

**PARTICIPATION AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT: FORMING A NEW GENERATION OF DEVELOPMENT LEADERS**

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On December 14 2018 a seminar was held in Bologna at the Legislative Assembly of the Emilia-Romagna Region titled: *Participation, Local Development and Training of Young Leaders*”: from the René Cassin Award to international networks of innovative laboratories of research and training of leaders of participatory local development.

It was jointly organized by the Legislative Assembly of the Emilia-Romagna Region (RER) and the KIP International School (KIP IS) with three objectives: to disseminate and analyse the outcomes of the René Cassin Award through the testimonies of winners of past editions; to learn about some of the experiences of participatory territorial development supported by the Legislative Assembly of the Region and to discuss the proposal of creating an international network of training initiatives related to participatory territorial development linked to an international network of territorial laboratories.

The articles published in this issue of *Universitas Forum* are based on the contributions presented by several speakers at the seminar and on a further experience of participatory research grounded in a reciprocal relationship between university researchers and territorial actors in Winnipeg, Canada. Together they represent experiences that are components of a strategy for forming a new generation of development leaders and for renewing the relationship between the university and the local territory that includes multi-actor participatory research on issues central to its social and economic development, drawing on the knowledge produced to innovate the university teaching curriculum and providing opportunities for significant practical experience for young graduates to complement the academic process and create openings for future employment.

In presenting the thinking behind this strategy, Luciano Carrino notes that professionals working in the public administration, whatever their specific discipline, contribute to the general social and economic development of their societies but that their specialised training rarely prepares them to recognise the complexity of needs, to adopt trans-disciplinary approaches and to critique and innovate the techniques they use in their professional activities or in generating public policies.

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That is why, in his view, professionals trained in specific disciplines should be taught to take into account the developmental dimension of their work, that is, of the contribution they can make not only to solving the specific technical problem before them, but also to improving the functioning of society as a whole and its capacity to respond to the complex needs of people. “The sum of many sectoral professions does not make a strategy to address complex problems such as poverty, inequality, violence and environmental degradation which require the convergent and coordinated contribution of all social actors and professionals from many fields.”

Forming development professionals cannot, however, be static, repetitive or follow a manual. To the contrary, it should be enriched by knowledge about innovative experiences that have addressed complex development problems and accompanied by research oriented to experimenting solutions to similarly complex problems in their own realities. This process of integrating social and technological innovations and to experimenting through multi-actor action research should be an integral part of the learning process and could contribute to innovating teaching curriculum and methodologies. The proposal is for interested universities, from different countries around the world, and in dialogue with institutions and social actors, to constitute an international network of teaching programmes for development professionals and researchers that integrate this trans-disciplinary approach. Each could be linked to a network of territorial laboratories where students could be engaged in action research, knowledge and innovations could be shared and students and researchers could co-construct possible solutions to some of the critical development issues facing every country today.

### **Co-constructing knowledge and innovating teaching**

Going in the direction proposed by Carrino implies innovating both the content and methodology of university teaching, and three contributions offer ideas for doing this.

Based on his experience with the International Health Centre (Centro Salute Internazionale (CSI) at the Università di Bologna, Angelo Stefanini addresses the internationalization of universities. He argues that internationalization requires a paradigm shift to support a more innovative and transformative educational practice in line with the university’s social function. In that context international development cooperation offers an opportunity for students, teachers and researchers to gain a global perspective, to appreciate difference and understand phenomena of inequality, but to do so requires a didactic framework that “deconstructs the mainstream narrative on development and international cooperation and reconstructs it with other, different, kinds of knowledge”.

Research, then, is the key to reconstructing this knowledge base, not what has been traditionally understood as scientific research, but above all, participatory research that brings together academic researchers, institutions and social actors. Sambou Ndiaye describes a hybrid research process (illustrated in detail in the previous issue of *Universitas Forum*) that was a collaboration among the national government of Senegal, the country’s local governments and a network of Senegalese universities, financed through international cooperation. The “national competition of innovative practices of local development” involved academic and institutional actors, students

and groups directly engaged in local development practices on the ground. It led to the identification and documentation of little-known existing practices and provided students with direct experience of participatory field research. The creation of ARUT (l'Alliance de Recherche-actions- Université- Territoire) at the Université Gaston Berger of St. Louis represents a commitment to continue this work of « co-construction » of knowledge and action between the university and the territory.

Shauna MacKinnon describes another research process that exemplifies the critical pedagogical philosophy in the University of Winnipeg's Department of Urban and Inner-City Studies (UIC). Intentionally located outside of the main campus, within the geographic boundaries defined by the City of Winnipeg as the "inner city", her research is in collaboration with many indigenous organizations who are providing social services to families in the neighbourhood. She illustrates how, through the participatory research process, the university becomes a "partner in the process of change" and how the research has contributed to knowledge sharing and identifying best practices regarding how to support children, youth, and families in an urban environment. MacKinnon underlines how the research process is equally important to the outcome and about the importance of relationships, including in research. The approach taken by UIC in its research and teaching can be considered an example of a critical pedagogy that aims to facilitate processes and create safe learning spaces for students.

A highlight of this issue of *Universitas Forum* are the contributions of former winners of the René Cassin Prize who reflect on their respective experiences of work-training supported by the prize in the context of international development cooperation in Senegal, local economic development agencies in El Salvador and Colombia and in an indigenous restorative justice organization in Winnipeg, Canada. In discussing their respective experiences and in analysing the salient elements that contributed to their professional and personal development they present them as laboratories, "as spaces for innovation and for forming professionals capable of concretizing ideas that break with past schemes and generate new opportunities". From their perspective, these learning experiences are not unidirectional: they are an opportunity to build relationships and to learn from other young people around the world, "to co-construct a vision of a global future and experiment tools for making it possible".

Concluding this issue is an article by Rossana Mengozzi based on three participatory experiences related to local development financed by the law on participation of the Emilia Romagna Region. The idea is to explore the possibility of linking concrete experiences of participatory planning with university research so as identify significant elements of participation and its impact on the territory and explore the potential for adaptation and replication in other territories within and outside the region, creating the basis of a laboratory on participatory development and participatory democracy.

In responding to Carrino's call to innovate the current approach to forming development professionals, the contributions presented here suggest that research and innovation partnerships between university and territorial actors, what we can refer to as territorial development labs,

should be made a priority. These “laboratories” are an opportunity for territorial actors, supported by researchers and students, to experiment possible solutions to development problems in their realities, to generate social innovation and produce knowledge that can fuel the paradigm shift Stefanini refers to.

The experience of the René Cassin prize also highlights the importance of providing opportunities for new graduates to complement their theoretical knowledge with practical professional development internships in experiences and organizations associated with these laboratories. The René Cassin prize demonstrates that such opportunities, if appropriately remunerated and of sufficient duration, can have a real impact on the future paths of young professionals in development-related fields.

Several universities and territorial actors in Italy, Latin America and Senegal are already experimenting with teaching programmes in response to the proposals discussed here, and several territorial laboratories have been constituted. Expanding this network and identifying international activities, such as conferences and workshops, shared research projects, exchanges and publications that can facilitate networking and knowledge sharing from different perspectives are further steps to be taken. Investing in this network’s activities on the part of international development cooperation and international development research donors would be a useful way to support the UN 2030 sustainable development agenda.