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## Incongruities Between the Theory and Perception of Regional Development in Less Developed Countries: Toward Bridging the Gap

Hooshang Amirahmadi  
*Rutgers University*

### INTRODUCTION

Planning education for less developed countries suffers from several interrelated problems, of which three are particularly significant. First, despite recent advances, most less developed countries still lack adequate educational resources, including universities, graduate programs, faculty, research facilities, and professional organizations, to educate and train their own planners. A number of publications have examined aspects of such inadequacies, particularly in regional development curricula and have advanced remedial proposals (Friedmann, 1967 and 1973; Dunham and Hillhorst, 1970 and 1971; Perloff, 1971; Kuklinski, 1971; Celestin, 1972; United Nations, 1972; Dix, 1980a). Fundamental to such inadequacies in less developed countries is the allocation of relatively small budgets to higher education in general, compared with defense spending, for example, and to the field of planning in particular (Amirahmadi, 1987a). Research on this aspect of the problem with planning education in less developed countries remains largely underdeveloped.

Second, the flight of a significant portion of their skilled manpower, including planners, to developed countries of the West drains less developed countries of their most talented people. Existing research on the "brain drain" identifies a number of push-pull factors, such as the underdevelopment and consequent lack of opportunities for personal advancement in less developed countries. Such opportunities are said to abound in developed countries. Proposals for rectification have included calls for global cooperation in the field of development, for taxing the migrants and the recipient countries, and for various other regulations to limit the mobility of skilled manpower (Mondale, 1967; Quie, 1967; Oh, 1977; Grubel and Scott, 1977; Glaser, 1978; Zahlan, 1981; Bhagwati, 1977; Hamada, 1981; Chopra, 1986; Lakshmana Rao, 1979). Again, we know little about the problem of brain drain in the field of planning.

Third, the education that students from less developed countries receive in planning programs of universities in developed countries only partially meets the challenge of the reality back home. Specifically, most such programs are tailored to the needs of developed countries, and culture-bound curricula incorporate teaching materials that are sometimes inappropriate for specific conditions of less developed countries. Proposals to remedy the problem have ranged from modifying planning curricula in Western universities to establishing planning schools in less developed countries (Oberlander, 1962; Serageldin, 1980; Zetter, 1980; Dix, 1980b; Rodwin, 1981; Perks, 1980; Healey, 1980; Perloff, 1969).

The purpose of this chapter is to address a neglected aspect of the debates on the relevancy of developed country planning education for students from less developed countries: the perceptual differences that exist between the mainstream Western planning literature and students from less developed countries. To demonstrate these differences I have focused on a few conceptual issues in regional development planning. I propose comparative education as a means to bridge the gap and as a step toward universalizing planning education in the West; a development that is called forth by the increasing internationalization of human relations. I conclude the chapter with a personal note on my experience with education in the United States.

### SCOPE AND OMISSIONS

Most texts, readers, or courses on regional development include some or all of the following topics: (1) definition and delineation of region; (2) review of regional problems; (3) major regional development objectives pursued by less developed and developed countries; (4) approaches to regional development, including analysis of their impacts and efficacy; (5) methods and theories informing such approaches; and (6) new directions and alternatives (Glasson, 1983; Alden and Morgan, 1974; Gore, 1984; Holland, 1976; Hall, 1982; Stohr and Taylor, 1981; Lim, 1983; Kuklinski, 1981; Gillingwater and Hart, 1978; Rondinelli, 1985; Friedmann and Alonso, 1975).

The first three topics demonstrate well the contrasts between perceptions of students from less developed countries and the mainstream (neoclassical economics) Western literature on regional development, and thus I shall concentrate on them. The arguments are intended to be general and exemplary and no attempt is made to examine details. The remaining topics are combined and briefly discussed as "Other Issues" at the end of the section entitled "Perceptual Differences".

Statements in quotation marks are my wordings of ideas expressed by others, mainly my students. If the ideas sound radical, it is only because they are expressions of a different reality, that of the less developed countries, and of frustration with the development experience in that part of the world. In fact, most students from less developed countries come from upper classes with little

commitment to social justice in their countries and, to the best of my knowledge, the number with any degree of commitment to radical ideologies is very low.

Views of students from developed countries are not included, because I wish to concentrate on the contrast between perceptions of students from less developed countries and the mainstream Western literature. Although the views of students from developed countries remain largely irrelevant to the formal education that students from less developed countries receive in developed countries, such views do contribute significantly to their general education particularly in the areas of culture and social life. Views of students from developed countries become indispensable in comparative courses, where mutual learning is the basis of education.

