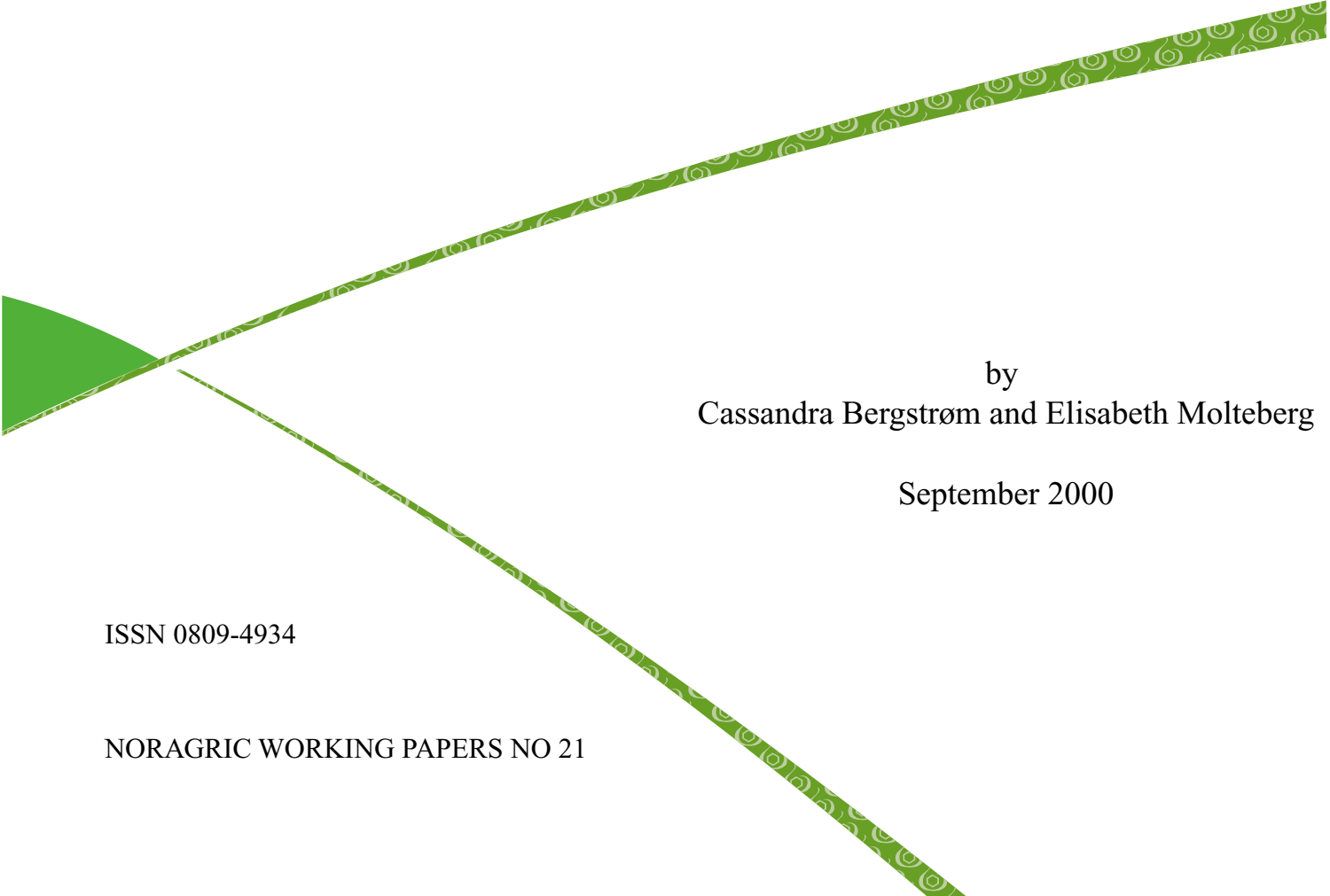


Our Common Discourse:
Diversity and Power in Development Studies

Paper no. 2 of 2



by
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Our Common Discourse: Diversity and Power in Development Studies

*Cassandra Bergstrøm and Elisabeth Molteberg**

Abstract: *The political nature of Development Studies is discussed, examining relationships between individuals and groups of scientists, professionals and local people. Although the implications of these relationships to validity differ, there is a common problem of marginalization and bias. There is a danger of assuming balanced negotiations - that all actors are power equals and all voices equally legitimate.*

Language is a tool used both consciously and unconsciously to instill worldviews and secure positions. An open style of writing and the creation of a shared lexicon would provide a forum for diversity where contrasts are seen as enriching, rather than detracting from our message. Transfer of ideas is also possible through metaphors. Metaphors have a possibility for

* Noragric, Centre for International Environment and Development Studies, Agricultural University of Norway. The views expressed in these papers are our own and do not necessarily reflect those of our institution. We take full responsibility for any errors made, whereas we'd like to share any credit due with the following persons: Special thanks to Ingrid Nyborg, Noragric, for a process of joint discovery on the topic. Thanks also to Terje Kvilhaug, Dept. of Economics and Social Sciences, AUN, for inspiring us in our philosophical explorations, and for his valiant efforts to minimize our mistakes. We are also grateful to the following persons at our institution for their valuable comments and advice: Cary Fowler, Ruth Haug, Kjersti Larsen, and N. Shanmugaratnam. Finally, thanks to all the others who gave us input.

inspiring transformation of understanding through seeing one concept in terms of another.

