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Universities as ‘global citizens’: reflections and learning from a project on female leadership for sustainable development of fishing communities in Colombia.

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Abstract

Research funding for projects in countries that are on the list of Official Development Assistance (ODA) – which is a measure of flows of international aid - has increased over the years. Universities have been working on projects through these funding streams that focus on sustainable development. Therefore, there has been an increase in funded research on sustainable development. However, sustainable development research in the Global South funded by international aid can be seen as paternalistic and neocolonial.

Using Brookfield’s lenses, this paper presents the reflections of the researcher/educators on a research project in one of the ODA countries: Colombia. The project focused on female leadership for sustainable development in a rural fishing community and was funded by the QR Global Challenges Research fund. The paper explores the learning related to symmetrical and asymmetrical power relations, agency and identity as perceived by three researcher/educators. Finally, it examines the potential of these types of projects for universities’ critical global citizenship.

Keywords: Global Citizenship, participatory research, researchers’ identity, researchers’ agency, power relations.

1. Introduction

Research funding for projects in countries that are on the list of Official Development Assistance (ODA) –a measure of flows of international aid - has increased in the United Kingdom in recent years (UKRI, 2020; Centre for Global Development, 2019). Universities have been working on projects through these funding streams that are increasingly focused on sustainable development and the sustainable development goals (SDGs). The SDGs have been developed by a consultative process spanning nations across the globe (UN, 2015). Sustainable development is a model with policy relevance at international level (Estes, 2010; Baker et al., 2005). However, sustainable development has been criticised for representing the views of some communities over the views of others (Andreotti, 2016, 2014; Rajan and Thornhill, 2019). For instance, indigenous people's worldviews or that of feminist political ecologists may not fit into the economic growth agenda that is part of the SDGs: for example SDG 8, Decent work and economic growth.

With the range of perspectives that different human communities may value, universities working on sustainable development projects in ODA countries, may face ethical dilemmas (Stein et al., 2019) that are not necessarily taken into account by traditional ethical processes. One of these dilemmas is that sustainable development research in the Global South funded by international aid can be seen as paternalistic and neocolonial (Andreotti, 2016, 2014; Rajan and Thornhill, 2019). Therefore, trying to avoid the pitfalls of neocolonialism requires an intentionally reflexive approach from those responsible for the initial framing and implementation of projects.

Global citizenship is a framework that looks at ways of addressing social issues. This is similar to the ODA related funding for universities' research. However global citizenship, especially its conceptualisation in recent years, brings together issues of social and environmental wellbeing whilst critically engaging with a range of 'political' communities such as indigenous communities or neoliberal western communities (Pashby et al., 2020). Therefore, global citizenship is an appropriate framework to explore the intentions of universities and researchers in ODA countries working in sustainable development projects.

Exploring the intentions of a university's research involves researchers questioning the funding and conception of this research. How should universities take steps to interrogate the framings of their international research projects in order to 'decolonise' the academy and to be congruent with a desire to do public good (Walker and McLean, 2013)? How do universities see themselves as 'good global citizens' while also seeing themselves as competitive businesses? These are questions that have yet to be explored in the literature (Stein et al., 2019) and is the focus of this paper.

As universities find their place on the global stage there have been moves towards a more outward-looking perspective (Hudzik, 2014). Although this could lead to a conception of the university as an agent for global citizenship, one material consequence has been an increasing tendency towards a competitive 'globalised outlook' (Engel and Sizcek, 2018). This is often conceptualized as 'internationalisation' of the university but is limited in its extent appearing to be self-serving rather than focussed on public good (e.g. Friedman, 2018), with national interest as the key driver (Engel and Sizcek, 2018). These authors thus conclude that based on their exploration of university

internationalisation strategies these “limit the possibilities of advancing central tenets of global citizenship” (Engel and Sizcek, 2018: 749).

