

THE UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY

A Bird's Eye View

by Johan Galtung

Center of International Studies
Princeton University
Princeton, New Jersey 08544

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I sometimes wonder how many times I have lectured on capitalism, be that of the private or state variety, before I had to experience the reality of that structure, even if certainly not the pain of those most hardly hit, myself. Of course, as a high school student, like many others, I had been in the proximity of that experience, working in a pharmaceutical factory in Oslo. But that was for a short time, not really important personally except in terms of some pocket money and some experience. There was no pain.

The experience with United Nations University, however, was both important, and very real. And quite painful.

As a coordinator of what at that time was one of their biggest research projects, the Goals, Processes and Indicators of Development Project (GPID) I was certainly not a slave. All of me could not be bought or sold. Nor was I a serf: the structure was hierarchical, but not more so than making some kind of dialogue or at least conversation possible. There were more rights than duties at the top and more duties than rights at the bottom--but the crucial characteristic of feudalism was not present. I was not tied to the land so to speak, to tilling their intellectual soil--I was free to leave at any time, and in fact did so.

The structure was capitalist. What they bought was research labor power, according to a contract spelling out what should be done, and when the product of the labor should be delivered. The compensation in monetary terms was also spelt out. And then came,

of course, the crucial point: not me, nor the means of (intellectual) production, belonged to them but the work product. The general formula of the United Nations, of which the UNU was a part, was followed meaning that the work product--the paper, the article, the book manuscript belonged to them. They could decide what to do, to publish or not to publish--and in case the decision was in favor of publication to have the upper hand on how to publish.

In short: working power for money, keeping the work product. Or, to be more correct: keeping the ultimate control over the work product since there is a way in which the work product of an intellectual can never be taken from him or her. It remains, stored in the brain, certainly also stored in the photocopy of the paper that he ultimately sends to the employer, to the labor-buyer. Actually, the structure was not so much capitalist as pre-capitalist or early capitalist. In the standard production pattern, utilized by the intellectual in both the oriental and occidental traditions, there is something profoundly artisanal. The means of production are very simple: paper and the pen, then a typewriter, then an electric typewriter and ultimately a word processor--approaching "modern times"; but nothing relative to what a skilled worker has at his disposal in a modern factory. In addition to that there are two store houses of raw materials: a library that can be mined for ideas or at least for footnotes; and the outside world. It is all there for the social scientist to get direct impressions with his own ears and eyes, or slightly processed impressions, indirect ones referred to as "data". But in this there is also something artisanal: he

goes out and fetches; it is not brought to him on an assembly line. Moreover, even if he works in a university his office is more like the workshop of an artisan, sitting like a cobbler or a carpenter doing pretty much his own thing regardless of what goes on in the adjacent rooms. Sometimes hoping for a buyer to turn up.

This structure can then be brought from the artisanal mode to the pre-capitalist mode in a very simple way; through organization. A pyramid emerges with a center and a periphery, very often referred to as a "project" or even a "program". All those rooms just mentioned with their individually self-governed artisans are crystallized and aligned into a production pattern. Lower echelons are marshalled into columns ultimately producing columns of data that are brought into the rooms for parallel and coordinated processing. Working periods are defined for data collection, data processing, data analysis, theory formation and the final write-up. An ultimately the work product is channeled upwards, to the board, the "steering committee", to the center. Up there things come together, sifted and sorted, messages are sent downwards again, do this and do that, more data on this and less on that, expand or add to this section, contract or delete that section, and so on. The latter process is often referred to as "editing".

In this transition from artisanal to capitalist modes of production of intellectual products the center holds up a reward: if you enter this organization there will be modern means of production available to you. We have something you do not have. A

modern computer. We have data banks. All of that is at your disposal: enter the pyramid at the point corresponding to your status (after careful evaluation at the top) and all of this is yours--the entry card, the key that opens the marvels of the machines. And only through this access can you produce a product that is modern, for what else could come out of modern machinery in a modern mode of production than a modern product?