I have also excluded that part of the Western literature on regional development which has dissented from the mainstream. Views expressed in this so-called radical or neopopulist literature, which is largely based on radical political economics, are, I believe, closer to the experiential perceptions of students from less developed countries. However, despite the fact that this literature has also over time become part of the mainstream, it is still the literature based on neoclassical economics which is the prime source of knowledge for students from less developed countries. Many of these students avoid so-called radical courses either because they fear political repression when they return to their countries, or they have no commitment to radical ideology, or they consider such courses, ironically enough, impractical.

It is clear that I agree with part of what students from less developed countries have expressed to me. I do not, however, wish to idealize them or suggest that their experiential knowledge of less developed countries is always superior to the largely abstract Western theories about these societies. Indeed, by referring to the knowledge of these students about regional issues in their countries as "experiential," I want to underscore their lack of conceptual sophistication. Nonetheless, the ideas, I believe, are relevant and should be incorporated in teaching and research on regional development issues in less developed countries.

Finally, my arguments sound as if I am stereotyping both the students from less developed countries and the mainstream Western literature on the regional development. This is, however, only partially true. Neither of the two is a straw man. For a sharper demonstration of the contrasts between the two, however, I have had to abstract from divergences that necessarily exist within the mainstream Western literature and within the students' opinions. I am also assuming that the student population I spoke to had not been previously exposed to the radical literature on regional development, or at least not to any significant degree. My presentation of the mainstream Western literature also abstracts from its rich complexity about issues discussed in this chapter. Again, this has been done for a sharper contrast between the two perceptions.

## PERCEPTUAL DIFFERENCES

### *Definition and Delineation of Region*

Region in the mainstream Western literature is generally defined as a subnational geographic unit that is usually self-sufficient in economic terms and capable of reproducing the conditions of its perpetual existence. The entity may be delineated formally, on the basis of internal uniformity, or functionally, on the basis of certain economic activities. Depending on the purpose of the analysis, other types of delineations and definitions are also possible (Richardson, 1979; Glasston, 1983).

For students from less developed countries, this conception of region is problematic. It brings to mind both familiar and unfamiliar perceptions. The geographic part of the definition is basically acceptable, although these students are reluctant to acknowledge the self-reproductive capacity of regions for fear of the political implications. As for the functional part of the definition, they cannot even understand its conceptual basis. Regional delineation in most less developed countries, as in developed countries, has often been based on political, ethnic, or other historical factors. "Region," remarked a student from South Africa, "is as much a geographic unit as it is a political-historical entity and a tool of the interventionist state." A student from Egypt went even further. He suggested that "region is the nation itself, the state, part of its existence. It was not long ago that Egypt was a region of the Ottoman Empire."

The low level of development in less developed countries has also fostered a different conception of space in the minds of most of the students who come from there. That conception is largely experiential, rooted in the social and communal nature of cultures in these countries (Sack, 1980). Thus, according to a student from Bangladesh, "a region is the sum total of all social relations which tie the regional people together, creating solidarity among them, rather than a piece of space within a larger spatial system." "Region," a second student from Nigeria remarked, "is an entity where people have common problems, religion, culture, habits, history, norms, and even climate."

Understanding of region as a territory in which the people have common social bonds is also rooted in the historical experience of less developed countries. "Egypt region," I was told by an Egyptian student, "Became the most critical memory of the Egyptians during the nation-building processes that followed the collapse of colonial order." The new "Egypt Nation," he continued, "was the same as the old Egypt region with a new political order."

The prevailing conception of region in most developed countries as a defined space within a larger spatial system is the result of the disintegration of communal property relations in these societies — a process that is also deepening in less developed countries. Equally responsible is the growth of regional governments and their influence on local affairs (Smith, 1985). Ironically, as the internationalization of human socioeconomic and political relation expands, the conception of

spatial demarcation is becoming less comprehensible (Smith, 1984). This is not to say that we are already "World" citizens and do not recognize neighborhoods or towns, but to direct attention to the globalization of issues and conditions.

Finally, for students from less developed countries nothing can be further from the truth than the conception of region as a mental abstraction or a container standing by itself, independent of its material or spiritual contents and history. On the contrary, for them, as for many regional theorists, a region represents an objective entity distinguished by its specific political-geographic form and socioeconomic, cultural and historical contents (Holland, 1976; Richardson, 1979).

