

**From Development to Transformation:  
Citizen Engagement for Social and Cognitive Justice  
Remarks by John Gaventa  
CASAE/CASID Conference  
University of Victoria  
June 5 2013**

**I. Introduction**

Many thanks for the invitation to be here and to the organizers. I am particularly pleased to be asked to speak at a joint meeting of Canadian Society for Adult Education (CASAE) and the Canadian Society for International Development (CASID). Despite the fact that adult education and international development share some common concerns with human and social development, the opportunities for us to come together to share these concerns are rare.

Like others in the room, my career has straddled these two fields. I was based for 19 years at the Highlander Center in Tennessee, which those of you in adult education will know has a long history as a popular education center for social justice in the American South. For a number of years after that, I was based at the Institute of Development Studies in the UK, focusing my work on citizen engagement, power and participation in the field of international development.

Now I find myself at the Coady International Institute, a great Canadian institution which, like Highlander, has a long history of education for economic and social change, within Canada and internationally. Having straddled two fields and two continents, I am delighted to find this space where those in adult education and international development come together, and where rather than having a foot in two different worlds, we can stand tall on both feet together!

Speaking to such a diverse group also has its challenges, as there is such a range of expertise in the room on such a wide range of topics. Rather than go deeply into a very specific theme, I want to reflect with you on some very broad questions about development and transformation, and about the role of citizen engagement and citizen agency in achieving both.

Over the next few minutes, I will:

1. Briefly explore the paradox in which we find ourselves, one in which development – by certain criteria – seems to be progressing, and yet by other criteria, underlying

development crises loom larger;

2. Suggest, as both of our fields have done, that the challenge is not in fact development – whether human or social – but transformation;
3. Apply this lens of transformation to my particular field of citizen engagement and participation;
4. And finally, share some concluding thoughts on the links between transformational social change and transformational knowledge, employing the lens of cognitive justice.

## II. Development or Transformation?

Just a few weeks ago, the UN released its annual Human Development Report entitled *The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World*. The report makes very interesting reading, and points to remarkable change on the development agenda. Listen to this statement:

*The rise of the South is unprecedented in its speed and scale. It must be understood in broad human development terms as the story of a dramatic expansion of individual capabilities and sustained human development progress in the countries that are home to the vast majority of the world's people.*<sup>1</sup>

The report goes on to describe this “development progress” via a series of indicators<sup>2</sup>:

- All countries - not some but all - have accelerated their achievements in education, health and income.
- Middle range countries like Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa and Turkey have seen some of the most rapid advances, but significant progress is also occurring in such places as Bangladesh, Ghana, Mauritius, Rwanda and Tunisia.
- The combined economic output of Brazil, China and India will, by the end of the decade, match that of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States. (This fact alone challenges our assumptions about the developing south and the developed north.)
- More and more people are entering the middle class.
- More people can read and write, are going to school, attending college. More women than ever before are getting an education.

And the list goes on.

---

<sup>1</sup> UNDP, Human Development Report 2013. *The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> See also Michael Cohen (2013), “World is making very clear progress”, *The Guardian Weekly*, April 5, p. 18.

So, how do we as adult educators and international development specialists react to this apparent progress in the human condition? Perhaps we should be raising a toast. Positive change seems to be happening. Our research, teaching, service and activism might even have contributed.

And yet, I expect many in this room might react - as I did - with some discomfort to this apparent celebration of “progress”, for it offers only a partial picture. We all know that the idea of progress itself is inherently a contested concept. Measured by different yardsticks, some of which the HDR acknowledges, others which it ignores, the global picture looks very different.

