

## **Report of the Working Group for Co-operation in Development and Area Studies Training, 19-20 September 2002, Ljubljana.**

The Working Group has been paying particular attention to the character and organisation of Development and Area Studies in different regions or sub-regions of the EADI constituency. It has recently examined some of the features of Development and Area Studies in the Iberian Peninsula. The siting of the General Conference in Slovenia offered an opportunity to take this interest further.

The plan of the Working Group to dedicate two of its three sessions to exploring the particular history of development studies in the East and Central European countries was amply justified. The Working Group had deliberately incorporated into its own Conference planning the Special Session on Transition and Development Studies on the 21<sup>st</sup> September; hence it was natural to invite Boris Pleskovic (Development Economics, World Bank, Washington) & Ferenc Miszlivetz (Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest) to attend our two earlier sessions of the Working Group. This proved invaluable since their awareness of and participation in some of the shifts in social science capacity over the 70s, 80s and 90s proved crucial to understanding this still relatively under-researched era. It became clear that there was by no means a single pattern to the coverage and status of development and area studies during the communist regimes; the institutions in Yugoslavia, for instance, had focused more on aspects of the non-aligned movement and their implications for self-management and south-south co-operation in the developing world. By contrast, in Hungary, it proved possible for the colleagues associated with the distinguished analyst, Tamas Szentes, to contribute to a whole series of development studies texts during the 70s and 80s. These scarcely circulated in the West but they did achieve a certain currency in Hungary.

In general, apart from the institutes in Yugoslavia, travel to do field research in the developing world itself was often highly problematic; and hence the development studies tradition was predominantly theoretical, unlike its counterparts in Britain, Holland and Scandinavia. It would seem that the close – perhaps too close? – links amongst academic, consultancy and technical co-operation that characterises some aspects of western development studies had little counterpart in the Eastern traditions of development studies. The cadres of technical co-operation personnel going out from Hungary or from Czechoslovakia seem to have had little connection with the theoreticians of development – though this would need more analysis.

Another aspect that would distinguish the Eastern from the Western European traditions of development studies would be the location of this field in one of the institutes under the Academy of Sciences. In the Russian model of the Academy which was found, with variations, in many parts of East and Central Europe, the institutes of the Academy were very separate from the teaching departments of the universities. Hence, it would seem that the regular teaching of development studies in undergraduate and post-graduate courses was not a feature of the Eastern tradition as it has been in the West for some four decades.

It was gratifying that many of the issues laid out for debate in these two sessions (on the Working Group's conference web-site) proved to be very relevant. There is no space in this brief report to do more than mention some of the more salient of them, but it is worth underlining the need for EADI as a whole to gain a greater insight into these changing traditions.

Amongst the many issues worth just noting is the way that development studies (concerning non-East and Central European countries) was replaced by transition and transformation studies (what Mischivetz referred to as a new theology of ‘transitology’), sometimes with a continuity of personnel. Also evident was the relationship between the ending of official development assistance (ODA) and ending of interest in development studies. Not that there had been the same relationship between development aid and the development studies constituency as has been evident in the UK or in Denmark or Sweden, but clearly the ending of scholarships for developing country scholars and the ending of aid projects and joint ventures had an impact on the standing of development studies.

As a corollary of this, it will be fascinating to note to what extent the re-emergence of ODA in countries such as Hungary, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia (see the very informative papers by Mrak, Barany, Halaxa and Szep in Special Session F) will lead to a renewed interest in development and area studies. There is already some evidence that this has been happening in the Czech Republic and in Slovakia. But some commentators on the situation suggested that the new interest in development studies in some parts of the region was more to do with exploring ways to regain markets and close the import – export gap with developing economies than with academic reasons.

It was widely acknowledged that there would be new careers in development opening up, as the accession countries recognised the need for capacity development in development assistance. There could also be knock on effects for the NGOs and for new institutes acting as advisors to government.

It was not necessarily a question of the Eastern countries simply acquiring the expertise associated with the West; there could well be significant lessons learned in Eastern Europe’s transition and transformation that could be of special value not only to poorer parts of Eastern Europe – such as the South East – but also to the developing world.

In this respect, the illustration, by Boris Pleskovic, of how the World Bank had sought to build new institutional capacity in market economics in many countries of the region was a powerful example of the challenges of mono-disciplinary capacity building, which has sometimes paid insufficient attention to the existing capacity that was already available. This intervention, too, was eminently worth studying in its own right.

The shift from being donors to recipients and then to donors once again – but in a very different context – suggested that this history should be captured before it was too late. Parts of it are captured in the two papers written for the Special Session on Transition and Development Studies, but, ideally, EADI should encourage a great deal more to be researched if we are not to lose a whole swathe of the history of development and area studies in this region extending from East and Central Europe to Moscow itself.

References:

Papers by Mischivetz and Pleskovic

Papers by Mrak, Barany, Halaxa and Szep

Outline of Working Group for Cooperation in Training’s General Conference sessions (on website)

