

THE UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY: SOME IDEAS*

By Johan Galtung

- 1. As a general guide to the selection of themes for the UNU might serve the problem conflict distinction. Research should certainly be focussed on the main problems of the world:

Poverty, misery - non-satisfaction of fundamental needs (food, clothes, shelter, health, education, etc.)

war and the threat of war - external, internal

social injustice, non-satisfaction of human rights

ecological balance (in the biosphere)

- depletion problems
- pollution problems
- population problems

But these problems cannot merely be solved technically: they have to be analysed in their concrete setting in practice. They are always associated with some kind of conflict, manifest or latent. Hence there is a need for a global approach that studies problems from many angles in the world; for a multidisciplinary approach that brings together natural scientists that may have technical answers; and social scientists with their analyses of the social conditions and consequences of the problems and suggestions for action; and above all for an approach that explores the relation and process between the problems and the conflicts built into national and world structures.

- 2. Above all of this there are many views. Multidisciplinarity is not enough, it must also be multi- or trans-ideological, bringing together people of various persuasions and intellectual frameworks. For example: it would be very difficult, but a comparison of, say, Chinese, Soviet and US conflict maps (lists of "conflict formations") of the world might be highly stimulating, but perhaps too difficult in the early stage of the UNU.
- 3. A generally eclectic perspective is a condition for the UNU to succeed. The UNU cannot gamble on one or a few trends alone. It must also try to transcend such notions as "liberalism and marxism are exhaustive and mutually incompatible" by seeing them as expressions of special conditions (e.g., they are both Western, they both arose in the same period as a reflection of/on industrial capitalism). The UNU should try to suggest more universal perspectives from which schools and ideologies can be seen as special cases, providing opportunities for scholars to see themselves more as working for the same cause - the betterment of the world - not as fighting each other, trying to make them more able to learn from each other.

* Memorandum prepared for Dr. Roger Gaudry, Chairman, UNU Council
Montreal 5 October 1974

An example would be how liberals can learn from marxists about social structure, marxists from liberals about notions of human rights, particularly in the field of freedom. Both can learn from Asian traditions about "inner man"; and for instance by seeing the enormous range of similarity between a Gandhi and a Mao they can learn about self-reliance, trust in the common man, the idea of serving people rather than imposing themselves on them, etc.

4. An extended concept of science would have to dominate the UNU, being more, not less difficult than what universities usually engage in. Some components of this extended concept:
 - science as a cycle involving not only the dialectic between data-collection and theory-formation, but also education that reaches not only trainees/students but the public in general, mass media, schools including feed-back from people and action, implementing ideas in practice, including the feedback known as evaluation. Science does not have printed paper as its final outcome, but education, for social participation, human growth, and action for social improvement. A good scientist is one who is able to work at all points of this cycle. When he/she does not it is usually because division of labor in society makes it impossible, even undesirable: data/theory for researchers, education for schools, action for politicians of all worlds. The UNU should move to transcend this.
 - science as fundamentally concerned not only with data and hypotheses, but also with values. Increased value-consciousness among scientists, increased ability to think in terms of alternative futures, guided by values, theories and data - not viewing the world as invariant, unchangeable.
 - respect for the silent university, for people, for all of us. Everybody has experience, something to contribute if stimulated especially with regard to values, so badly treated by "modern science". Intuitions held by ordinary people may be much more valid than what researchers have in terms of value perspective, because a certain "deformation professionnelle" that rules out values, making them implicit rather than explicit.
5. For all of this it is crucial to avoid elitism. In some fields ways should be found of involving people in general. Examples:
 - when it comes to formulating views as to what constitutes "quality of life" or "social indicators" it is obvious that this cannot be decided on by experts alone. Dialogues with people all over the world are called for, meaning something very different from survey research.
 - the problems of the young, of the aged, of women must not be one more field of study monopolized by middle-aged men. They should be studied by these groups themselves. Scientists can serve as catalysts, perhaps contributing with some ways of formulating problems and expressing answers - but not deciding on the answers.