Consideration may thus be given to whether, as Engel and Sizcek (2018) suggest, global citizenship should be principally seen as an outcome of increased international co-operative efforts or whether it is a motivational driver of these efforts. Although UK higher education has been said to have an increasing audit culture (Erickson et al., 2020), which has helped to stifle engaged citizenship in its staff (Spooner, 2017), it is still possible for individual staff to be motivated by a sense of service.

Universities characterise two main areas of activity: education and research. Funding of international research in the UK in recent years has been via the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), as part of the UK’s ODA commitment. However, there is little information on the direct benefit to local actors versus the return to the developed world (e.g. what proportion of funding returns to, or never leaves, the UK).

It has been well-documented that in some sectors, the funding of local efforts for self-help are routinely marginalised. For example, in humanitarian responses to emergencies only 0.2% of the overall funding response goes to local actors, even though these are the people who are inevitably the first on the scene (Roepstorff, 2019).

A university acting as a ‘global citizen’ might be expected to model an ethical approach to funding of its activities in relation to its obligations to both ODA and to its core purpose for public good. This could translate into a critical view of not only what research is funded, but also on the ethics of the power relationships and the uncritical use of Western paradigms of knowledge that are inevitably self-reproducing (Dawson, 2020). In practice that might mean that the university as an organisation, “promotes critical understanding of how we can think and act without prejudice in our diverse and interconnected world” (Mansouri et al., 2017: 5).

These issues frame the reflections of three researchers from a UK institution who devised and conducted a research project funded by the UK DfID via the Global Challenges Research Fund.

2. Project background

2.1. Project on sustainable development and women’s leadership

The research project was funded by GCRF and carried out in Colombia, one of the ODA countries. Women leaders belonging to fisher associations were selected by the regional federation (Federacion de Pescadores, acuicultores y Agricultores del Canal del Dique-FEPASACADI) via a meritocratic selection process to allocate 24 places for a residency, representing more than 30 associations. During the residency, the researchers gave a general background on concepts related to participatory research, biodiversity and sustainability (e.g. tragedy of the commons), sustainable development goals (SDG) and Aichi targets, followed by activities that allowed researchers to gain feedback on participants’ perspectives on these topics. The women leaders and researchers explored together the meaning of female empowerment and networking. They also explored how they could use their strengths as women leaders in the area to promote innovative projects and

entrepreneurship in their areas of interest. The women leaders acknowledged that they benefited from the project in the way they wanted to benefit, dependent on their level of participation. Researchers reflected on their teaching, learning, and research experience during the planning, execution and analysis of the project. The researchers also encouraged women leaders to reflect on their journey from the beginning to the end of the residency.

One key idea that the researchers kept in mind was that although ‘development’ is typically predicated on a one way flow of knowledge and values from the ‘developed’ to the ‘less developed’ nations, (Stein et al, 2019) this can lead to the reproduction of epistemic and economic dominance even within higher education partnerships designed to address this.

2.2. Community based participatory research

Community based participatory research (CBPR) is a type of qualitative research (Kesby, 2005) that provides structure and mechanisms for collaborative and rigorous research, using traditional or new methods, but with a community focus (Horowitz et al., 2009). In CBPR community members and researchers contribute equally and recognise each other’s experience, there is trust, collaboration, shared decision making, and shared ownership of the findings, with acquired knowledge that benefits all partners. The partners commit to long-term research relationships, and aim for local capacity building, systems development, empowerment and sustainability (Horowitz et al., 2009). The community benefits by enhancing their empowerment, co-learning with scientists, informing the wider community of organizing efforts, and linking research to policy action (Balazs and Morello-Frosch, 2013). There are several levels of CBPR, from a basic level where the community are study participants, the design is arranged by the researchers and results are socialised with the community, to a higher level in which the community are partners in the research and highly involved throughout the process, from conception of the project, data collection, fundraising, publication and ownership of results (Balazs and Morello-Frosch, 2013). In all the levels the community is recognised as a unit of identity, but higher levels of collaboration imply longer times of execution and complexity, to ensure relevance of research, rigor, and maximum reach to stakeholders (Balazs and Morello-Frosch, 2013), which may not always be possible to achieve. Examples of CBPR with native communities in Latin America have proven to be a very effective tool to collect, analyse and monitor environmental conditions and promote sustainable use of resources within the community (Oldekop et al., 2012; Saavedra et al., 2016).