But if he does not want? What if the researcher wants to continue in the artisanal, brain-intensive (as his labor force presumably is mental rather than manual) rather than the highly capital-intensive mode just described? Well, in that case he is free to leave but at his own considerable risk. He is no longer in it, he is old-fashioned. Of course, Aristotle and Marx produced a couple of good things in their old-fashioned manner, without foundation grants, without word processors and computers and modern libraries. But think what they could have done if they had had all of this at their disposal---! (Not to mention, the skeptic would say, think of all they would not have done if they had had all of this at their disposal, spending the time on the tools instead!

However, this was not the way in which the UNU organized the transition from artisanal to pre-capitalist or even capitalist production patterns. The UNU was never a university, it still is not a university and possibly, even probably, will never become one in any reasonable sense of that word, for reasons to be spelt out

later. At this stage only one point should be mentioned: the UNU offers very little in terms of means of production: no library, no computer, no data banks. There is not even a campus, no place where colleagues can freely meet, be strolling in the afternoons on the generous and gracious lawns that seem to be a basic part of British intellectualism or be fighting it out in the coffee houses, cafés or highly mundane cafeterias that are indispensable parts of the continental pattern. Not to mention the basic aspect of it all: the UNU offers no students. There is no systematic, lasting way in which ideas are tested out every day on presumably interested students who can react, fight back, even fire back and keep the professor awake and alive. There are the occasional seminars and training courses doing something towards fulfilling this important requirement. But they are not any substitute for courses of longer duration where the research worker has to fit his findings and his thinking into organized patterns of thought that ultimately have a bearing on the professionalization, be that as intellectuals or as intelligentsia, of the students.

So the UNU had to do this in another way. The organization was built with the center in the UNU center in Tokyo and the periphery everywhere else. Vast networks were spun from Tokyo to places of learning and research around the world. Networks of networks were constructed. Complete spider webs were spun around the world, with the spider sitting in Tokyo, presumably waiting for the products to come although sometimes one got the impression that more important than the products was the spinning of the web. In other words, what

the UNU substituted for what the UNU could not offer in terms of means of production for intellectual work was a transnational organization of the center periphery system, in the less artisanal, early capitalist mode of intellectual work: work was put out, all over.

In so doing there is no doubt that the UNU was and is riding piggy-back on the means of intellectual production found in the UNU periphery. Every UNU project is a way of using local libraries, word processors and computers and what not, local teaching experiences, local dialogues and above all local data, assistance, secretaries. Monetary compensation is a trifle relative to the money and human capital invested in these things of production all around the world there has to be compensation in some other terms. And there is that compensation. Even a critic of the UNU like the present author is more than willing not to concede, not to admit, but to applaud what to me seems to be two major compensations or positive aspects of the United Nations University:

- the UNU offers the travel funds and the per diems necessary and sufficient for researchers to come together, particularly from the Third World, with each other and with researchers from other parts of the world, who otherwise would not easily have managed to meet, or at least not for a sufficient amount of time or in a setting that would make it possible to coordinate cooperative intellectual work;

- the United Nations University, in doing so, provides a protective umbrella for those often very vulnerable researchers and units of researchers, fledgling institutes and groups in the periphery, often in the shadow of stronger universities and countries in our present highly irrational world.

This, then, becomes the basis of the exchange pattern. The United Nations University gets the work product and the control over the work product by riding piggy-back on monetary and intellectual investments all around the world. In return UNU offers some but not much money (as shall be seen later this does not apply to the functionaries of the UNU, they are amply rewarded), opportunities to come together for mutual intellectual stimulation and a certain protection, a UNU umbrella for researchers who might otherwise because of their vulnerability not be in a position to work on intellectually, not to mention politically, risky projects.