The transformative functions of metaphors are fundamental to enabling us to develop theory not attainable from within other delineated scientific practices.

INTRODUCTION

In our first paper we lay down the philosophical foundation, as well as discuss some of the methodological implications, of the Development Studies discourse. Our discussion is based on recognition of the natural-social nexus of this area of study. The nexus, approached through both a physical reality and our human understanding of it, forms the foundation for our modified realist approach. While a positivistic approach assumes that neutrality is possible, and hence that science is apolitical, a modified realist approach recognizes the underlying constitutive values in all of our choices - including our academic ones. Rather than striving towards objectivity as a measure of validity, we have forwarded the ideas of Taylor [1985] with his arguments for working towards expected outcomes of our work, Hollander [1991] with her arguments for a commitment to make right what has gone awry and Pretty's [1994] criteria for trustworthiness. Validity, as such, is more than verifiable facts; it has to do with the values and norms that inform a particular form of social practice. While we recognize that the subject matter of Development Studies is political in nature, there is nonetheless a boundary between our science and politics that will be further explored in this paper.

Given the foundation of our first paper, including a brief exploration of methodological implication of how these ideas might be approached, we turn here to central issues of diversity and power in Development Studies. Before beginning this discussion, we will briefly remind the reader of our definition of Development Studies: the study of the interface of society and nature with the intention of contributing to change, seen as the improvement of sustainability and equity. This hybrid definition brings together elements from definitions within Agenda 21

(integration of environment and development, integration of sustainability and equity) and from the work of Jules Pretty (sustainability seen as context dependent and process oriented).

[UNCED 1992; Pretty 1995, 1997]

In this paper, we will again discuss validity and relevancy within Development Studies, here asking such questions as: What constitutes the border between activity and science, between science and politics? Who can claim to be a scientist - what are the needed qualifications to be scientific? Indeed, what form of inquiry is a scientific one?

In the Development Studies discourse, the commitment to improvement is commonly expressed through the concepts of equity and sustainability. In evaluating the discourse, we have chosen to focus on these terms precisely because they are ill defined and problematic. The ideas are appealing: one can picture oneself striving towards a just, clean and green world. But, the terms are also appealing because they are open to a host of interpretations: we have a possibility of defining them to fit our own visions.¹ As such, their use opens up for miscommunication and manipulation, problems of language and power that affect the discourse. We problematize the concepts of equity and sustainability to explore three such points of contention: communication characteristics, problem definition, and inclusion/exclusion. These generate the following types of questions: How are ideas communicated – with what terminology, in what style, and through which media? Which problems are addressed, how, and by whom? And finally, to what extent are there barriers to open participation in the discourse? And if so, who is excluding whom on what grounds?

KNOWLEDGE, DEVELOPMENT, DIVERSITY AND POWER

As Development Studies aims to explore questions of improvement, one needs to recognize that different groups living within an area, as well as within and between different levels of decision-making institutions, will have different perceptions of the nature of problems, different judgments about how to act on their perceptions, and different views on what constitutes improvement. This recognition requires examination of the distinctions often drawn between science and politics. Rather than assuming that good science is, or can be, neutral; the validity² of research instead depends on its ability to accommodate diversity. Validity in this case is an evaluation of the “trustworthiness” of the methods and analysis used, as well as the conclusions that are drawn, to the various stakeholders (Pretty 1994). This does not imply an acceptance of bias, or deliberate attempts to prejudice data analysis to favor a particular group or idea. Instead, it is an explicit recognition that theory is dependent on human understanding and interpretation of ideas, and that these vary both between groups and between individuals within groups. [Shrader-Frechette 1991] To approach an understanding of a phenomenon, Development Studies needs to accommodate the involvement and views of the different groups involved in development: those affected by problematic situations and processes, those involved in altering them, and those interested in addressing them through research. Each of these groups must be recognized as stakeholders within the development discourse. This is easier said than done.

Consider, for example, an area indicated on a map as sparsely forested. A Northern environmental group has created the map. Researchers have counted trees through satellite photos, followed up with on-site checks to check the reliability of their findings. The conclusion drawn from the environmental group is that this is a perfect area for a reforestation

project. But, local women may be much more interested in the dense woody shrubs which are not visible on the map - as these are a major source of woodfuel. The trees may even have been planted in an area that was previously barren, implying that the people have generated the existing forest according to their own needs, such as protecting a village from fire and providing it with shade [Leach and Mearns, 1996]. Who defines what is a relevant problem? Who is a relevant researcher? Who is involved in the debate? When and where does it take place? These are crucial issues in promoting a common discourse where actors recognize their interdependence in addressing problems. But, can all of these diverse voices be incorporated into the Development Studies discourse? This is a question, among other things, of power.

Let us first consider the implications concerning the relationship between science and its object. As we stated earlier, our definition of Development Studies emphasizes the promotion of equity and sustainability, and capturing the complexities and context specificity of natural systems, of social structures and processes, and of interfaces between nature and society. This goal has consequences not only at the analytical level but also to the way we shape the process of knowledge generation. The objective of Development Studies can be defined as the generation of knowledge that serves people's struggles to achieve their desired ends. Consider the terms equity and sustainability with respect to the following: who are "people" and what are their desired ends? Is, for example, sustainability improved when species are preserved through the establishment of a national park? What if the local people previously dependent on those same resources are forcibly moved to a different area with low soil fertility, and therefore become dependent on food aid? What can we say about sustainability and equity now? Are these terms, which are so often twinned, really mutually supportive, or can they be diametrically opposed? The establishment of a perceived common body of stakeholders raises

problems of inclusion: Who are the stakeholders who can legitimately claim a right to involvement in the discourse? Scientists? Professionals - policy-makers and practitioners in governments, multinational agencies, NGOs, and other institutions who deal with issues of development? Those whose living conditions are directly affected by the problems addressed – the poor, the marginalized? All of these questions concern the democracy of science, but their importance is not restricted to ethics. They also concern what perspectives and which knowledge forms are considered relevant and important to whom. In this sense, epistemology is also about definition power when studying issues where results should be helpful to a user group, which often will have different concepts of what constitutes valid and relevant knowledge and action than those of most scientists.