Think of some contrasting facts:

- About the same time this spring as the press was reporting and celebrating the HDR report, the world passed another milestone: over 400 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, a level beyond which scientists have warned will lead to a climate change tipping point of no return. In Canada this made the back pages of the *Globe and Mail*.
- Only four G20 countries have reduced their carbon emissions since the Rio Summit in 1992, a failure that will have huge consequences for us all, but especially the poorest, most vulnerable countries, regardless of their development progress measured in other ways.
- Though income averages are on the rise, so too are vast income inequalities, in most countries, north and south. Groups as diverse as Oxfam, the World Economic Forum, and the IMF warn that rising inequality is one of the key risks of our century. (In South Africa, for instance, one of the most unequal countries, economic inequality is now higher than under apartheid.) As we know, economic inequalities are highly linked to inequalities of power and voice. Yet, the High Level Panel Report issued last week on the post 2015 Development agenda, chaired by Prime Minister Cameron, refuses to name tackling inequality as one of its official development priorities.
- Though we have more capacity to produce food than ever, the world’s food system is in disarray, with hunger in some parts of the world and obesity in others.
- While there are fewer recognized overt wars and conflicts than in previous times in history, the levels of chronic, everyday violence – especially against women – continue to shock us, in north and south alike.

Again, the list could go on.

The point is that those of us who have worked in the field of development or adult education face paradoxical times. While the social, economic and human development gap, as traditionally measured, shrinks, perhaps more significant systemic crises that will affect the quality of our lives seem to be on the rise, not only in so-called developing countries, but in the so-called developed ones as well.

This development paradox – which is not new but perhaps becoming more apparent – of course challenges us to re-think the concept of development itself. It suggests that the development paradigm based on an understanding of a bi-polar world of north and south, and a vision of linear change, in which poor countries come to look like middle class countries, and in which poor people come to look like middle class people, does not in itself create solutions to underlying and critical problems which we all face, whether we live in south or north or are rich or poor.

It is for this reason that many have argued that the challenge we face is not only one of development, but one of transformation. As Michael Edwards, one contemporary development thinker, shared with us recently at the Coady Institute, *“It’s clear... that existing systems of politics and economics have to be transformed, not simply expanded or made more accessible to the poor, which has been our default setting for many years... So what we really need are transformative solutions that can break through the limitations of our current economic paradigm, political systems and social order.”*<sup>3</sup>

To introduce the idea of transformation in this audience is a bit risky because its meaning, like that of development, is also highly contested. The concept of transformation – especially transformative learning – has been an important one in adult education, with a long history of literature dating back to Mezirow (and perhaps before), and a long list of articles debating the concept. In development literature, the words social transformation and economic transformation are also widely, and often uncritically, used. While I do not want to plunge into an extensive debate on these meanings, I do want to suggest that the concept is important, for it fundamentally challenges us to re-think the construct about development, be it adult development or international development. In a transformational sense, development is not

---

<sup>3</sup> Michael Edwards, “What does it mean to be transformative?”, notes of presentation given to Coady International Institute staff, 2011. See similar text and arguments at <http://futurepositive.org/transformation/>.

only – as the HDR would want us to believe – about quantitative change along prescribed human development indicators. Rather, it is about qualitative change of the systems behind the indicators themselves, in ways that perhaps by definition cannot be prescribed until after the transformation occurs.

As Edwards describes it,

*“The essence of transformation, like a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis, is that something qualitatively different and better, not simply something quantitatively bigger or more of the same, can emerge from old or existing structures when they are challenged, broken up and re-imagined around a different set of values and principles.”*<sup>4</sup>

While Edwards writes from development perspective, this definition of transformation is also similar to those found in the extensive adult education literature. As Stephen Brookfield writes, for instance, *‘When something is transformed, its component elements undergo a profound metamorphosis so that what emerges is fundamentally different from what went before.’*<sup>5</sup> Great debates exist on how this occurs, and in particular how transformative learning occurs, yet the idea of transformation as a qualitative and paradigmatic shift in how we see the world, and therefore in how we understand and measure progress, remains a fundamental challenge.

### **III. The idea of popular participation as a driver of transformation**

If broadly speaking we are interested in transformational change – not just human, economic or social development – then we still face the critical question. How and under what circumstances does this occur? What are the engines that drive such transformation?

While we all may agree on a broad need for transformation, when it comes to this question of how it happens, many of us will retreat to our disciplinary perspectives: for economists the driver might be the market, for political scientists it might be the state, for adult educators it might be education, and so on.

I am no different: rather than deal with this question in a general way, I would like to reflect for a few minutes on one idea which has a long history in both development studies and adult

---

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* A similar metaphor is used by Karly Polanyi in his classic work *Origins of our Time: the Great Transformation* (1945).