I am not saying that this is necessarily a bad deal. Whether the deal is good or bad depends very much on who you are, on where you are located in the intellectual structure of the world. The pattern looks very different from the point of view of a Third World researcher with practically speaking no access to funds, little opportunity to meet colleagues and no protection than from the vantage point of a First World researcher with sufficient funds to engage in a highly independent artisanal mode of production even

on a free-lance basis, unlimited opportunity to meet other people, and in no need of any particular protection, or certainly not the kind provided by an organization which is a "university" only on paper. If the UNU even in its present form can redress some of this imbalance by offering deals not only acceptable but beneficial to Third World researchers, and to those from the Second World, the socialist world--even if they are problematic for some First World researchers--that already justifies the existence of the UNU. But in so saying there is certainly no carte blanche, letting the UNU off any hook, free from any criticism. The costs incurred by some are also felt by others even if the benefits may seem to outweigh the costs from their point of view. This makes the costs worth looking into.

Hence, let us continue exploration of the UNU as an experiment in early capitalism. It is early capitalism because the work is put out, organizing a network of artisanal workshops, from a center, in this case Toyko. And the word Tokyo, the name of the capital of Japan, should not necessarily be taken too lightly in this connection. For what we see here, in the work pattern of the UNU, is also the work pattern of the big Japanese corporations. Work is put out. A major Japanese company like Toyota, the leading car manufacturer in Japan (Japan being the leading car manufacturing country in the world, but the General Motors of the US still being the biggest corporation although I would argue that it is to a large extent controlled by Toyota) has 20,000 subcontractors delivering work products, working under highly artisanal conditions, in small workshops, often on a family basis. All those parts then come to-

gether according to a master plan, assembled. And off the assembly line rolls the car, including being reprocessed by the central factory in this remarkable process peculiar to the Japanese mode of production whereby things are taken apart, put together again until the perfect product has been obtained.

I am certainly not saying that the UNU center has done, or is capable of doing anything like that or will be capable in the near future. Whereas a Toyota car, arguably, is considerably more than the sum of the parts I think it can be argued that what comes out of the United Nations University as products, meaning books and journals, so far is less than the sum of the parts because so much disappears on the way. Even the products themselves are, so far, rather invisible. But that is not the point. The point is that to the Japanese, setting up the United Nations University, this particular mode of production looks natural, normal since this is the way the Japanese economy works. And not only nationally as indicated by the Toyota example. Japan is also putting out all kinds of operations all over the world, particularly in developing countries, in the Third World, having one job done here, and one there. It ultimately all comes together in Japan, for final assembly and evaluation. In that sense the UNU is nothing but an intellectual version of the Japanese company operating abroad, the famous soga sosha, sailing under the flag of the United Nations. In the UN, however, there is practically speaking nobody who understands or who cares much about what goes on (that may change, however). Japan got, and paid for, their UN organization--that is it. Is it strange that they shape it according to their own mold?

Then come all the other trimmings and trappings of capitalism, meaning once more capitalism in its early stage. There is, of course, always the problem of trying to get better deals, in other words of negotiating a contract, not to mention renegotiating the contract. As said above, the structure is not feudal anybody contracted is free to leave, with due warning, of course. But that is the easy way out. The satisfactory way out is renegotiation after a real, meaning equal dialogue, or a deal satisfactory to both parties, to the labor buyer and the labor seller alike. For this to happen, however, the parties have to meet.

Problematic. In this particular organization, the UNU, the real parties for negotiation would be the Rector himself, and the Council. Tremendous power is vested in the Rector in a pattern which in this case is not Japanese: the Japanese pattern would be much more collectivistic. Power would be with the Management, not with one particular person. This pattern, in fact, derives from the UN system in general, giving feudalistic power to the Director General, Executive Secretary, to the Rector or whatever the head of the organization, agency, university is called. That person can with full right not only think but even say: "This UN organization, that is me!" Whatever is done, not to mention whatever is published, is in his name. His permission is necessary for anything of any importance. In practice he is the final arbiter of internal conflicts. He can hire, he can fire. His only problem would be with the board, council or general conference. In other words, the control is at the top, not from staff, not from the bottom--except in rare cases, after hard struggle.