Research question: what could the three UK based researchers learn about researcher motivations towards designing and implementing international sustainable development projects in the context of the public good/global citizenship mission of higher education from a project in the Colombian Caribbean?

3. Methods

The research design for this study was based on reflective practice in teaching and learning (Brookfield, 2002) and research (Chiu, 2006; Wilson, 2007; Nicholls, 2009). The practical element that led to the reflection was a participatory research project focused on women’s leadership in fisher communities in the Dique Channel region of Colombia (Barrios et al., in press). The whole research project was done over the course of eighteen months (August 2018 until December 2019). The 31 participants (including the researchers) spent 6 days/5 nights in residential fieldwork in a working farm in the Dique Channel, Colombia. During the design of the research project and

preparation of the residential fieldwork, the researchers started to develop a reflective dialogue (Chiu, 2006; Wilson, 2007; Nicholls, 2009).

Reflective methods are important in participatory research. This is because they help researchers to become aware and include a wide range of voices and perspectives (not only the most prominent) from the participants as well as from themselves (Chiu, 2006; Wilson, 2007; Nicholls, 2009). Brookfield (2002) provides four lenses for critical reflection (originally designed for community college learning and teaching experiences), which are: autobiographical experiences of learning, the learners' eyes, our colleagues' experiences and the theoretical literature. The researchers used these lenses to help orientate reflections. In this reflection, the three researchers conceptualised themselves as learners.

This reflective process was highlighted by the discussions about ethical approval for the project. During the fieldwork, the three researchers met every night to reflect on the day and made any changes required for the subsequent days of data collection. During these meetings the three researchers developed their reflective dialogue, making notes of key aspects to be further discussed.

After analysing the data collected during the fieldwork, writing and submitting a paper to an academic journal (Barrios et al., in press), the researchers met to record a final reflective dialogue. In preparation for this dialogue the researchers read their individual and collective reflective notes written during the research project. The dialogue was driven by the researchers' questions to each other. In this respect it was similar to an unstructured interview. However, the three researchers acted as interviewers and interviewees simultaneously. The whole dialogue (55'28" long) was audio recorded and divided in three. Each researcher did a verbatim transcription of about 18 min (i.e. a third of the whole audio recording).

The three researchers triangulated the results of the data analysis whilst engaging in a process of self-reflection to acknowledge the biases inherent in their own research personas. Thus, the three researchers coded the whole reflective dialogue independently. A framework was developed throughout the research project whilst having the reflective dialogues. The framework included four main aspects:

1. Researchers perceptions of power relations between the researchers and the Dique Channel participants.
2. Agency of the researchers as perceived by themselves
3. Identity of the researchers as perceived by themselves.
4. Interactions between 1, 2 and 3.

The first stage of coding was done assigning text to a unit of analysis for aspects 1, 2, and 3 of the analysis framework and to identify themes. The second stage focused on the 4th aspect to analyse the interactions between 1, 2 and 3. Each researcher worked in stages 1 and 2 of the data analysis independently. The results were only discussed once the two stages of coding were completed by all the researchers.

Researcher A: She defines herself as a multidisciplinary researcher. She started to work in academic research before starting or completing her PhD. Her background is in music, arts and

sustainable development. Researcher A has 6 years' experience working in higher education. Her workload is focused on research with a small teaching load. Previously she was teaching music in further education (FE). Her approaches to teaching have shifted over the years depending on the subjects taught. In FE, whilst teaching Music Theory and Solfege, she perceives her approach as structured and teacher-led. When teaching contemporary music and sustainable development she perceives her approach as more student-led, less structured and holistic. Researcher A has a keen interest in power relations and the impact they have on people professionally, personally and within inter- and intra-organisational stakeholder networks in the education and research sector.