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Brookfield (2012), “Critical Theory and Transformative Learning” in E.W Taylor and Patricia Canton and Associates, *The Handbook of Transformative Learning*, San Francisco: Jossey Bass, p. 131.

education, and which has been a common theme in my work over the last number of years – that is the idea of popular participation and civic engagement as a driver of both personal and social transformation. By participation, I do not mean simple consultation: I mean the right to participate in decisions that affect our lives, the ability of people to act upon and to change the world, to shape their own futures. Ideally, such engagement is not only about participation in the development project, it is to help define and to shape the meaning and quality of development itself.

This vision of course has deep roots in both adult education and development studies. For instance, in my current role, I think of the work of Moses Coady, a leader of the Antigonish movement. On the walls of the new Coady Institute where I work, I read daily of Coady’s vision of development. As he wrote, “*if we are wise, we help people everywhere to get the good and abundant life...*”<sup>6</sup> But the vision was not only for a better life in Human Development terms: it was also about control - for people “*to become the masters of their own destiny*”<sup>7</sup>. And the way to achieve this vision was through participation. He wrote:

*“The world calls loudly today for a real democratic formula to bring life to all its people ..It is not going to be done by guns, marching armies or bombs but by a program in which the people themselves will participate. It is democracy not only in the political sense but it is participation by the people in the economic, social and educational forces which condition their lives.”*<sup>8</sup>

Coady’s democratic, participatory vision is found in other historic roots of our work. The terms “popular participation” or “participatory development” emerged in the development literature about fifty years ago, a response to top-down, blueprint paradigms, and shaped as well by important social and liberation movements of the time. Participation proponents drew on the work of Paulo Freire, whose book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, first published in English in 1970, articulated the development process not as a “gift” received from others, but as a process gained through critical reflection and action by the people themselves.

The theme has continued throughout both adult education and development studies over the last half-century, through champions such as Albert Hirschman, Sheldon Annis, Budd Hall,

---

<sup>6</sup> Laidlaw, A. F. (Ed.). (1971). *The man from Margaree: Writings and speeches of M. M. Coady, educator/reformer/priest*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, p. 122.

<sup>7</sup> Coady, M.M. (1939), *Masters of Their Own Destiny*. New York: Harper and Row.

<sup>8</sup> Coady, M. M. (1957). *My story*. [n.l.]: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, p. 11.

Robert Chambers, Rajesh Tandon, Orlando Fals Borda, Anisur Rahman. It is echoed in the work of Amartya Sen, one of the early shapers of the UNDP's development report, whose notion of development as freedom focuses on the idea of freedom from a world without hunger and material deprivation, but also on the positive freedoms: the capabilities to shape one's own future.

But after almost half a century, what has happened to the idea? What can we say about whether or not it has fulfilled the transformative vision of its early proponents?

Here it is difficult to come up with a definitive statement, for a number of reasons. Partly we can't be definitive because there are no universally accepted indicators that measure the state of popular participation or its contribution to development. The *Human Development Report*, in all of its measures, doesn't neatly measure it. We have an array of democracy indices, but these focus on the institutional mechanisms of democracy, not on the degree and quality of citizen engagement in shaping their own lives.

It is also difficult to be definitive because the concept itself has many meanings. The term "participation" in development has often slipped from one of agency and control, to one of participation of beneficiaries in aid projects, or one of token consultation, which positions people more passively as "users and choosers" in externally defined and led initiatives, rather than "makers and shapers" of their own policies, programs or futures.<sup>9</sup>

And yet the counter view, the idea of popular participation as a transformative force, continues not only to be seen in historical events – witness the Arab Spring, the Occupy movement, the mass land marches in India – as well as to be the subject of important policy documents. In March this year, for instance, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights re-asserted the idea that "*Participation is a basic human right in itself, a precondition or catalyst for the realization and enjoyment of other human rights*".<sup>10</sup> It is in fact through citizen engagement that rights are made real, and through citizen struggles that new rights are created.