### *Regional Problems*

Most less developed and developed countries share similar regional issues, including regional disparity, lagging regions, lack of local participation in national decision-making and leadership, and regionally based ethnic conflicts. Examples of countries with these types of shared problems include developed countries such as Britain, France, Spain, and Canada, and most members of less developed countries such as Brazil, Iran, India, and Sudan. It is not surprising, then, that regional demands for social justice and decentralization should be growing in both developed and less developed countries (Shabbir Cheema and Rondinelli, 1983; Amirahmadi, 1987b).

These similarities aside, significant perceptual differences exist about what constitutes or causes a regional problem. The mainstream Western literature usually takes the view that a regional problem exists when either serious grievance is voiced by a significantly large group of local people, or a region fails to meet some predefined national norms, standards, or criteria (Brown and Burrows, 1979). These subjective and objective definitions make sense to students from less developed countries, but they also know by experience, as do the mainstream theoreticians of regional issues and the students from developed countries, that the people of a problem region may not dare to complain about their dire conditions and thus internalize their problems. Moreover, a lagging region may not be classified as a problem region for political reasons.

Most mainstream Western literature on regional issues considers economic problems (e.g., unemployment and poverty) as resulting from "spatial problems," such as disequilibrium in distribution of national wealth or population across various regions, rather than causing them. In other words, spatial anomalies such as absence of productive factors or obstacles to their free movements are rooted in socioeconomic factors and wrong locational decisions. However, the spatial aspects of the problem (e.g., concentration) are only of secondary importance to the people of the region. It is my impression that the argument which distinguishes the people's problems in space from the "spatial problems" makes better sense to students from less developed countries.

Problem regions, according to the mainstream Western literature, fall into three categories: depressed, backward, and congested (Hoover, 1975). Depressed regions are areas that were once developed but gradually lost their economic vitality as a result of industrial decline or because of structural changes, such as changes in energy sources or transport modes. Backward regions are areas that have never been developed and have been unable to significantly change their subsistence economies. Finally, congested regions are areas that suffer from overconcentration of population and socioeconomic activities.

To students from less developed countries this categorization of problem regions is problematic. The depressed category exists largely in books on the impact of colonialism on their countries' spatial development, the backward category appears the most prevalent, and the congested category is associated with their most modernized metropolitan areas. Nevertheless, most of these students characterize their countries as having tremendous regional problems, such as disparity in levels of development, living standard, and political participation among peoples of various social or ethnic groups.

This relative conception of regional problems is rooted in their sense of (and not necessarily commitment to) equitable development as a desired social goal. It is not, therefore, surprising that conceptions of development and underdevelopment as absolute conditions should be largely alien to most students from less developed countries. For them they are best defined as historical relations between the dominant and dominated societies. Even students from dominant classes in less developed countries can not escape this feeling of being dominated from outside. As Freire (1968), Illich (1971), and Fanon (1963) remind us, oppression becomes internalized when resistance to it is defeated.

Similar conceptual differences exist between students from less developed countries and the mainstream Western literature over what causes regional problems. Of the two main explanations given in the literature, namely balanced and unbalanced growth theories, the latter appeals to the consciousness of these students. What remain mind-boggling for them are the unrealistic assumptions, as well as the apolitical arguments, upon which balanced growth theories are built.

For example, these theories assume competitive capitalism and all the neo-classical economics assumptions about it, and reduce forces affecting regional growth or decline to economic factors. Most less developed countries are hardly capitalistic in the sense assumed in these theories, and the role of the state cannot be overlooked in explaining regional development in these societies. Indeed, "the brand of capitalism existing in most less developed countries today," remarked a Turkish student, "is best described as state monopoly capitalism." The student underscored the monopolistic dominance of the state in these countries. It is not, therefore, surprising that Myrdal (1957) and Hirschman (1958), for example, should make more sense to students from less developed countries than Losch (1952) and Isard (1956). As a colleague once put it, "the monopolistic state in less

developed countries is the primary source of regional imbalance and its only hope for cure."