Researcher B: Researcher B is originally an ecologist, completing a PhD on the ecological impacts of an invasive non-native species. She has worked as a professional actor; teacher of English to speakers of other languages; woodland surveyor for a national park; and collaborated in funded art/science projects. She has taught undergraduate and postgraduate Biology and Research Methods. She now works in a centre for learning and teaching at a university in the UK, working closely with academic staff to enable them to develop their teaching practice. She has led projects at the institutional level in global citizenship, student transition and personal tutoring.

Researcher C: Researcher C is a marine biologist with a PhD in tropical marine ecology. Her work involves comparisons between tropical and temperate marine environments around the world. In the UK she has worked in four leading universities, teaching and supervising students (bachelor-PhD levels) on topics related to marine biology and ecology. She coordinated the Newton Fund project Fishing for Life (www.pescandoparalavida.org) between 2016-2018, the base for the women's leadership project. In Colombia, she worked for the national marine research institute (coordinating research projects and a research line) and the Ministry of Defence (as advisor for the Colombian Maritime Director and the Colombian representative at UN-IMO). During the last 3 years she has coordinated several binational projects (UK-Colombia). Her participation in Newton and GCRF projects has increased her involvement in scientific-social research.

3. Results

The coding analysis showed 18 different themes identified as a result of the reflection on the research experience with the women leaders in Colombia (Figure 1), from which power relations, agency and identity are the most relevant to the aim of this paper.