---

<sup>9</sup> Andrea Cornwall and John Gaventa (2000), "From Users and Choosers to Makers and Shapers: Repositioning Participation in Social Policy", *IDS Bulletin*, Volume 31, issue 4, pp. 50-62.

<sup>10</sup> Magdalena Sepulveda Carmona (2011), "Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights", UN Human Rights Council, p. 1.

And so, after 50 years history, the idea of popular participation or citizen engagement as an engine of transformation remains present, indeed, I would argue, it remains strong. But what do we know about its contribution? About what difference such engagement has made?

Before coming to Canada to the Coady International institute, I had the opportunity to serve as director of 10 year action research program, known as the Development Research Center on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability, based at the Institute of Development Studies in Sussex. Bringing together a network of 50-60 researchers in over 20 countries, we produced over 150 first hand case studies on how citizens engage, participate and mobilize to improve their lives and to gain their human rights. Many of these may be found on our website, as well as in a series of volumes by Zed Books under the theme of *Claiming Citizenship* that examine meanings of citizenship and role of citizen action in claiming rights, demanding accountability, deepening democracy, dealing with violence, producing knowledge, acting globally and other themes. (For full information see [www.drc-citizenship.org](http://www.drc-citizenship.org).)

Throughout this work, we attempted to take what we termed a “Seeing Like a Citizen approach”, (playing on James Scott’s phrase of “Seeing Like a State”) and to elaborate a paradigm or an approach of Citizen-Centered Development. Building on historic ideas of participation and participatory development, we chose the term “citizen” to connote a person with rights and with agency, or the potential for agency, whether or not that identity is recognized by the state or given by a passport.

Such a Citizen-centered development paradigm, we argued, stands in sharp contrast to the other we see around us:

- A neo-liberal market approach – focuses on market mechanisms with citizens as consumers and customers;
- A state-based approach – focuses on state institutions, with citizens as users and clients;
- A ‘thin democracy’ approach – focuses on electoral processes, with citizens as periodic voters;
- A civil society (NGO) approach – in which citizens are often reduced to beneficiaries of projects and programs created by others.

In each of these approaches, citizens are treated as a residual category who act and respond as a by-product of other forces of development, not as rights-bearing actors in and of

themselves.<sup>11</sup>

We began this research program in early 2000, when the discourse of a *rights-based* approach to development was at its heyday. By the end of the program a decade later, the concern with rights-based approaches had shifted to a concern with *results-based* approaches. We were challenged with the question: So what difference does this citizen action really make? And here, while the field has many case studies, we have few large scale studies that answer the question systematically. We attempted to rise to the challenge.

Drawing from 100 of our case studies from 20 countries, and using qualitative coding techniques, we coded anything that looked like an outcome, and soon had a database of some 800 concrete outcomes, both positive and negative. In turn we grouped these outcomes into categories, thus inductively drawing from concrete cases to create a broader framework to understand the outcomes of citizen engagement. In 75% of the cases, these outcomes were positive – that is that they were seen to contribute towards broader developmental or democratic goals. But in 25% they did not – participation led to negative results, a point to which I shall later return.

This work has since been widely published, most recently in December's issue of *World Development*, so I will not go into in depth.<sup>12</sup> For participation practitioners and proponents the outcomes will come as no surprise – though it is useful that they are backed by evidence. Let me share them briefly with you.

**First, engagement is important because it helps form better citizens: citizens who are aware of their rights to participate in the first place, and are more confident of their ability to do so.**

While this finding may sound self evident, it is a critical piece, which is often overlooked. Most theories of citizenship and democracy discuss the importance of an informed and aware citizenry who can participate in democratic life, hold the state to account and exercise their rights and responsibilities effectively. Yet in many societies, citizens may be unaware of their

---

<sup>11</sup> For further elaboration see John Gaventa (2010) 'Seeing Like a Citizen: Re-claiming Citizenship in a Neoliberal World', in Alan Fowler and Chiku Malunga (eds.), *NGO Management: The Earthscan Companion*. London: Earthscan.

<sup>12</sup> John Gaventa and Gregory Barrett (2012), "Mapping the outcomes of citizen engagement", *World Development* 40 (12): 2399-2410.

rights, lack the knowledge to engage, or not see themselves as citizens with the agency and power to act. People do not wake up in the morning and say, “aha, today I am an aware active citizen”. As adult educators have long reminded us, people must gain this awareness through action.