In the case of the UNU control, or even dialogue, initiated from the bottom becomes practically speaking as impossible as in a transnational corporation. If for no other reason at least for this one: the geographical distance to the UNU center, and the travel expenses involved--travel to Japan being among the most expensive in the world even if you come from countries nearby. To put it with brutal simplicity: there is no way in which students can occupy the Office of the Rector, there being no campus, there being no students either. The only thing there is is the Office of the Rector where He, often in seclusion, can make decisions affecting quite a lot of people. He also prepares papers to the Council justifying those decisions to Council members with little or no interest in, or understanding of, what is going on anyhow. Not having, nor seeking knowledge of what goes on in the periphery of the system, except what is printed on paper, sorted and sifted by the UNU Center in general and the Rector in particular.

To put it less brutally: nor is there any way in general in which UNU researchers can meet and dialogue with the real decision-makers, the Rector and the Council. The dialogue is channeled and diluted through a well-known institution in any capitalist enterprise: the foreman on the side of the labor-sellers and the representative, the lower rank manager on the side of the labor-buyers. The former is referred to as a "project coordinator", the latter as a "Vice-rector". In some cases some other terms may be used, but this is the general structure. And the problem is very simply

stated: what the project director puts forward as requests to the vice-rector may not necessarily be what the researchers in the network think would be most important; what the vice-rector understands or accepts of what has been put forward is not necessarily what the project coordinator sees as most important; what is then forwarded to the real decision-makers, the Rector and the Council (but above all the Rector since the Council meets infrequently and is only marginally interested in the matter, and often successfully manipulated by the Rector) will be only a fraction of what has been originally communicated. And what is then ultimately accepted, in the sense of coming out as a decision, may be such a tiny part of the concerns lower down in the structure that it is unrecognizable.

Any chain is as weak as its weakest link; in the UNU all links are weak. Even with the best will it is difficult for a project coordinator to comprehend fully the concerns of a network spread all over the world; even with the best will the communication that takes place between the coordinator and the vice-rector in a hurried encounter in Tokyo or somewhere else with many other items on the agenda is imperfect. And then there is that final link in the chain: the authoritarian relation built into the position of the Rector, even if the Rector should have a personality with a different inclination. In the first link too much space becomes impediment, in the second link too little time, in the third link the social structure itself interferes.

So, the coordinator travels to Tokyo with a bag full of complaints and grievances, formulated as requests, even demands.

Again and again the same thing happens; again and again nothing or very little comes out. The frustration increases, on all points in the structure. The Rector is never accessible. How could anybody that high ever be concerned with the small problems in the periphery of his system? Those who do the work of the organization, those who go through all the painful intellectual experiences, of course also infinitely rewarding, of trying to conceptualize, of coming to grips with the intricacies of such enormous "problems" as peace, development, human rights, environment, food, energy-- not to mention all the inter-relations between them, are politely received, given their per diems, put into a hotel, and instructed about the bus to Narita Airport the day of their departure. Quite a distance from the excellent living quarters of the Rector, the place where the Council members are entertained, the people above, arriving in the early days of the university on first class tickets, well dined, well wined, glancing at the countless preparatory papers and reports and reports about reports, not to mention reports about reports about reports, lying at the tables in the meeting room.

Of course, occasionally the researcher receives a visit from a Council member, the Council members dividing this arduous task among themselves. No reflection on the individual quality of these people; they are excellent people. Some of them may even have participated in the UNU in more peripheral positions. But we are dealing here not with the characters of persons but with the characteristics of an organization; less psychologically, more sociologically. The Council member has other concerns: How does this project fit in with totality? Is it too small? Or even more problematically, is it too

big? Will it loom too large? What kind of impression will it make, not only intellectually, but politically? Will it attract or frighten away future donors? The major donor being Japan, how will the Japanese government react--will they be offended, hurt, or will they feel that this is the thing that they will continue supporting? What about other countries in the world, and they are numerous--about 160 in number, representing very many different angles on all kinds of world problématiques--how will they react?