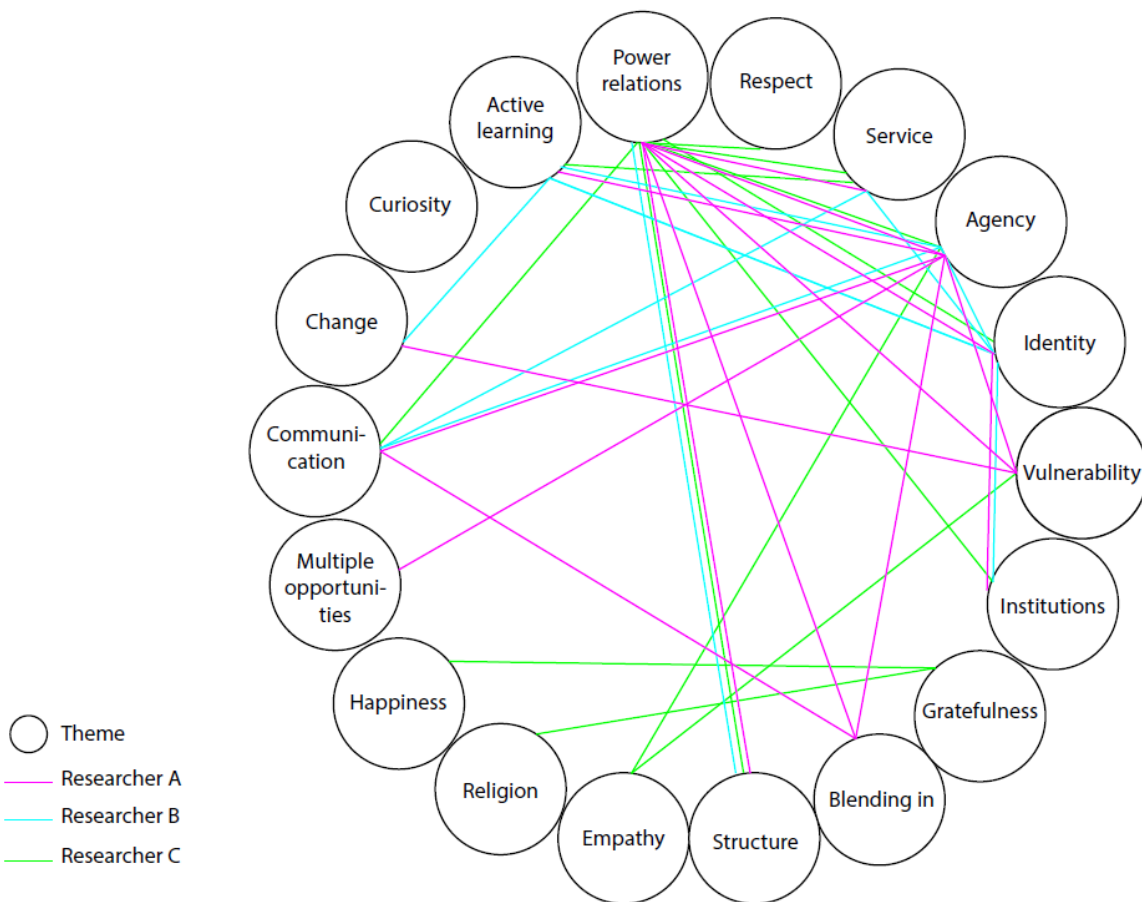


Figure 1. Themes and connections between themes as mentioned by each researcher.

3.1. Analysis of power relations (symmetrical and asymmetrical)

The researchers' reflections were characterised strongly by a consideration of power relations. A basic open coding showed that the researchers considered both symmetric and asymmetric power relations as being present (Figure 1). Interaction with other themes allowed for tentative connections to be drawn where themes appeared to link to each other.

Symmetrical power relations were perceived to exist in relation to the experience the researchers were having of both challenges and togetherness:

"...we can talk at the same level, and at your level. I am at your level because we are in these conditions together. There are things I can give you from my experience, not my knowledge but my experience. There are things that I am willing to learn from you as well."

There was also the idea that some effort to equalise power relations needed to be made by all and that a period of time might be needed to begin to achieve such a goal:

"...I think that yes, they would expect the power relations, because they were saying Dr (researcher C), Dr (researcher C), and then with the time it was (researcher C), right? So it is up to you... mmmh... It's up to both sides, to be open for that communication."

There was a strong belief from the researchers that they had learned things that could be brought back and enacted in their own practice - another example of the way in which power relations at times, felt more equalised:

"one of the things that really struck me was how alive they were... they were so...passionate... and there was this kind of vibrancy in their being..."

"...I feel I learned from that a lot from them about being really active students and self-driven... managed to absorb that and I feel that I can bring it to the classroom here.."

Asymmetric power relations were acknowledged by all the researchers. Researcher C reflected that even though they had some similarities with the women, they felt a power distance in terms of life experiences that might present a barrier:

"...I am aware that I have travelled more than... That was not the point, I didn't want to remind them that I was more this or that. It would be pointless for what I wanted to do, because then there is no communication..."

All three researchers tended to link power relations to 'structure' as the researchers largely created the structure and progress of the workshops. Researcher A also acknowledged the possible existence of power asymmetries, reflecting not only on the power that the women in the community might perceive in the researchers but also in the wider notion of an admiration for the 'foreign other':

"...actually I think that even with [colleague] there is a sense of [Researcher C] is really powerful. They all see [Researcher C] as a powerful thing...she brings money she brings professors...she brings knowledge, people who speak a different language... she brings and to be honest, we still have this in Colombia 'ooh foreigners, they are amazing...they do things amazing'.

These reflections on the nature of power relations as seen by these two researchers were complemented by asymmetric relations as seen from the point of view of Researcher B who experienced an unexpected difficulty in a dramatic shift of power relations as they interacted with the women:

[I thought] "what am I doing here, why should they listen to me, what do I have to offer, really? And it felt like I had nothing to offer. At that moment I had nothing to offer and...I thought they were looking at me and they were going, you don't have anything to offer us...Because their lives are so different... there was a gulf, there was a big gulf between us and I, I couldn't cross it really."