Local people³

Ironically, those most affected by the problems, despite fast spreading rhetoric about “participation” and “empowerment”, still generally have very little power to define what is a problem and they often have a weak voice when an opportunity is available. Often, this voice is manipulated and distorted through the filters of professionals and researchers acting as middlemen and interpreting messages in terms of their own epistemologies [Reason 1994, Chambers 1997, Holland 1998]. However, there are examples of successful and fruitful developments, where scientists, professionals and locals generate knowledge and action strategies together [see for instance Reason 1994, Chambers 1997, Holland 1998, Blackburn 1998, Pretty 1995, Seur 1992]. Learning from these efforts and developing them further is a challenge involving institutional, financial, epistemological, and methodological difficulties, to name some. But it is a challenge that must be accepted and taken seriously by all groups of actors involved in the Development Studies discourse. Diversity and power cannot be

addressed, and hence cannot be promoted, without involving those affected by and affecting problem processes.

Equity and inequity are directly linked to diversity, particularly through inclusion of differences. Consider spatial diversity: although similar problems are found globally (such as pollution, food insecurity, and environmental degradation), they are diverse in nature because they are anchored in local physical and social realities. Hence, across-the-board solutions can't be found; the complexities of each case must be dealt with in its own right. Moreover, within each case there is social diversity. Ignoring it may lead to the promotion of action which will perpetuate or even increase inequity. The question of improvement is often "in the eye of the beholder": what constitutes improvement for one may be inconsequential, or even degrading, in the eyes and experience of another. For example, a project, which is by no means unique, was able to improve living conditions for a group of poor members living near a garbage dump within a community. The family has been able to begin in petty trading and are therefore no longer dependent on the children sorting through the garbage heaps. This has meant that the children could begin to attend school. Certainly this represents an improvement for the all of the members of the family. One consequence, however, was that the project further marginalized another group living in the same area and who were overseen at the outset of the project. [McAllister, personal communication]

This oversight may have been from the researchers side, but it may also reflect local biases. Those most marginalized in a society are often no longer seen, or are considered so different as to be irrelevant or invisible in a society. Getting a full picture of a situation requires us to actively seek out not just the mainstream views of a society, but also the marginalized or those considered to be different.

“In order to ensure that multiple perspectives are both investigated and represented, practitioners must be clear about who is participating in the data-gathering, analysis and construction of these perspectives.

Communities are not homogenous entities, and there is always greater danger of assuming that those participating are representative of all views.

There are always differences between women and men, between poor and healthy, between young and old. Those missing, though, are usually the socially marginalized.” [Pretty 1995:1254].

Researchers can get an idea of differentiation seen through local eyes by actively including comparisons and categories suggested to them by locals, concerning themselves and the people in their society. [Seur 1992] This use of local terminology and categories can aid communication, by giving us insight into each other’s way of thinking about such concepts as equity. Such differences need to be captured for analysis of change to be truly reflective of a situation. Nonetheless, in pursuing these differences we should not lose sight of the fact that often what appears to be conflicts are reflections not so much of different ideas, but of our means of expressing them.

2.2. *Professionals*⁴

The relationship between researchers and professionals involved in the Development Studies discourse is of a very different nature from that discussed above. It has traditionally been a close relationship. There is a continual flux of people, ideas, data and analyses between donor, policy-making, implementing, and research institutions – a shared reality (note the continual proliferation of new “buzzwords”). There are potentials in this shared reality, but also shortcomings, of which some important ones are related to power issues. Some of these concern the relationship between science and the development industry; others concern implications of this relationship to locals.

Concerning the former: there are many links between Development Studies and the “development industry”. Research, both commissioned and independent, informs decision-making both at policy and more concrete action levels. Research monitors the actions and priorities of development agencies. And professionals’ discourse informs research. As a result, the industry may influence research analytically, in terms of values, and in terms of the research agenda.

Although much effort is made by scientists to maintain a critical and reflexive distance from much of the jargon of the industry, a process of analytical “pollution” may result from the overlapping careers of many. Concepts, assumptions and analyses may be imported wholesale into the scientific discourse from the industry discourse. As an example, this paper problematizes the terms equity and sustainability. The importing of concepts poses a potential threat to the validity of science, to the extent that the development industry’s analyses and concepts (the aforementioned buzzwords) generate research without a critical examination of their implicit assumptions and perspectives. Metaphors, myths, and narratives may influence and affect the conceptual independence and rigor of scientific conceptualization and analysis⁵. This threat is compounded by the applied and value-based nature of much of Development Studies research: to what extent are these values based on unrealized and/or unproblematized assumptions, which do not hold? The concept of desert encroachment is a case in point. Although there are those who still adhere to this idea, most scientists currently agree that desert encroachment is in fact not encroachment at all, but simply a biological reflection of fluctuations in climate. Nonetheless, in 1994 the international Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) was signed. The myth of desert encroachment, firmly entrenched in the minds of many, was a useful political tool used for gaining support to the Convention.