Thus, our work suggests that it is through citizen engagement that people develop greater civic and political knowledge, and a greater sense of awareness of rights and empowered self-identity, which serve as a prerequisite to deepening action and participation, and which themselves can be personally transformational.

*For instance, in Bangladesh, a woman said: “in the past, we the poor did not realize many things. My father was a sharecropper, I also became a sharecropper. We thought that we would have to pass our days doing the same things that our forefathers did, that those with assets would stay rich and those without would stay poor. We came to know that we are not born poor ... that the government holds wealth on behalf of the people, that our fundamental rights as citizens of Bangladesh are written into the constitution.”*

Having a sense of citizenship is one thing; translating that into effective and sustaining change is another. For this further skills and capacities are needed, what political scientists call political efficacy. This leads us to our second outcome: **Citizen engagement builds more effective participation practices.**

Through participation, people can learn the civic skills, form the relationships and networks, and build the organizations needed to make their voices heard. Again this may seem obvious, almost tautological. But it is not, because not all participation leads to such strengthening – often participation can be tokenistic, even disempowering. A Brazilian activist said, *“In fact, I did not say anything. There was no place on the agenda for me. Everything had been agreed beforehand...and I was called almost to legitimize....and I felt very uncomfortable”*

Both of these first two outcomes of citizen engagement – more aware and more effective citizens – are necessary building blocks for participation to deliver change more broadly. In the absence of such foundations, without strong citizen leaders and organizations, spaces and opportunities for participation will not take root and will rarely lead to lasting change.

Third, when these building blocks are in place, our study points to dozens of examples of **citizen engagement contributing to development results, for example in improved health,**

**water, sanitation, or education.** There are also many examples of how popular participation contributed to strengthening governance by improving cultures and frameworks for accountability, or better implementation of national and international commitments to human rights, or new public policies for social justice.

Finally, the studies confirm that **participation is important at this higher level not just for policy change or service delivery: it can also contribute to more pluralistic societies, bringing new voices and issues into the public arena, providing a sense of recognition, social identity and dignity which are important for a sense of inclusion.**

So on the one hand, from a data base of 100 case studies around the world, we could find plenty of evidence for the contribution of citizen engagement to positive change. But while this research may provide an evidence base to argue for the importance of participation, equally important is that it offers us as proponents an important wake up call. Participation does not always work. It is not a panacea. There are many risks involved as well.

Although 75 percent of the participation effects cited in the IDS study were positive, the other 25 percent were more negative. These include a sense of disempowerment arising from meaningless, tokenistic, or manipulated participation; the use of new skills and alliances for corrupt or questionable ends; and elite capture of the participatory process. A failed participatory process can set back its potentially empowering effects for years to come.

Significantly, many of the negative examples, of where participation had gone wrong, did not grow from the failures of people to participate effectively. A large percentage had to do with the failure of governments or agencies to respond. Greater citizen engagement might simply be met by bureaucratic “brick walls,” or the failure to implement policy decisions. In a surprising number of cases, even in so-called democratic countries, participation led to reprisals and backlash against those who spoke out, including violence against those who challenged the status quo.

All of these cases suggest that strategies to improve participation are not just about strengthening capacity of citizen to participate – not only about transformational learning at an individual level, but also about building the capacity of institutions to respond, about the institutional transformations necessary to maintain and protect the rights and freedoms of civic engagement in the first place.

#### **IV. But has it been transformative?**

But I digress. Let me come back to the earlier question of “what difference all of this citizen engagement makes”. Our study, and others like it, gave some pretty comprehensive evidence about the positive contributions of citizen engagement for development and indeed for democracy and human rights. After 50 years of popular participation in development, we know a great deal about these contributions and the conditions under which they are made.