### *Regional Development Objective*

Ideally, regional planning or policy should help achieve national growth, regional development, interpersonal equity, and territorial balance in living standards. In the real world of capitalism, no such results have been achieved. The mainstream Western literature on regional development faults the contradictory nature of the objectives for the ineffectiveness of regional development strategies (Dewar et al., 1986). Specifically, the literature counterposes place prosperity to people prosperity, sector to region, and efficiency to equity, arguing that achieving one would inevitably require sacrificing the other. Using a perverse logic glorifying national economic growth at the cost of inequity, as in the inverted U thesis, the mainstream Western literature, in most cases, turns out favoring place over people, sector over region, and efficiency over equity.

Most students from less developed countries, even those who tend to agree with the mainstream theories, feel that the conflicts should be handled differently, and in one student's words, "in favor of all parties involved." But many of these students use their experiential knowledge to formulate a more complex response. "I do not know exactly how the conflicts could be resolved," remarked a Colombian student in one of my classes, "but I know from the experience of my country that neglecting equity and regional development objectives in favor of efficiency and sectoral planning is not the right approach." He went on to suggest that "efficiency and sectoral objectives are interrelated and are of an economic nature, while the related objectives of regional development and interpersonal equity are largely social in character."

An Ethiopian student expressed a somewhat different view: "The alleged conflicting nature of objectives is either misconceived, as in the case of place versus people, or is a reflection of social contradictions rooted in deeper structural issues, as in the case of efficiency versus equity". A somewhat similar but more precise statement was made by a student from South Africa: "Efficiency versus equity debates in my country are political, and in most cases equity is defined in terms of political efficiency, as a legitimization tool." She then made the following comment on the issue of place versus people: "Place is a powerful tool to conceal social differences and the uneven distribution of development benefits among various social classes. Otherwise, everybody knows that development should be concerned with the people who need it most."

My own experience has led me to believe that such conflicts may also reflect policymakers' own prejudices against this or that objective, depending on their position in the structure of social relations, as in the case of space versus sector. Most line ministers, for example, do not support regional planning; provincial governors, on the other hand, favor regional planning over income distribution

policies (Amirahmadi, 1986, 1987c). Our as yet imperfect knowledge of the nature of relationships among space, sector, and class in planning also contributes to our inability to better manage the relationship between equity and efficiency objectives (Lim, 1985).

Formulation of objectives, regardless of who formulates them, is constrained by the manner in which problems are conceptualized. If such conceptualizations are problematic to begin with, then there can be little hope to formulate nonproblematic objectives. An example will illustrate the point. Most mainstream Western regional growth models consider regional imbalance as undesirable and argue that it is largely caused by immobility of productive factors, particularly labor and capital. Spatial equilibrium is then elevated to the most desired objective of regional development. The prescription invariably includes means which would facilitate factor mobility (Vanhove and Klaassen, 1980; Hansen, 1974).

To most students from less developed countries these formulations of cause, objective, and cure are problematic and unreal. In the words of a Haitian student, "Assumptions of neoclassical economics may apply to advanced capitalism, at least in fifty percent of cases, but they are surely unreal and inapplicable in the context of my country." She added, "It is true that regional inequality is a big problem in Haiti but it is not true that the problem is caused by lack of factor mobility or that it can be cured by providing incentives to labor and capital. In my country, one man, Duvalier, was everything and everything was personified in him." The case of Haiti may have not been as unique as it may sound. Similar situations have existed in many less developed countries including Iran, the Philippines, and Nicaragua.

Another issue is the question of who should formulate regional development objectives, technocrats or the people. The mainstream Western literature, by and large, takes a technocratic view, arguing that trained specialists are keener in realizing what the general public need and how they can best be served given the available resources (Alden and Morgan, 1974). Development, according to this view, can and should be taken to the people in the forms of plans or projects. This view has been modified only slightly in more recent literature that focuses on decentralization and participation (Rondinelli, 1985; El-Shakhs, 1982).

The reaction of students from less developed countries to technocracy is usually cautious and mixed. "Instead of packaging development for the people," remarked a student from Taiwan, "we should work with the people to develop conditions for their self-development. This means", he continued, "that participation of the people in development is essential." Most of the students from less developed countries with whom I have spoken favor a largely conditioned technocratic approach along with controlled decentralization. They do not think that the people can plan, but neither do they accept the view of the people as herds. They are after a more balanced and objective view.

### Other Issues

On the issues discussed above — definition and delineation of region, regional problems, and regional development objectives — significant perceptual differences exist between students from less developed countries and the mainstream Western literature. Similar differences exist over such other important issues as why regional disparity develops, the most appropriate planning approach to regional development, the desirable impact of the chosen approach, and possible alternatives to obsolete ideas, methods, or theories.