This angle of the Council member, inspired by the concerns of the Rector, this way of looking at intellectual work, is in a sense both global and wholistic, far from the idiosyncracies of the individual researcher who from his place in the world social geography, and with his intellectual tools, tries to come to grips with the enormity of the problems facing humankind. But from the point of view of that very same researcher the concerns of the Council, more often than not implicit rather than explicit, are interfering with his work, irrelevant to the pursuit of knowledge and insight. Researchers are at their best when they are free to proceed in the way they themselves see as best. They then make their findings and writings available to public inspection, in settings characterized by give and take, by dialogue, above all with their equals as intellectuals. But the Council member/overseer does not engage in dialogue. He or she may listen, with a sympathetic expression on the face, taking notes mentally or on paper, writing a report to be forwarded to the upper layers or strata of the system. He does not engage in dialogue.

There is nothing the researcher can learn from the process. Rather, he would feel spied upon, an object of information and commentary, not a subject entering into a dialogue with another subject. He might feel exactly like a worker exposed to industrial engineers, timing and clocking his performance, calculating productivity, finding out whether he is a part of the solution or a part of the problem, a "troublemaker" a liability to the organization. He is not told what is the problem; his contract is simply not renewed,

In a structure of this type the sociologist will know beforehand that efforts will be made to beat the structure.

I do not think that the repertory of components of what sociologists often call the "informal structure" contains anything extraordinary in connection with the UNU. What is striking is rather how ordinary it all becomes, and in a sense also how debasing the structure is for intellectuals, in principle the guardians of academic freedom, of intellectual pursuit as the guiding light of their lives. And I do not think they are to be blamed for what happens; the blame is on the structure and those who devised it.

Thus, the first and obvious subterfuge is not to take the clauses in the UNU contracts seriously. In all the shadows cast by the UNU pyramid one hears the same whisper: why not make one version that can be sent to Tokyo and another version,

possibly a better one, to be published in a scientific journal-- the former to get the money in the contract, the latter to get the necessary intellectual prestige and academic reward (promotion) this year, not when or if the publication mill of the UNU has been grinding for a sufficiently long time to squeeze out a product in some well hidden place"! Maybe one should point out that this is not necessarily a sign of dishonesty, deception. Rather, the argument could be made that the UNU is not paying more than the top of the top of the iceberg of total investment behind an intellectual product: the training of the scholar, the setting in which he works, the data, most of the processing--all of that comes from local resources. Ultimately the source is the proverbial "tax-payers' money" in most cases, the way national universities in a nation-state are constructed. So why should not the intellectual first pay allegiance to the traditional source of his funding, letting the UNU ride in the second seat, not up front?

Second, there is the usual jockeying for a new project, a new program, a new contract. The obvious strategy on the side of the researcher would be to say as follows: "unfortunately, the funds made available to me so far are insufficient to complete the project because of the changing terms of reference, brought about by our discussion in meeting number X, X+1, X+2 and so on". In other words, the researcher has an excellent bargaining chip that really gives him some leverage. "In order to complete the job as we now have agreed it should be done more money is needed; if that money is not forthcoming nor will the report". The key to his

bargaining power lies in the concept of a redefinition of the terms. Of course, the work has been described in the contract. But in any reasonably organic intellectual enterprise the terms of reference will change as the research proceeds, and even more so when there are meetings, conferences and dialogues involved. More facets of what originally looked like a well defined problem are uncovered, and more so the more global in domain and wholistic in scope the project and its network. The project grows, and the growth is not necessarily cancerous. There certainly has to be a cut-off point, a rounding off, a platform where the growth process stops and the work is finalized. But at that stage it is far from unreasonable to demand a renegotiation of the contract.