[personal experience⁶, Hoben 1998] The evocative connotations of the word desertification were capitalized upon, while they were no longer a part of the term's definition.

We do not see it as problematic that Development Studies is based on an objective of improvement. But, in making an assumption that science is neutral, one blinds one's self to one's own biases about what needs improving, as well as what an improvement will be. We see improvement as being problematic if the Development Studies researchers have the power to set the political agenda in determining such things as how the conclusions of such research should be interpreted. During the CCD negotiations, one of the most contested issues was the scientific definition of desertification, despite clear recommendations from a group of national scientific advisors. [*ibid.*] Clearly, within this international forum, this was a political, rather than a scientific debate. The scientists provided their conclusions, but the interpretation of how these conclusions were to be used was open for discussion. The political implications of whether desertification is caused locally through poor land use practices, or whether it is caused by global warming, are substantial indeed. There is thus a need to evaluate where the dividing line falls between politics and science; and to respect that the agreed upon goals and values of a society are something which belong in the public, or political, domain [Kvilhaug 1992]. Clarifying where this division lies is further complicated within Development Studies as the actors involved in the discourse actually move back and forth between the different roles of scientists, professionals and politicians. This is explored below, first however we would like to say a few more words about policy directed research.

Another manner in which politics and the Development Studies research agenda overlap is through policy-directed research. Does it unduly shape the whole scientific project? Are we conceptually and analytically free to pursue deeper understanding and address more basic

issues, or are we confining ourselves to fairly concrete enterprises, like an R&D department of the development industry? We argue for the legitimacy of applied research in this paper, and we believe that it is an asset to Development Studies. But we also firmly believe that more basic research has a legitimate and necessary place – because there is a wealth of issues to contend with, and because such work will strengthen the totality of Development Studies research carried out. It is from here the inspiration to further develop the science of Development Studies should spring. Without the freedom and interest in pursuing the theoretical basis for our work, we are forced to question the very integrity of Development Studies as a science. The aim to solve problems is often given prominence in Development Studies research, and this is a valuable aim. But in our view, being clear about the primacy of contributing to understanding and knowledge is crucial to justifying the existence of Development Studies as science, not merely industry R&D. As researchers, we can be activists, discussants, advocates, mediators, but our primary role is to be scientists – to generate knowledge and insight. All the other roles should be informed by and subsidiary to this one.

We now turn to considering the latter issue of the implications to local people of the close ties between research and development industry. An inclusive discourse compounds problems of power, agency, and appropriation for one's own ends which, to some extent, already exist in a purely scientific discourse. The various actors promote their diverse agendas in the name of development by flagging such words as equity and sustainability. The ability for any one person to be placed at different sides of the research/industry table should enhance mutual understanding and provide richness in perspectives to the knowledge produced. But there is a great weakness in that all the perspectives to be gleaned from this interchange are on the same side of the most crucial dividing line - that between the assistance givers and the assistance

receivers. This makes it highly problematic to inform the shared reality on the perspectives of those affected by the problems addressed. An example here, which we have all become familiar with during the last few years, is structural adjustment. This program was born under the auspices of a group of neo-classical economists employed by the World Bank. The myopic views of what ailed all of the developing countries in the world that suffered from weak economies were sold by these same experts as good medicine - or pressured through conditionality. National governments conceded to ensure transfers of funds. There is no doubt, whatsoever, that the local stakeholders had no say in problem definition. Their current reality, reflected in the loss of social programs such as free education or agricultural subsidies, is a bitter medicine indeed; particularly as the sickness that was diagnosed is not the same as the one local stakeholders would express they are experiencing. [Corbridge 1995] Then the question of objectives of policy and activities arise: to whom should they have relevance? Is development undertaken to address internationally negotiated goals, or for locals. Again we ask, development, sustainability and equity for whom? Is one idea of development necessarily more sustainable than the other? Sitting on both sides of the table provides the opportunity to influence agendas in favor of a particular group or individual's interests. Who is able to influence the discourse; who is heard, in the establishment of a representation, however broad, of a "perceived common problem"? How is it possible to ensure inclusion that is not yet another source of domination and marginalization?

Science and academia

Characteristics of the scientific community itself may pose other problems concerning power. We will mention some of these. There are institutional barriers to inter-disciplinarity, which derive from the disciplinary orientation pervasive in universities. There are also problems e.g. of co-operation and legitimacy related to the relative prestige and legitimacy of methods and

disciplines, which derive from the traditional hegemony of quantitative and above all physical sciences. Legitimacy problems also affect action-oriented and normative approaches, due to dominant and traditional scientific ideals of objectivity, neutrality and detachment.