Most mainstream Western regional growth theories identify market imperfections, such as factor immobility, monopoly, and/or unequal resource endowments as causes of regional disparity. Their prescriptions for solving the problem are also largely similar: various incentives or control policies to mitigate market imperfections and encourage spatial redistribution of resources (Yuill et al., 1980; Hansen, 1974). Planning is recommended but only under special circumstances. These theories also share the common view that spatial equilibrium is the desired result. The implicit assumption is that spatial equilibrium is efficient and will benefit everybody. Mainstream theorists also share a common strategy to arrive at new approaches: rather than scrapping the old ideas, they keep modifying them to fit new circumstances.

Most students from less developed countries I have met are against application of mainstream Western theories of regional development in their original forms to their countries. They maintain that the assumptions of the theories, including a competitive capitalist system, are inapplicable to less developed countries. The explanation of market imperfections as the cause of regional disparity is thus ruled out. They also argue that in the absence of an explicit policy, unequal resources distribution does not necessarily lead to disparity among regions. The only real causes of regional disparity, they insist, are the imbalanced policies of the monopolistic state in these countries. If the monopolistic state is responsible for regional disparity, then it is also the agent that can best cure the problem. After all, despite the growing power of multinational corporations, states in less developed countries are still the main economic agents and the most resourceful capitalists. However, the policy prescriptions of the mainstream Western regional theories are, argue students from less developed countries, largely inappropriate to situations in their countries. "Financial incentives," commented a student from Turkey in one of my classes, "do not work beyond enriching the rich and are harmful to the poor budgets of these governments." "Control policies could be beneficial," she added, "but the corruption of the state officials makes their implementation difficult if not impossible." As one of my Brazilian classmates remarked in a course on regional development at Cornell University, "In Brazil, control policies have been effective any time they have been placed in the hands of independent administrators with a strong commitment to regional development. At other times, such policies have only worked in the reverse direction of their objectives."

This leaves planning as the approach to regional development that is most favored by students from less developed countries, although they dislike its technocratic values and prescriptions. Most of these students are trained as generalists, even in such technical fields as architecture and engineering. "Technocratism will only work if people believe in it," remarked a student from Egypt. "In less developed countries," he continued, "the majority do not believe in technocratism not only because it has not worked for them but also because they do not trust their governments."

A top-down planning approach is considered inappropriate, and thus a bottom-up approach is advocated (Stohr and Taylor, 1981). "Planning means," a Palestinian student remarked, "working with people, not for them, learning about how they think, not telling them how they should think, letting them decide what they want, not deciding for them." In short, appropriate planning should incorporate participation of people into its processes, from problem identification to objective formulation to implementation of the plan. In this way, the desired result, spatial equilibrium or interpersonal equity, as well as probable new alternatives are jointly determined by the people and planners.

Students from less developed countries also tend to be critical of the mainstream Western regional development literature for its insensitivity to the realities and perceptions of these countries. They contest the universality of many development conceptions and argue that such conceptions are culture-bound. "In the United States," a student from Yugoslavia remarked, "planning is taught as a profession as if a universal theory of planning could exist." He suggested that planning is a time-, place-, purpose-, and class-specific activity. A student from Egypt claimed that "most Western theories have contempt for the allegedly backward informal sector in less developed countries. What they forget is that most large cities in less developed countries live on this sector." He added that, "I am not sure what but technology might have largely been responsible for such misconceptions as well as universalization of concepts that still remain basically local."

Finally, students from less developed countries are unhappy with the abstractness of mainstream Western regional development theories and their lack of unity or link with practice. "While we are assured of their usefulness," remarked a student from Iran, "we do not have a specific idea as to how the theories we have been taught might be applied in our countries." A student from Africa, commenting in a panel on planning education for students from less developed countries at the 1985 Meeting of the Association of Collegiate schools of Planning, made a similar remark: "We have come here to learn how to cure our social ills back home; this, or should be, our ultimate propose. An education that is not directed toward this goal cannot be appropriate for Africa." He claimed that, "We used to think more about solutions before we came to the United States. We now think more about theories, methods, and definitions." This is obviously an exaggeration. But an exaggeration also carries with it a certain amount of truth. It seems that what students from less developed countries really need is an education that raises their

consciousness beyond their experiential knowledge, makes them think about the specific problems of their countries in new and innovative ways, and teaches them how to apply the new knowledge to solve such problems.