Third, there is the jockeying for entirely new contracts, possibly within new projects and within new programs, indicating that the researcher has to be somewhat careful with the second step in the preceding paragraph. He may be seen as a liability rather than as a productive asset by the forces higher up. At some point he has to deliver the goods, although there may also be the possibility of playing on internal divisions and contradictions in the UNU system indicating that the experience gained in division X may be of interest to division Y. Since human jealousies and rivalries are rather universal such tactics will also belong to the organization.

Fourth, "I know somebody who knows somebody". In other words, the utilization of a direct line to the power center. When geographical distance in space is considerable, the time available

for dialogue is negligible and the social distance inside the organization is also considerable, as indicated above the direct link becomes even more necessary. Ideally the direct link should be extended to somebody in the immediate environment of the Rector, or to the Rector himself, making intellectuals small when vying for the attention of the big. Ideally one possibility should be a Council member, but that in most cases turns out to be a blind alley.

The reason is very obvious. From the point of view of the council member his position is a perk, one of those things that accompany a distinguished career, travel to an exotic land, per diems covered in an expensive capital, perhaps the possibility of bringing the spouse (although not at the expense of UNU), a week of discussion that might be intellectually stimulating but certainly not too strenuous. All of that positive, on the benefit side, and not to be balanced off against the cost of having to listen to the complaints from the shadows and the peripheries of the structure. Their problems would be so small relative to the grand visions presented by the Rector: gigantic new horizons, new visions of problems to be approached, funding that may or may not be achieved, the large-scale problems of many large-scale organizations.

Then there is the self-congratulatory aspect: the Rector congratulating the Council, the Council congratulating the Rector with their achievements, they themselves having produced absolutely nothing but bureaucratic papers in addition to a couple of speeches, sitting on top of the result of the toiling and sweating further down in the pyramid. I portray it in stark terms, they are in no

sense unjust, but again in no way bears on the personality of the people concerned, only on the structure. Just like capitalism, private or state--nothing particularly original.

Fifth, there is the possibility of using the only possible social process in this institution: the contradictions within the UNU Center itself. A process can only evolve in a very real sense under the conditions of proximity in space, and with sufficient time available for the process. In the UNU system this condition is only met at one place, in the UNU Center. The problem is, of course, that in that center there are practically speaking no researchers present for any extended period of time. They come and go. Any contradiction would be between the top decision-makers, the Rector and Council on the one hand, and what can here be conveniently referred to as the "staff" on the other. Daily tensions over trivialities accumulate. They may be generalized, a pattern may emerge. Since all of the people concerned are under short-term contracts there is risk involved if an explicit stand is taken: the contract may not be extended for a new two years' period. Particularly for the Japanese, and most of the staff members are Japanese, this must be a very harsh condition indeed, accustomed as they are to life-long employment, guaranteed until their retirement. To Japanese staff the working situation must look particularly precarious, and not conducive to confrontations of any kind. On the other hand, the Japanese are not alone in that particular place. Contradictions do accumulate, and may even eventually lead to threats of strike if basic conditions are not met.

From the point of view of the researchers this is not at all satisfactory. There is no guarantee at all that the interests of the staff will coincide with the interests of the researchers in the network and the networks of networks; they may be entirely different, sometimes compatible, sometimes incompatible. This is readily seen by anybody contemplating a regular university: a strike of the clerical staff in the vicinity of the Rector, the vice-rectors and deans will very rarely be an expression of the same interests as those held by the academic staff. And their interests, in turn, may not be the same as the students. Since there are no students in any lasting, meaningful sense in the UNU system, only fellows and participants in short-term courses, the latter category may perhaps not be considered. But the difference between clerical and academic staff remains. There is never any substitute for direct representation, or a social process involving the parties concerned.

In short, given the nature of the formal structure the sociologist participant observer would expect the five mechanisms just mentioned to be very important aspects of the life of the total organization. In fact, they may become so important as to dominate. They may become the bread and butter of meetings precisely because they are bread and butter issues. Efforts to push them under the carpet may be counterproductive: they may only show up in other contexts, and disagreeably so. The tea/coffee breaks, the meals, become by far the most important parts of the agenda: this is when real issues are discussed.