A source of particular concern to our analysis of the Development Studies discourse is that of barriers to scientists wishing to be involved in it, and to play a role in shaping its premises. There are financial and institutional barriers to such involvement, with underlying power processes. Development agendas have often been designed in the North, and then carried out in the South. Researchers have followed where funds have been available. Many critics have – rightly, we think – pointed out that in Development Studies, researchers from the areas where research is carried out have not played a sufficiently prominent role. Slater [1997:648] has written about the dominance of Euro-Americanist thought and learning in much of current research, and about our need to open ourselves up to other perspectives and recognize the contributions of others. He suggests we take into practice “... another three R's - respect, recognition and reciprocity.” He points to the way the journal publishing system acquires a gatekeeping function as the referee system screens what is accepted as new knowledge in the field. Scientific societies and fora perform a similar function. Slater questions whether these are open, democratic fora or whether the gatekeepers are simply looking for reification of their own beliefs. Are Northern scientists sequestering the discourse by excluding others? On the same subject, Mkandawire [1998:111] writes,

Historically the study of Africa has been premised on the fiction that the natives do not know. They do not know the Victoria Falls, the source of the Nile, Kilimanjaro exist. These had to be discovered by the Great White Explorers. The premise was essential to the colonization and subjugation enterprise. In their quest for providing

“knowledge-based” justification for their presence, the colonialist had to deny native knowledge, denigrate local tradition ... Much of the writing on Africa seems to be written as if it were premised on that fiction, although I cannot figure out what is the rationale for this today.

Clearly Development Studies stands to benefit from true institutional collaboration where similar topics are covered through comparative studies in both developed and lesser-developed countries. The idea that Development Studies should focus solely on a set of countries based on economic criteria seems to deny recognition of complexity of the types of problems in which we are interested. Collaboration will give the perspective both of insider and outsider to all of the researchers involved. Returning to the ideas of Slater [[1997, p.648](#)] he says, “...Mutual respect and recognition must include ... the right to be critical and different on both sides of any cultural or intellectual border. Reciprocity and dialogue can only emerge if there is a will to go beyond indifference and historically sedimented pre-judgments...”

Reciprocity requires not only acknowledgment, but also acceptance and encouragement of the mutual contributions researchers from different geographical areas can provide to one another. It goes beyond individual and institutional collaboration. The pursuit of reciprocity will require us to closely examine gatekeeping processes in academics, such as access to publishing in academic journals and the development of common projects, to discover and dismantle barriers to open participation in the discourse.

Awareness, responsibility, and a balancing act

The issues outlined above are some of the traps and dangers involved in doing the kind of science that we have defined Development Studies to be. We certainly have no brilliant final

solutions to offer, but we consider awareness and continual consideration of these issues to be of crucial importance to relevant and good research.

There appears to be a balancing act involved for scientists, between overriding users and being overridden by them. Here we see a need to distinguish between stakeholders in an additional manner than just local, professional and scientific. With respect to any particular situation, there is reason to differentiate between primary and secondary stakeholders. We can do this both with respect to action: those actively involved and those involved passively. And, similarly, we can do so with respect to outcome: those affecting an outcome and those affected by an outcome. The question of overriding refers primarily to those passively involved that are affected by outcomes. Overriding may take the form of marginalizing, manipulating, or domesticating⁷ them. Currently participatory research is considered to be politically correct. Many research and government programs jump on the bandwagon and utilize the terminology. But many also abuse its intent. In an example from the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, a government report was touted as being the product of participatory meetings. But, the report was written in a language inaccessible to most of the Masaai. And, even more important, many Masaai disagreed with the conclusions. As a response to the report, these Masaai groups made a video, which they forwarded to the government. Here they stressed that the findings of the report were incorrect, and the process was flawed. In fact, the conclusions if carried through would be a direct threat to their current way of life. These Masaai groups reported that the researchers distorted the participation process by hearing and reporting only those ideas the facilitators themselves wished to promote. Should the report have gone through, as it normally would have, the Masaai would have been held hostage by the very process that the facilitators claimed provided them with a voice - a supposed process of equity. [Enkigwana-Ee-Ramat 1996; Taylor and Johansson 1996]

Overriding may also refer to professionals groups, through uncritical appropriation of analyses, values, and agendas. Returning to the ideas of active and passive action and those involved or affected by outcomes, we can also apply these ideas to the research community itself. We have already stressed that Development Studies focuses on problems that are global in nature. Therefore, researchers from different countries should be involved equally in research or development projects in each other's countries. This needs to include all stages of the research, from design (active) through collection of data (affected by) and analysis (active). Relegating data collection to scientists in developing countries is a means of marginalizing their input to the research process. Collaborative research has the possibility of increasing the richness of the inquiry, the number of perspectives involved; and thus enhancing the validity of the research. It should not be seen, as it so often is, of being only for ethical or capacity-building reasons.

The ideas presented above focus primarily on being aware of and accommodating diversity. We have, therefore, often stressed differences. Nonetheless, it is important to underline that we can gain a common understanding out of these different social constructions precisely because of the similarities we share as people. Many of our common experiences are derived from the physical world: we all experience air and water, for example. Although we may understand what we experience in different ways, the thing we see/feel/hear is the same. We have placed Development Studies at the interface of society and nature. This gives us a basis for distinguishing between human cognition and a physical reality. We assume there is a physical world that exists independently of our cognition. We all experience this world. But, we cannot appraise whether theory describes it accurately because our observations are theory dependent. This is discussed in more depth in our first article where we refer to the concepts

of a modified realist approach [Chalmers 1982]. It constitutes a form of middle ground, acknowledging that theory is a social construction, but one which aims to explain actual physical conditions. A direct realist position may constitute a starting point from which to make a contribution towards resolving a crucial dilemma: that of how to establish a coherent discourse and process of knowledge generation with contributions from such seemingly incommensurable paradigms as positivism and constructivism.

COMMUNICATION

Nonetheless, wanting to do something and doing it are two different things. Lying at the base of being able come to some kind of joint understanding of what we see and experience, is our ability to express it to one another. Communication has traditionally broken down for a number of different reasons. In our first paper we explored some of the implications of the underlying paradigms we work within. Here, we touch briefly on this, as well as a number of other commonly expressed difficulties of communication between researchers. We then turn to more linguistic aspects of the communication itself.