Despite criticisms, most of these students value the opportunity of being in the West and are content with the general education they receive. "Still it is good that we are here," said a student from Egypt after she had gone through a long list of problems she thought attributable to Western education. "Just the very learning process we go through here is useful," she added. "We really change a great deal; we become very different," another student from Malaysia remarked. "I particularly like the Western pluralistic intellectual environment," remarked a student from Panama. "West is the hotbed of ideas; whether relevant or irrelevant to less developed countries, they dynamize you, make you move!" she added. As I point out later, my own experience with education in the United States also attests to the accuracy of these students' views.

### CONTRIBUTION OF COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

Focusing on certain regional development issues, I have indicated that considerable perceptual differences exist between the experiential knowledge of students from less developed countries and the more or less abstract mainstream Western literature. The differences, I believe, reflect the uneven development of socioeconomic conditions and human knowledge at a world scale, as well as cultural diversities and the comparatively stronger regionalism in less developed countries. Whatever the reasons, the perceptual gap has implications for the education of students from these countries.

In particular, aside from hindering communication of knowledge and experience between less developed and developed countries, the differences may lead to a rejectionist attitude among students from less developed countries if it is not brought to the fore in the classroom and critically evaluated. "Focusing on the American definition of a region," commented a student from Egypt, "will prevent us from learning about our own country's culture, history, and politics." Similar rejectionism may be detected in views of other students including those from developed countries in a course focusing only on perspectives of less developed countries. Such students may resist learning even concepts and techniques that could be beneficial to their countries.

The urgency for comparative education also arises from the growing universalization of human activities and relations, as a result of which a "one-world" system is emerging with unevenly developed and culturally diverse nations as its interdependent parts. Developments in communication and transportation technologies have drawn nations closer to each other and their interactions have expanded. International specialization or division of labor and the uneven distribution of usable resources on a world scale provide additional impetus for intensified socioeconomic and political relations. Finally, globalization of capital

and its preconditions for accumulation have led to similar development problems and approaches throughout most of the capitalist world.

This diversity amidst universalism is the main reason for the increased need of nations for mutual understanding and cooperation and it calls for genuine universalism in international education. In words of F. Champion Ward (1967, p.42):

West is clearly bent on knowing the Rest on the Rest's own terms. Thus the naive universalism which the West displayed in the colonial period, the uncritical belief that all mankind is destined to be Westernized in due course, seems to have "turned into its opposite" in the form of a cultural pluralism having, it would seem, no single set of values to purvey or share ... I think that we should go on from assimilation and its apparent opposite to what I can only call, somewhat pompously, universalism.

Declining enrollment in planning programs in recent years (Krueckeberg, 1984, 1985) and the consequent increasing reliance on foreign students have made universal education particularly relevant to the field of planning. But, as Jacob Canter (1967, p.30) pointed out:

The larger question is whether our institutions can create and teach from a body of knowledge that educates all students, from the US or whatever country, with relevance to the realities of the present day world, the world of which every student be he American or foreign, is now irrevocably a part.

After about twenty years, this "larger question" still remains valid. However, because of advancements in science and technology as well as in international scholarship since the 1960's we are today in a better position to develop the kind of knowledge Canter called for. Voluminous publications and audiovisual materials on various cultures and cross-cultural issues are readily accessible throughout the world. Classrooms are now more culturally mixed than any time in human history, and educators are not always from the same cultural background as their culturally diverse students. We need to use these and other available resources to develop the requisite knowledge. Greater emphasis on comparative education, I believe, is a step in the right direction and is a prerequisite to planning for the inevitable change from diversity to universalism in human knowledge and practice.

Comparative education is a pedagogical approach that allows nations to learn from one another's knowledge and experience. It facilitates cross-cultural communication by combining perceptual differences and shared views in a common format. Teaching materials are drawn from a variety of literature and audiovisual devices covering both less developed and developed countries. Various modes of student participation are incorporated. Class discussions, presentations, short

critical papers, and group projects are all encouraged. All these activities are carried out in the context of a critical-historical approach to education.

A critical-historical approach allows for a factual and chronological explication of changes over time in issues, knowledge, and practices of different nations, strives to find fault and merit in them, and subjects them to careful analysis and judgement. If correctly applied, the technique should lead to formulation of a perceptual crisis and anxiety in minds of the participants, effecting a change in the character of student-teacher relations as well as the course, and make the teaching-learning process dialectical and reinforcing. The approach should also aim at creating new social orders by effecting a new unity of theory and practice (Shaul, 1968; Hodge, 1980), reveal pros and cons of different views, and facilitate students' self-awareness as well as their cross-national understanding.

