucháň and Simon Lightfoot (2015). *Development Cooperation of the ‘New’ EU Member States; Beyond Europeanization*. EADI Book Series, Palgrave MacMillan.

Notes

¹ A large number of publications of various types were presented, and provided very useful insights into the issues taken up.

² Coordinated by EADI and the Global Alliance for Tax Justice, and hosted by the Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation and the Department of Development Studies of the Vienna University

³ His presentation was linked to his recently published book, *Development Cooperation of the ‘New’ EU Member States; Beyond Europeanization*, in the EADI Book Series.