Who talks with whom - and why?

Let's look at the distribution of paradigms across and between disciplines.⁸ It is not an orderly one-to-one relationship. Scientists within the same discipline may have more trouble communicating with each other than with colleagues from other disciplines – consider physical and cultural geographers, or neo-classical and institutional economists, for instance. Some forms of inter-disciplinary discourse may thus actually run smoother and be more fruitful than certain disciplinary debates.

The dividing lines and spheres of communication cut across what is conventionally seen as a fundamental dividing line in science: that between natural and social sciences. Some ecologists may have more in common with anthropologists than with other biologists, for instance. It seems that those who are engaged in interpretative forms of science, who explicitly deal with problems of meaning, find a constructivist paradigm a more conducive framework for understanding and inquiry than a rationalist/empiricist one. Much of social science belongs here, while e.g. some schools in economics do not. Conversely, those who are concerned with observation of physical phenomena and problems of measurement tend to find a rationalist/empiricist paradigm more helpful. This applies to much of natural science, but not to, for example, quantum physics, where the relationship between observer and observed has proved a crucial problem. Shared or compatible paradigms, so crucial to the ease of communication between academicians, appear not (at least not only) to be a result of disciplinary indoctrination or individual dogmatism, but to be strongly related to similarities in the problems they address.

Another dividing line often offered as an explanation for the configuration of communication flows and barriers is that between qualitative and quantitative approaches, but like the social/natural science explanation, this is mistaking the symptom for the cause. Examples abound of successful combinations of qualitative and quantitative methods used by researchers subscribing to both constructivist and rationalist/empiricist paradigms.

A third and more interesting dividing line is that between predictive and diagnostic sciences. This refers to the objective of the science – whether it aims to predict future conditions through the formulation of laws or merely to diagnose present conditions through observation of constellations of symptoms. In some sciences, for example in biology and economics, there

is conflict over whether prediction or diagnosis should be the aim. Some see diagnostic science as of inferior use and importance. Although such a view may be attributed to considerations of scientific prestige, these conflicting views of the objective of science are strongly related to conflicting epistemological positions⁹. A paradigm discussion is a necessary element in their resolution or management.

Communication lines and schisms between scientists cut across disciplines as well as other general dividing lines in science, such as those between social and natural science and between quantitative and qualitative research. It is precisely the point that all these things refer to ranges, rather than dichotomies, which opens for communication. There is a range between holism and reductionism; a range between a conceptual world and a physical world and a range in how we address these issues with qualitative through quantitative methods. By diagramming these (Fig. 1) we can see that much of natural science work is concentrated in particularized approaches to the physical world using qualitative methods; and similarly many of the social sciences concentrate on the conceptual world, using a holistic approach and qualitative methods. But, given that these are ranges, rather than dichotomies, and given a common world to draw our experiences from: there is a blurring between all of these categories.

Differences in fundamental beliefs and worldviews are not the only stumbling blocks in communication processes. We'd like to point briefly to two problems of a linguistic nature, which affect a common analysis process. One concerns disciplinary terminology, the other concerns metaphors. They have in common the tension between maintaining conceptual precision and allowing an inclusive discourse.

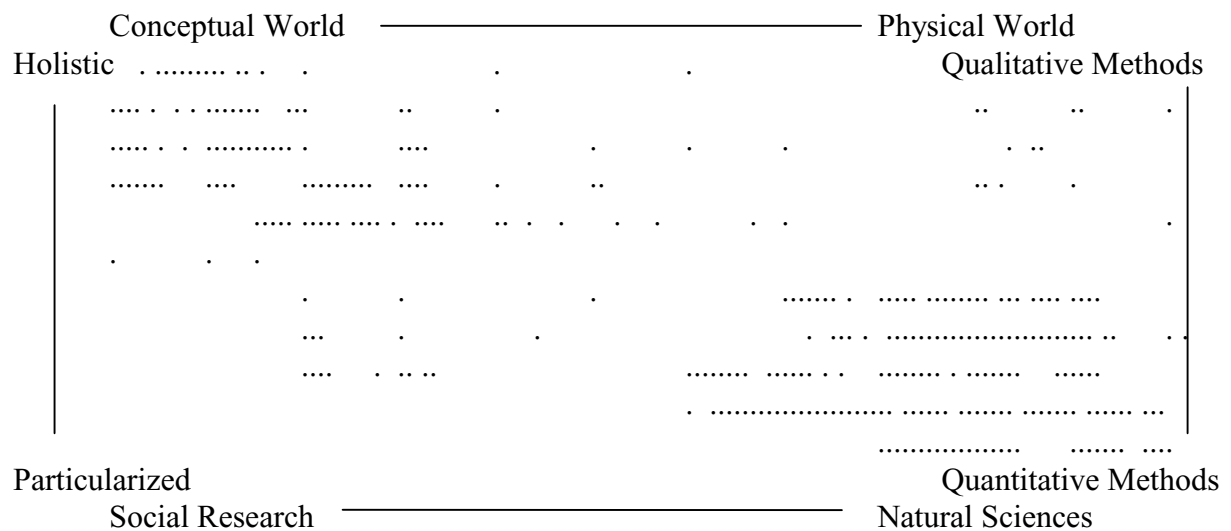


Figure 1: Development Studies Research: characterization of a point spread of studies.
 This represents a typified range between the conceptual and physical world; and holistic and particularized approaches to learning about this world; as well as the tendency of splitting this inquiry between natural and social sciences; and qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry. The illustration indicates that all four of these aspects may be better conceptualized as ranges/tendencies than as dichotomies.