And yet, despite the rich history and literature on popular participation, if we measure by a different yardstick, that is, if our concern is not just development but transformation, we come back to a more fundamental question: Have citizen engagement or popular participation been transformative? Have they contributed to not only greater inclusion in development projects, processes and decisions, but also qualitative transformation of the nature and direction of that development? Here I have to pause. After 40 years as a research and activist for citizen participation, I think I can make a case for the importance of popular participation for development, but if the yardstick for success becomes participation for transformation, then I become a bit more uncertain.

We can of course celebrate many successes.

- A number of studies have shown that participation transforms how people think about themselves, how it can shape their identities as active citizens and agents of social change, as well as their values and worldviews.
- Efforts in participatory governance and participatory governance have changed not only the numbers of people engaged, but also how we think about the meaning and practice of democracy itself.
- Participation in the economic arena through people’s collectives and cooperatives not only leads to great economic inclusion but offers models of an alternative.
- Participation through social movements and advocacy has not only claimed existing rights for many, but also added new rights to the human rights lexicon.
- Work on women’s leadership and on gender have created new understandings of what development means, as well as what is meant by transformation.

The list could go on.

And yet despite the examples, if we are honest with ourselves, we still face huge challenges, as

outlined in the earlier discussion of development paradox. Citizen engagement has made a difference, and yet systemic crises that affect all of our futures continue to deepen. If the yardstick is not only participation in processes and decisions that affect one's lives, but the transformation of those processes and decisions to a qualitatively different kind of change, our task becomes much bigger and more challenging. To participate in development is one thing, to participate in transforming the meaning of development is quite another.

What then would a move from participatory development to transformative development imply for our work? How do we go about doing it? I can't confess to have the magic bullet for this, not even for my own work, still less for that of others. While I do not have the answer, I would like to conclude by reflecting with you on a few thoughts on how a lens of transformative development could enlarge our focus.

## **V. The Role of Cognitive Justice**

If we are concerned with not only the extent of participation but also with its transformative potential, then we must first address the question of *participation for what?* And answering the question of participation for what takes us quickly to issues of how knowledge shapes the visions and boundaries of the possible, as well as whose knowledge is used to shape and define these transformative possibilities.

We are reminded by the work of Stephen Lukes and others that power is not only what occurs in the public arena, but also shapes what is visible through its hidden and invisible forms. It not only shapes the spaces of participation – and people's access to them – it also shapes the agenda for participation, through affecting what people think about and what, therefore, becomes a legitimate issue or idea on which to act. This role of power to shape one's consciousness – what Stephen Lukes called the “third face of power or what I and other colleagues call “invisible power” is critical to understanding the possibilities of participation for transformation.<sup>13</sup> Without addressing power's invisible dimensions, greater participation may appear as increased citizen engagement voice, but may in reality be just a more popular echo – a playing back - of the dominant values, knowledge and messages of the status quo.

Participation for transformation therefore must not only involve action on existing meanings

---

<sup>13</sup> See discussion in John Gaventa (2006), “Finding the Spaces for Change: A Power Analysis”, in *Power, Exploring Power for Change*, *IDS Bulletin* 37 (6). See also the web site <http://www.powercube.net>.

and agendas of development, it must also involve creating the opportunities and spaces for new more transformative forms of knowledge, for defining new meanings and possibilities.

But this in turn raises questions of cognitive justice– that is of whose ideas and visions have power and are considered legitimate to help shape the future and to define the transformative possibilities.

As Boaventura de Santos Sousa writes, “Social injustice is based on cognitive injustice”<sup>14</sup> (2006, 19). He goes on to suggest that modernity must remember and recognize the “ecology of knowledge”:

*“The ecology of knowledge aims to create a new sort of relationship between scientific knowledge and other kinds of knowledge. It consists in granting ‘equality of opportunities’ to the different kinds of knowledge ... maximizing their respective contributions to building ‘another possible world,’ that is to say a more democratic and just society.”*<sup>15</sup> (2006:21)

If transformation involves not only participatory action but also the process of creating a future based on cognitive justice, then quickly we must ask ourselves, “how do we as educators and researchers contribute to this goal?” When we talk about popular participation, we can always distance ourselves from the struggles of others, but when the idea of cognitive justice is introduced – well, that involves our work. As educators we help people learn to think, and also shape what they think about, as researchers, we produce knowledge that could help to shape the vision of another possible world.