For researcher A, power relations were linked to agency, identity, service, vulnerability and blending in. For researcher B, power relations were not linked to any other theme apart from structure. For researcher C, power relations were linked to themes such as agency, identity, service, respect, institutions, structure and communication. These differences in the way in which power relations (the most important theme identified by all the researchers) linked to other themes,

highlights the different perceptions of each researcher about the interaction with the community. Thus, in order to understand the links, it is important to describe the other main themes.

3.2. Agency

Agency was crucial for the researchers' learning in the Dique Channel project. Here we use a definition of agency as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2001. p. 112). This suggests that the capacity to act varies in relation to the social and cultural environment in which the action occurs. The researchers emphasised agency as a key factor in the development and implementation of sustainable development projects (Figure 1). During the reflective dialogue, the researchers thought that their common agency was linked to power relations, active learning, communication, multiple opportunities, empathy, blending in, vulnerability and identity.

However, each researcher linked agency to different themes (Figure 1). Indeed, agency had the same or fewer interconnections to other themes than active learning and communication for researcher B, and the same or fewer interconnections than service, gratefulness or empathy for researcher C. The researchers discussed that active learning requires agency of the learners to actively engage in learning (see Figure 1). In addition, in participatory research all participants involved (including researchers) could be in a learning mindset.

Sustainable development projects involving universities based in the Global North and local communities based in the Global South are likely to be subject to historical power relations potentially mirroring neocolonialism (Andreotti, 2016). Although it is not always possible to avoid these power relations, the three researchers tried to address this issue by using reflection throughout the project. The three researchers believe that acknowledging power relations and finding ways to balance them is a crucial element for the successful implementation of sustainable development projects involving academia and communities. Agency therefore plays an important role in addressing power relations and throughout the project the researchers reflected on the power relations and discussed ways to balance them. One approach includes a focus on learning rather than teaching and combined with participatory research this can be a tool to help address power relations. However, power relations may often be present in research deemed 'participatory'.

In this particular case, shifting the focus to learning rather than teaching could be done by setting out to learn from and with the Dique Channel Leaders. This might feel more natural for some researchers than for others.

"Researcher A: hopefully we have managed to create a balance. Because I think I am the opposite of paternalistic, just throw yourself to it and then you can do it...I am a bit too much like that: I throw you there, you deal with it. Whereas researcher C is a lot more structured and you accompany people in the process and maybe I am too much of throwing people and maybe you are too much of ...

Researcher B: ... leading

Researcher A: or showing the way..

Researcher C: Or I am deductive and you are inductive...?

Researcher A: oh no...

Researcher B: oh Maybe...yeah.. that's so interesting

Researcher A: I don't get it.. tell me about it

Researcher C: I was thinking about my lectures and passions and things.. why it works here but does not work there...but and I was thinking I give examples and examples and examples and I am telling them so they can do it in different ways...here we were trying different methods we were saying you need to find your journey...and how you can do it from here and here.... And now with structure and I remember from my PGCE and they were pushing me pushing it...and thinking how to be more inductive and they were telling me 'in an activity...talk less and do less and let them find out more and more'... and eventually I was feeling at the end of the lecture 'oh this is rubbish' and the feedback from the people was 'Wow that was so awesome' and What? really? honestly??!'

Researcher b: That's amazing... because you were letting go..."

Researchers can also use their agency to take action to balance power relations. For instance, the researchers mentioned approaches they used to try to blend in within a group for example, through showing their own vulnerabilities and communicating empathy so that unequal power relations could be mitigated. It was challenging for one of the researchers not being able to fluently engage in Spanish with the rest of the participants which affected their own sense of agency, whilst also, potentially, equalising power relations.