In the meantime the total UNU machinery does not necessarily come to a grinding halt. Life must go on, the machine must go on, the UNU has to survive. But the institution may become like the proverbial

steam engine; extremely badly greased, with all kinds of dissipating energy in all directions. The staff may strenuously be pushing the piston up and then pushing the piston down again. The crankshaft may be turning, and some energy may appear at its end, sufficient to turn a couple of printing presses, with some books coming out in the process. But the internal work is tremendous, the costs very high. One meeting alone, given the circumstance that the funding is in dollars and a considerable part of the expenses are paid in yen, with the deteriorating (from the dollar point of view) yen/dollar ratio is tremendously costly, adding not only travel and per diems, but also the preparatory work on the staff side in the UNU center. Put that sum in the denominator and in the numerator the number of pages of intellectual content coming out of the meeting, as opposed to the countless reports, the reports about the reports and so on. I am afraid that the ratio is extremely low, indicating a very low efficiency of the machinery.

But having said that the objections immediately emerge and I myself would be among the first to mention them: true, the investment is considerable (although a minor part of it ends up as monetary compensation to the researchers); but the output cannot be measured only in terms of printed pages. The output lies in the intellectual capital vested in the researchers, in the dialogues they have had, the networks they have built thanks to the UNU and the new networks they go on building themselves, standing on the shoulders of what the UNU has provided. The output also consists in the protection

offered, the UNU umbrella. Sometimes that umbrella only reenforces existing structures that might not be the most fortunate; sometimes they protect the vulnerable and the small in the periphery standing for alternative approaches to the mainstream in their fields. And academic life can only thrive in diversity. The moment mainstream alone, or countertrend alone for that matter, dominates academic life is dead. A monochromatic intellectualism is no intellectualism at all, merely dogma. The true nature of intellectual life is the ability always to ask new questions, always to say "but is that really so"? Whether the United Nations University has really contributed to that more profound aspect of research activity remains to be seen. But the networking ability of the UNU is hardly to be doubted and certainly not to be denigrated.

So, there we stand with an organization that is a peculiar mix of many traditions. There is the feudalistic element taken over from the United Nations in general. This is less known to those only acquainted with the political United Nations (the General Assembly, the Security Council) where the General Secretary can hardly be portrayed as a feudal lord, there being considerably higher forces and sources of power in his immediate vicinity; the nation-states in general, the Security Council members in particular and the super-powers even more particularly (and most particularly, the United States which is also the host country). But this feudalistic aspect is certainly well known to anybody who has been working in any one of the UN agencies in the vast UN family.

Then there is the capitalistic aspect of the UNU. The Rector becomes, in fact, a director general of a vast transnational corporation for the processing of data and thoughts, raw material, papers extracted from the periphery. His Council looks very much like a Board of Trustees. They are overseers, of the Rector rather than of the organization, and the atmosphere at the top depends on the Rector's ability to handle the Council and vice versa. All kinds of structures are possible, from extreme collusion and friendship to enmity and hostility. But they all have one thing in common: they take part in a stratum far removed from the reality of the organization where the real work is being done, made further invisible by nicely doctored reports. Geographical/social distance matters.

Then there is the Japanese aspect of the organization: the soga sosha aspect of the center doing the processing of artisanal products delivered from the periphery. If this was left to a real soga sosha rather than to the amateurs in the UNU center the efficiency would probably be considerably higher.

Feudal, capitalist and Japanese structural aspects play together and reinforce each other, making people lower down in the UNU small. In an organization like this many hopes and expectations will surround the appointment of a new Rector. In an organization that is pyramidal people will be misled to expect great changes to accompany the changes in personality. The social scientist would be skeptical, however. He would point to the very simple: look at the three structures just described. They are very strong. Any individual person is weak relative to them. The Rector may change. But the structures will survive any change in rhetoric. With structures that strong only structural change will be real change.