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- the problem of nutrition: in this world at least one billion women have tremendous experience in what kind of food makes their families happy. They know things intuitively nutritionists do not know, whereas they know things explicitly the women may not know. The UNU should find ways of channeling this tremendous wealth of knowledge up to the social surface.
6. The UNU should avoid too much distinction between developed and developing countries. We are all maldeveloped one way or the other: some are underdeveloped, some overdeveloped. Rich/poor, however, certainly is a valid distinction. There are several ways of cutting across this distinction.
- research on common problems, e.g., the aged, the young, women - or simply on problems of life-styles in general that contribute more to self-realization, to capacity for happiness and joy, and to install these in others - at all kinds of levels of development.
 - soft technology, technologies based on more self-reliance - a necessity when "third world" countries start processing their raw materials themselves in order to counteract heavy class distinctions.
 - sometimes reverse the pattern: many poor countries treat old people in a much more humane manner, and are also closer to folk wisdom scorned in the rich countries because of the last centuries of respect for science.
7. Nothing of this is meant in any way to undervalue the achievements of modern science, only that they have to be seen in a broader perspective. Rich countries can help poor countries get some of the tools of modern science. Much of this can be done by having research done in the developing countries, establishing their centers of this particular kind of excellence so that more of the spin-offs accrue to these countries.
8. How to ensure that the findings reach people; education:
- publication in readable form, using the good pocket-book (rather than the "report") as form of publication. Establishment of a UNU Press, in cooperation with university presses around the world.
 - mass media programs, including cassettes (sound, video) made cheaply available in large quantities. Cooperation with such institutions as the Open University in England.
 - preparation of teaching material, curricula, textbooks for primary, secondary, adult education - as ideas that could reach national centers for further dissemination.
9. How to ensure that some action comes out of all this:
- couple it to important intergovernmental, particularly UN system conferences - give researchers a chance to appear at such conferences as they did at the Stockholm UNEP conference.
 - request that all research ends up with some kind of concrete action implications. Often this makes it much more easy to understand what is being said in a more theoretical vein, particularly for people in general.

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- have more users of science on all boards and committees of the UNU, have them demand, almost force researchers to produce things with concrete implications (which is not the same as "realistic", in the sense of being immediately acceptable).
- organize "years", using the IGY as a model?
- use the principle of architect competitions to produce good ideas for problem-solving and conflict resolution. Sometimes various researchers might work on the same problem, rewarding the best one(s) using an international jury, according to education and action criteria in addition to standard scientific criteria.

10. The UNU should generally attempt to generate a style which may serve as a source of innovation in universities. It should be more dedicated to serving people and their needs, less elitist, less individualist. There should be much more team-work, more collective forms of publication, while at the same time maintaining very high standards in the three-dimensional sense alluded to above.

11. More particularly, the following points could make the organization more adequate as a carrier of the ideas the UNU should stand for:

- The UNU Council should gradually be changed so as to reflect the UNU itself: the Tokyo office should be represented; regional and functional centers should be represented; researchers should be represented. If this does not take place within the Council, there must be some mechanism for articulating problems and conflicts in the system. Both present council and any "internal council" should also have users well represented; meaning not only the universities of the world, but schools, politicians, some kind of "people in general".
- Council meetings are expensive and usually bring together extraordinary people. This occasion should be used not only for UNU decision-making, but also to communicate very well with mass media (more than press conferences), and to engage in teaching and seminars on the spot. This way Council members will know each other better, and in contact with the trainees they will develop more ideas as to what the UNU really is becoming, not only on paper.
- Inside the Tokyo office and the regional/functional centers high norms of internal democracy should be adhered to, with staff meetings, frequent occasions to articulate and solve problems and conflicts.
- All the academics used in UNU administrative positions should not only have the right but also the duty to engage in some teaching and some research - simply to keep in shape, keep fit -- and in order to utilize already existing resources in the UNU Center.
- Telecommunication should be relied upon often instead of travel and conferences. Cost-benefit studies of conferences organized over telesatellite should be carried out.
- Do things cheaply. This could start by slashing salaries, from the Rector downwards - do they have to be tied to the UN salary scale? The UNU will probably attract better people if it offered lower salaries since the wrong motivation (money as such, money as an indicator of prestige and power) would be avoided. The UNU cannot ask for voluntary work, or work based on low remuneration, if the staff is too well paid itself.