Specifically, students from less developed countries should become able to see the superficial/ideological nature of some of the notions they hold as well as their rejectionist attitude toward unfamiliar conceptions. This will help them become pragmatic and screen their experiential knowledge; abandon some notions, preserve some, and elevate others to a higher level of sophistication. Views of students, as well as teachers, from developed countries should be affected in a similar way. They should also become aware of flaws in the uncritical applications of their largely abstract perceptions of less developed countries and modify them accordingly. Only in this way does it become possible for the two sides to understand each other better and thus contribute to the advancement of human knowledge and practice.

Despite all these and other advantages to be gained from comparative education in regional planning, the approach as defined in this chapter, remains at an incipient stage in most universities of developed countries and is almost completely alien to educators in less developed countries. The general apathy is largely rooted in the belief that less developed and developed countries are too dissimilar in terms of their development issues to be in a common format. This view fails to appreciate the value of a comparative approach in which dissimilarities, differences, or diversities can be assets in a learning process involving various cultures.

Moreover, the universalizing forces alluded to above have led to homogenization of certain important development problems around the world. An American student once remarked to me that, "Less developed countries are not hundreds of miles away any more, they are right here in our central cities, in our declining rural areas." Indeed, the policy of enterprise zones advocated by British Prime Minister Thatcher and later US President Reagan in their early years in office assumed similarities between American and British central cities and less developed countries (Goldsmith, 1982; Beaugard and Holcomb, 1983).

At the present stage of world history, comparative education has become a necessity, particularly in development planning. Its specific mission is to facilitate

the transition from diversity to universalism. As planners and educators of students from diverse cultures, we can speed up the transition by introducing a comparative approach, as defined in this chapter, in our courses and other teaching tools. We should also improve the approach, make it better fit our specific purposes and the field as a whole. No single framework can be imposed, as each subject will require its own. Therefore, course format, topics to be included, their organization, contents of the teaching materials, and course requirements should all be carefully selected to meet the specific objectives of the course and the larger goal of cross-cultural communication in that particular subject and in general. Space does not allow me to develop an exemplary course here. I have attempted the approach in one of my courses at Rutgers University and will gladly share the experience with those interested.

### A PERSONAL NOTE

I wish to conclude this chapter with a few remarks on the relevancy of United States planning education for students from less developed countries and the kind of changes that they can expect to go through while here. I shall exclusively rely on personal experience as requested by the volume editor.

United States education has been undoubtedly beneficial to my personal development. Whether it has also benefited my country, Iran, is less certain. After all, I have not returned home; hence, from a national perspective, the investment in my education has been lost. But, I am always a potential returnee. If I do return, I would take the knowledge I have gained in the United States with me and that should benefit Iran. The knowledge is relevant to Iran because it is an amalgamation of my experience there and the international education I have received in the United States. My research on planning issues in less developed countries including Iran, should also be helpful to Iranian planners. Advantages and disadvantages of the brain drain for less developed countries are many and complex, and they have been evaluated in numerous publications. This personal note focuses on the impact of United States education on my personal qualities and development.

Specifically, after going through almost seven years of formal education in the United States and being involved in teaching and research for another five years, my research, teaching, and writing abilities have significantly improved. I have learned to look at things critically, to be more cautious, to recognize that solutions are not easy or ready-made, and not to be overly optimistic. I have surely become a professional in my field of specialization. My knowledge of the world has also increased and I now think more globally than I ever did. The opportunity for greater interaction with a variety of racial and ethnic groups and cultures has been particularly responsible for my present belief in internationalism. Among other qualities and benefits I have gained are a broader outlook and greater depth of insight in my field, more systematic thinking and planning, a new attitude toward my work and colleagues, awareness of the importance of time and schedules,

widened professional contacts, and confidence in my competitive ability. I have also learned to be more aggressive and assertive in achieving my career objectives.

Would I have gone through the same qualitative changes if I had spent the last twelve years at home? Obviously, most of these changes are age-related and all may be experienced irrespective of the type of education one may receive and his or her place of residence. However, when I compare myself with friends who have backgrounds similar to mine and who stayed in Iran, I cannot escape the conclusion that, if I had stayed in Iran, I would have not experienced at least some of the qualitative changes that I have enumerated above, or at least not in the same direction and with the same intensity. These include in particular some of the behavioral and cultural changes and many technical abilities.