[Ideas inspired from diagram by Bawden and Ison 1992]

Words and concepts

Communication is dependent upon a joint understanding of words and concepts. Development Studies is faced by both problems of similar words meaning different things to different groups, and different words conveying similar concepts and ideas ... a situation of “richness of knowledge and confusion of meaning” [Hanna et al. 1996:6]. Part of the development of a common discourse should include a very conscious attempt to clarify our understanding and intention when we use similar terms in different ways, such that our agreements and disagreements become clear. When we begin to examine our use of language we will find that some disagreements may be questions of degree of emphasis of particular points, others may be more fundamental in nature with respect to what are essential elements of the field and how we can go about getting an understanding of them. Within the area of common property management, an attempt is being made to develop a shared language. Focus on the human-ecosystem relationship is being explored through the concepts of stocks, flows, controls and

attributes. These terms can be applied equally to ecosystem characteristics, human system characteristics and interaction characteristics [Constanza and Folke 1996]. In addition to developing a shared language built on a lexicon of common terms, there is a need for a willingness not only to let others speak, but to strive to understand what they mean. Communication at this level may give us not only a better understanding of others, but of ourselves as well. It may also give us insight to our subject as we may learn of new ideas and approaches that offer a novel way of interpreting our science. [Huspek 1997] One example of how transfer of ideas commonly occurs is through metaphors.

Metaphorically speaking

Shotter (1997) refers to Wittgenstein when he argues that metaphors give us “dimensions of comparison”. Metaphors, he says, make context visible by bringing our attention to things that works to draw our attention, in different ways in different contexts, to what we would otherwise not know how to attend.” [ibid.:38] Metaphors can act as a medium that can cross borders more easily than terminology, which different disciplines have laden with their own special meaning. Hesse (1972 in Maasen 1994) has argued that metaphors lie at the foundation of all of our ideas - what we currently accept as fact was once approached through metaphor. When there is nothing, we need metaphors to be able to contemplate a new way of thinking about/ approaching something, but we need to adapt it within our new way of understanding. Metaphors allow us to make comparisons much more deeply/thoroughly than just the concepts themselves allow us. This is precisely because we have the possibility of bringing our understanding of one phenomenon into our approach to another [Kvilhaug 1996].

Maasen [1995] also argues that metaphors are used when there is difficulty with a particular approach for accounting for an object or phenomena. She makes a distinction between transfer and transformation with reference to how the metaphors are incorporated into the science. Transfer, in this context, “leads to reorganization of the phenomena and thus to a novel way of problematizing [the] study” [ibid.:22] Transformation occurs when a metaphor produces cognitive changes in an approach, actually influencing the investigative process. In this use, the metaphor inspires use of existing tools and concepts to approach the question/problem in a new way. This may lead to a reconceptualization of a disciplinary object. “The transformation of individual metaphors may thus occur in the form of different variants: as translation into the discipline-specific vocabulary, as filler of disciplinary gaps, even as differentiation of new research fields.” [ibid.:24-5] It is with relation to the latter we see a possible special significance for metaphorical thinking with relation to Development Studies. Metaphors stimulate reconceptualization: new ways of applying methods and interpreting results. If this is true, and Development Studies is, as we argued in our first paper, characterized by inter-disciplinarity which is both additive and integrative, we would expect to see more use of metaphors and models here than in traditional disciplines, precisely because of both its roles: its role in transferring concepts between disciplines and in transforming concepts and approaches stimulating novel ways of thinking.¹⁰

While metaphors may provide a quick way of transferring ideas and an inspiration for new ways of thinking, they need to be considered critically, too. Ostrom [1990] has argued that the entrenchment of untested metaphors has led to a lot of incorrect policy with respect to common property. This has developed from an uncritical acceptance of the idea of inevitability in Hardin’s [1968] “Tragedy of the Commons” - resulting in the expectation of finding disaster at the margins. We have looked at the problematic acceptance of untested

ideas earlier within this paper with respect to such concepts as equity, sustainability, and participation. Reification is apt to be particularly prominent when actors sit on both sides of the table, but the use of metaphors also contributes through allowing basic ideas to be easily grasped, allowing this process to go very fast. It becomes difficult to do away with the ideas once they become established because they become part of people's assumptions.

Assumptions, we showed in the paradigm discussion in the first paper, are not available to us to scrutinize until something challenges them. One is more apt to explain away divergence as aberrations than to question one's basic assumptions.

Our conclusion from this is that we should be aware of the important role metaphors play both between researchers and in the wider context of development – they are used in both our daily and academic discourse. Suggesting one should not use metaphors is a denial of the way in which people think. Metaphors are part of the creative process, a source of inspiration.

Nonetheless, the development community as a whole, of which scientists are a part, should look for them, be aware when they are being transferred to the development discourse, and actively work to either reveal their inadequacies or develop and incorporate them into the science of Development Studies.