3.3. Identity

The researchers used a poststructuralist approach to consider their identities as sociocultural phenomena where “social actors claim, contest, and negotiate power and authority” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2008; p.154). In this way, identity is seen as a social action that agency can achieve, with interaction being an important component. The researchers' identities were thus engaged with in a multidimensional manner. Identity can be considered as rooted in interaction. Agency, identity and power relations are profoundly interconnected but are reflected on here in the context of each researcher and their professional experience.

In the case of researcher B, identity was linked to institutions, agency, service and active learning. For researcher A, identity was linked to power relations and institutions. Researcher C did not link her own Identity to other themes (see Figure 1). The following extract indicates how the researchers linked their identities with contexts in the global south and global north:

“Researcher A: Maybe academia (in the developed world) does something to the beings ... which is about separating those things.

Researcher B: It does exactly that, it puts it in a box doesn't it? That's why those women [the colombian communit] weren't in the box...that's why you got that kind of passion in the classroom because they weren't separating out the academic self and their real human self. They were together.

Researcher A: Because separating [identities] helps you create more power relations maybe...

Researcher B: Or it helps people recognise which bit of you they can gain power over... so they can gain power over the academic because they've got the hierarchy, they've got the institutional

hierarchy, they've got the teaching hierarchy ... I am the teacher you're the student, so those hierarchies reveal if you've managed to identify if you've got the academic side or if you've got the whole person...or you don't know how powerful they might be, or they might have all sorts of powers that you know nothing about.

Researcher A: But it's very scary to look at them because suddenly you've got to...

Researcher A: You do whatever... I don't know if it's tough love... I feel that I really left the group because I was ill [This refers to a WhatsApp group where the researchers and the women leaders had discussions and shared information. The group was created after the residency. Researcher A left the group due to a period of illness] I didn't come back to the women's group because I feel I need to let them go and I feel they need to find their own thing and maybe at some point we can come back but it is time for them to go and do their thing, and I feel that I don't want to intervene in that process...they are powerful enough to go and do their own thing ...I feel hopefully they are at that stage... and if they need something they can come to us rather than us asking them if they need something.

Researcher B: Hmm definitely”.

Thus, whilst agency was discussed extensively in the reflection, identity seemed to be a theme that was not as developed for the three researchers. Due to the funders' requirements the project had tight time constraints. Therefore, it is possible that the researchers were focusing more directly on agency because they had to make decisions and take action in short periods of time. This focus on practicalities and logistics may not have left enough space for reflection in other areas requiring deeper thinking, such as identity. As outputs are measured, at least in the UK, not only for their quality but also for their quantity, developing reflection on researchers' identities and their links to agency and power relations, might be difficult.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The results showed that the researchers were able to discern specific learning about their own motivations towards designing and implementing international sustainable development projects in the context of the public good/global citizenship mission of higher education.

4.1. Agency and identity and their links to asymmetrical and symmetrical power relations

The researchers agreed that their agency was a fundamental concept linked to power relations and through agency, some neo-colonial approaches could be avoided. However, trying to avoid neo-colonial approaches is not enough. Asymmetrical relationships were still present and historically, paternalistic characteristics of human interactions are difficult to break (Stein et al., 2019). All three researchers were able to recognise at least some of their own conscious power differentials manifesting as asymmetric power relations, as seen in section 3.1. Awareness of this is however, only the first step and efforts to mitigate possible asymmetries in power relations should be considered. Stein et al (2019) highlight the reproduction and retrenchment of economic and epistemic power relations that clearly exist between the global north and the global south, with epistemic dominance of a eurocentric curriculum, and the still remote notion that the global north might actually have things to learn from the global south.

The researchers agreed that the awareness of one's identity played a crucial role in the design and implementation of the sustainable development project in the Dique Channel. The researchers also felt that this could potentially be the case in other projects that try not to engage with historically ingrained power relations between the Global South/Global North power but to create a more balanced dialogue. The discomfort felt, for example, particularly by Researcher B was, as Andreotti (2016) discusses, a discomfort and challenge to a frame of reference and worldview that is inevitable if we continue to ask searching questions regarding our own motivations - in fact, if we do not experience some discomfort, one could argue, we are not challenging ourselves sufficiently.