My experiential knowledge about regional development issues in Iran is now almost twelve years old! I have not abandoned all of the ideas I developed there. I have preserved some in their original form and elevated others to a higher level of sophistication by amalgamating them with concepts I have learned in the United States. The list of qualities I have abandoned, preserved, or changed is too long to mention here, but I will give one example: I still feel as strongly about social justice and public service as I did before coming to the US; however, my understanding of how to construct a more humane society has significantly altered. I have increasingly become a pragmatist in the sense that before setting ends I think deeply about the means available to me and the constraints I have to face.

Perhaps the most important fact about my education in the United States is that it has significantly altered my personal qualities. But no less significant is the fact that I have not been a passive receptacle of ideas to which I have been exposed over the years. Most of the time, I have screened them consciously and have made my choices to accept or reject them after careful evaluation.

I am not sure if I am at all able to recall what particular steps I took to accomplish the screening process, or why I have made the choices that I have. The voluminous readings I have done, the extensive discussions I have held with many different types of individuals, and my professional activities have surely played a significant role. Clearly, many personal, social, and environmental factors have also intervened in my education. My experiential knowledge was another important criterion for evaluation of ideas. My commitment to social justice must have played the most significant role. But equally important must have been my personal interests, which have not been always in accord with the best interest of my country or my social commitments. The fact is that our choices are rooted in many conflicting sources of social aspirations and personal interests and are made in numerous conscious and unconscious ways.

I may not be representative of students from less developed countries, but I am not a terribly exceptional case either. Most of these students, I believe, will modify their experiential knowledge over time. They will abandon some ideas, preserve others, and synthesize many more with the ideas they are exposed to in the



West. Therefore, the perceptual differences that I have shown to exist between these students and the mainstream Western literature should be considered an educational asset. It is the responsibility of the Western educators to be sensitive to these differences. Along with diverse and tremendous opportunities to learn in and from the West, such differences constitute the objective basis for comparative education in planning. The complex views of students from less developed countries toward education and opportunities in the West should be considered an asset in a comparative course where Western students are also present. One can safely assume that students from developed countries also have complex views of less developed countries that should equally contribute to the intellectual environment of the classroom. The views clash as they are exchanged and are advanced as they clash. The classroom dialectic of such give-and-take can be tremendous.

Comparative education allows citizens of different nations to exchange their largely varied knowledge and experience and thus learn not only about themselves but also about other people. The need for such an education also emanates from the existence of diverse cultures in a world where human problems and relations have increasingly become universalized and global understanding and cooperation are indispensable for advancement and management of its affairs. Significant facts may be learned about international perceptions and relations, including the problem of domination of developed over less developed countries, if comparative courses are designed within the framework of a critical and historical pedagogy. Because comparative education produces comprehensive knowledge, it leads to a better, more informed practice.

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## Inequalities, Western Roots and Implementation Problems: Three Challenges to a One World Planning Education

Farokh Afshar  
*University of Guelph*

### INTRODUCTION

International planning education in the West, and international students' attitudes to this education have undergone three phases in recent decades. The first was a 'West Best' phase; the West was supposed to know best and therefore taught "Western ways" to international students. Separate programs or courses for international students were not considered necessary. When these "Western ways" appeared inappropriate to countries of the South, a "South best" reaction followed. Problems and solutions for such countries appeared so different from those in the West that separate programs were set up to teach about such countries[1].

Today we have come full circle. Common programs are urged but their motives and methods differ significantly. It is argued that in an increasingly interdependent, one-world where the problems and potential solutions of the North and the South are inextricably interlinked, separate programs make little sense. Instead there should be common international planning programs for students who intend to work in the North and in the South. Both sets of students should learn together and from each other using the comparative method and a global perspective to address the problems of this interconnected one-world. Interdependency, comparability, mutual learning, and a global perspective forging one-world are the key concepts of this approach. The idea appeals at first blush, given the undeniably increasing interlinkages among nations, the apparent trend towards some convergence between the capitalist and socialist camps — *glasnost* and "market socialism" being the most recent expressions — and the increasing recognition that we all have something to learn from each other.

But the idea's realization presents a triple challenge: the challenge to international education to combat unequal interdependencies and the unequal treatment of indigenous knowledge systems; the challenge to planning education to transcend its Western roots in a capitalist, relatively stable, abundant, urban world