We have argued that the use of metaphors arises, in part because we lack the precise language needed to convey the complex ideas that they represent. Metaphors create an image in our minds that may be interpreted differently by different individuals. While this quality is precisely why they can be a source of inspiration, it raises questions with respect to scientific precision. One question is whether the use of less precise terminology will reinforce less precision, and therefore reflect less rigor in our scientific work. Another question may also be raised with respect to the creation of an inclusive Development Studies discourse. In

accordance with what we have argued earlier in this paper, a shared language within Development Studies must necessarily be accessible, not only to different groups of scientists, but to stakeholders as well. But, specific scientific terminology is often exclusive. As such, it restricts the dialogue to a select few. Such terminology is claimed to reflect precision and therefore scientific rigor: given its precision, the words, it is argued, cannot be misunderstood. Given our earlier discussions it seems clear this may be a masking of fundamental underlying differences which one tries to assume away. Another, more important question, is whether we can develop and articulate our diverse thoughts without the aid of such precise language.

Greater terminological openness or fuzziness will allow us and others to reflect more on implicit connotations of the information being presented, as well as underlying assumptions. While this is partly about the words chosen, it is also about the style of writing. Shotter [1997:29] has distinguished between two different types of writing: “monological-retrospective-objective writing” which he says is used to produce “explanatory theory” and “dialogical-prospective-relational writing” which is used is used for practical theory. The latter is “theory that is useful in a tool-like way in noticing and making differences in and to situated, living activities. It is to do with noticing, and perhaps open up, possibilities in the future toward which to direct one’s action now.”[*ibid.*] While the first is contemplative, the second is looking towards future possibilities. The second is open for debate: it seeks continual evaluation of the message being presented. We recognize a need for both styles of writing, but would stress the need for developing the second as a justified alternative of scientific writing within Development Studies. It is here we will find a space for representing much of the

diversity we have discussed earlier: where contrasts in our presentations are seen to enrich rather than detract from our message.

CONCLUSION

We see Development Studies as an open arena for scientific discourse. A shared set of general, but not too vaguely defined problems constitute points of convergence for this discourse. Our point of departure in these papers is that Development Studies research is political and reflective research, which addresses complex problems at the interface of nature and society. Part of this complexity is the diversity of perspectives of stakeholders. The discourse itself is also characterized by such diversity. The papers discuss how to deal with some of what this requires of individual scientists, as well as of Development Studies as a science. More specifically we focus on issues of power and communication.

In the first paper we discuss communication problems between scientists with different views of the world and of science. While acknowledging the challenges involved, we argue for reflection on our own practice and a discussion of paradigms. We consider this a continuous and integral feature of scientific activity and discourse, which Giddens [1984] refers to as double hermeneutics.

Applying this approach to our own work, leads us to a modified realist position, which distinguishes between an independent physical reality and our interpretations of it. This means that in addressing problems concerning people and the environment, we have to simultaneously handle two different ontological modes. This makes inter-disciplinarity necessary and challenging. We've presented soft-systems analysis as a means of capturing a reality as a totality of different perspectives.

The modified realist position also gives some guidance in dealing with the validity problem inherent in political research. We recognize the presence of values in our science, while drawing the distinction between science and activism. We also recognize that validity is to a great extent a question of relevance, and thus of power.

It is this that we explore in the second paper. We discuss the political nature of Development Studies more extensively, examining the relationships between individuals and groups of scientists, professionals and local people. Although the implications of these relationships to the problem of validity differ, there is a common problem of marginalization and bias. There is a danger of assuming balanced negotiations - that all actors are power equals and all voices equally legitimate. There is also the danger of attributing a certain power relationship to people involved in addressing a problem.

In order to negotiate, people communicate. Language is a tool of power used both consciously and unconsciously to instill worldviews and secure positions. Exclusive use of scientific terminology creates unnecessary boundaries between different groups of academicians, as well as between academia and stakeholders. A more open style of writing and an attempt to create a shared lexicon will provide a forum for diversity where contrasts are seen as enriching, rather than detracting from our message.

There is a need in Development Studies to be able to communicate with one another across traditional boundaries of science. Metaphors have a possibility for inspiring transformation of understanding through seeing one concept in terms of another, and hence inspiring us to bring our way of understanding to a new phenomenon. The transformative functions of metaphors

are fundamental to enabling us to develop theory not attainable from within other delineated scientific practices.

NOTES

¹ For example, Pretty (1997:10) reports that in the period from the report of the Brundtland Commission (UNCED 1992) to 1997, nearly 100 definitions of sustainable development have emerged.

² Internal validity: correspondence to realities of case. External validity: correspondence to realities of other, comparable cases. These are used to discuss and evaluate relevance. For more on validity, see first article.

³ ... or “the poor”, “those affected by the problem”, “the recipients”, “the people”, “the informants”, “the subjects” – this group has many labels in the discourse, none of which we’re completely comfortable with. These terms tend to oversimplify or patronize. For lack of better ideas of our own, we still use them – although “developees” might be an alternative?

⁴ Actors who derive their income from different sectors of the development industry

⁵ Recent work which demonstrates this includes e.g. Hoben 1998; Arnfred; Leach & Mearns 1988, 1996; Maasen et. al. 1995 and Sachs 1992.

⁶ Bergström acted as the scientific advisor to the Norwegian delegation under the negotiation of the international CCD.

⁷ Domestication is a term used by Selener [1997] to refer to processes where participation is essentially a process of appropriating the views and positions of those in power - i.e. a process of alienation and assimilation.

⁸ For a more in-depth consideration see the first article.

⁹ Contemplation of the high scientific prestige of medicine – a diagnostic science – might prove an additional motivation, for those concerned about prestige.

¹⁰ Certainly the field is characterized by an inordinate number of buzzwords. To what degree this is more or less than in other fields is not a question we are prepared to address.

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