Now I want quickly to recognize here the rich history of work and experience of participatory research and learning that have emerged over the last decades, which are deeply rooted in ideas of cognitive justice. Participatory research has brought questions of knowledge and power to the fore, and also made possibilities for co-creation of research and knowledge in new ways.

But even as one who has engaged in this history of work, I find myself asking “is participation in knowledge production enough?” Do we risk spending a lot of time in

---

<sup>14</sup> de\_Sousa\_Santos, B. (2006). *The Rise of the Global Left: The World Social Forum and Beyond*. London, Zed Books, p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

promoting participatory forms of knowing and learning, which assume dominant paradigms, and do not address the question of participation for what? How can such participatory research and learning also contribute to creating another possible world, a more transformed world, not just a more participatory one?

Here I want to conclude by making three observations, on which I welcome your discussion and debate.

First, I want to suggest that as development researchers we are far better at producing critical knowledge and critical thinking than we are at producing transformational knowledge. Yes, exposing and critiquing systems of power and meanings of development is important, but is critique enough? Do we do enough in our work to highlight emerging alternatives and to understand their transformative potential? Here, I am influenced by the work of Erik Olin Wright, past president of the American Sociological Society. In his Presidential Address at the ASA last year and in his recent book on *Envisioning Real Utopias* he calls for us to “contribute to rebuilding a sense of possibility for emancipatory social change” through both theoretical work, which helps to imagine a different world, but also through concrete empirical work, examining new innovations that “embody in one way or another emancipatory alternatives”<sup>16</sup>. He goes on in the book to look at a number of such alternatives, and to use elements from them to begin to construct a theory of transformation.

What would happen if we adopted this approach in development studies? What if we moved from a preoccupation with critique to a preoccupation with a search for alternatives and with finding and documenting the precursors for transformational change? If we shifted our focus, from development studies to transformational studies?

Secondly, this same idea raises a challenge for adult educators. Adult education has taught us a great deal about transformational learning and more recently about social movement learning. It also has a strong tradition of helping us critically to address issues of race, gender, environmental change, peace-building and more. But while such learning is important, I also ask myself, where are the intentional learning spaces of today which contribute to and foster

---

<sup>16</sup> Wright, Erik Olin (2010) *Envisioning real utopias*. New York: Verso, p. 1.

learning that not only (and importantly) critiques the present order but also helps us to imagine and create a different possible world? In her paper here at this conference, my Coady colleague Catherine Irving examines, for instance, the important role of the StFX Extension Department in contributing to the Antigonish movement, as well as the work of the Highlander Center as an intentional institutional space for transformative learning that contributed to the emergence of the civil rights movement.<sup>17</sup> Writing about this role, historian Aldon Morris talks about the importance of what he calls “movement halfway houses”, which contribute not only to the skills and tactics of social change, but also to “a vision of a future society”.<sup>18</sup> Where are such spaces today? Where are the places in which people can be encouraged to imagine a different world, and gain the skills for its creation? How can they be nourished and sustained?

Finally, whether we are in development studies or adult education, the demand of transformational change, supported by cognitive justice, also challenges us to break out of our geographical boundaries and disciplinary divisions. We live in a globalized world, and the systemic crises we face – be they environmental, economic, social – affect us all, whether we are in the north or the south. Indeed the transformative solutions for the weakening democracies of the north may be created from the emerging democracies of the south, and the seeds and visions for new kinds of economies and societies may grow from anywhere. It is by coming together, across north and south, education and development studies, practice and theory that we create and contribute to that “ecology of knowledge” which will help us to build that “other possible world”, one which, going back to Mike Edwards' definition of transformation, is *“like a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis, something qualitatively different and better, not simply something quantitatively bigger or more of the same”*.

I welcome your thoughts and discussion on other ways in which we can rise to this challenge.

---

<sup>17</sup> Catherine J. Irving, (2013), “People’s Educational Spaces: Antigonish and Highlander as institutional cases supporting learning in social movements”, paper at CASAE Annual Conference, Victoria.

<sup>18</sup> Aldon Morris (1984), *The origins of the civil rights movement*. New York: The Free Press, p. 140.