4.2. The role of HE as global citizen, considerations and potential impact.

Accountability in higher education institutions in the UK is increasingly linked to measurable results (Schmidt and Günther, 2016). For colleagues in research active positions, this is linked to the quantity and quality of research, with a tendency towards focusing on the quantity rather than the quality (Schmidt and Günther, 2016). This means that research projects are ruled by strict time constraints. Therefore, the time to reflect and build awareness around researchers' identities is limited. Also, reflection around researchers' identity is not common practice in all research approaches, or in all disciplines. With sustainable development requiring multidisciplinary approaches, reflection on researchers' identities and motivations may not always be necessarily part of these projects.

One possible way to ensure that this type of reflection is embedded throughout a project, is to include this in the design of the research. Andreotti (2016) devised a pedagogical tool for critiquing paternalistic and ethnocentric soft global citizenship approaches to education for international development. The tool was designed for education for a critical global citizenship, and could be used to interrogate the motivations and reflections of the researchers involved in a 'service learning' project. The tool asks the user to consider seven patterns of engagement and representation: hegemony, ethnocentrism, ahistoricism, depoliticisation, self-serving attitudes, simplistic solutions, and paternalism. It provides questions to interrogate the attitudes of the user to each of these and asks whose knowledge is being privileged.

One of the main problems for universities in developed countries (representing Higher Education and Research) when working with communities in developing countries (Global South) is how to engage with the communities in International Experiential Service Learning -IESL and Global Citizenship Education-GCE without becoming one more example of the typical neo-colonialist (we, the powerful), hegemonic (we, the universal knowledgeable people), ethnocentric (we, the good, moral and desirable whites from the north), a-historicist (we, forgetting local history when addressing problems), de-politician (we, forgetting the imbalanced power relations), self-focus (our self-affirmation and CV building), and paternalistic (we the helpers for these poor souls) organisations that have passed by the area in the past, getting plenty of information and leaving nothing meaningful for the community (Andreotti, 2014; 2016).

This kind of structured global citizenship assessment could be part of the formative assessment of sustainable development projects from the outset. Through this assessment, researchers could reflect and aim at working towards global citizenship 'otherwise' (Andreotti, 2015) and critical global citizenship by recognizing and surfacing their neo-colonial and soft global citizenship. This

could provide awareness of our own neocolonial and paternalistic assumptions and behaviours and would not only improve the outcomes of the projects in terms of equality, but also may encourage change in and around us.

Researchers in international projects could thus pursue a position of ‘constant vigilance and compassion’ in order to recognise patterns of complicity in perpetuating past colonialisms and oppressions. Researchers’ attention to their agency in the project would be regularly and critically interrogated, using this kind of framework. To attempt to equalise power relations is a complex and difficult path to tread and risks opening up new inequalities. Treading carefully is perhaps the best we can do.

“As we realize our wider complicity and vested interests in social hierarchies and principles of separability the auto-pilot position is to reproduce these same patterns precisely while declaring our innocence or transformation” (Andreotti, 2015: 224)

Another approach could come from the reflection of researchers who, like some of the authors of this paper, grew up in developing countries, but have lived and worked in a developed country for decades. The process of working with marginalised communities in Colombia has allowed them to understand that in order to engage with the local communities they need to go and live (at least temporarily) with their everyday needs (how to access the area, how to adapt to normal working days under local weather conditions, local food, culture, wages etc), as well as the benefits of living in the area (access to more ecosystem services and quality of life) to identify opportunities for local community development. More than “feeling responsible for changing or saving the world there” (Andreotti, 2014: 22), or assuming that the developed world is “better”, the question is how to improve the local conditions and make the most of the benefits that those conditions offer to local communities, from their own perspective, without promoting our “developed country” beliefs as universal. The collaboration then works when both sides (universities in developed countries and communities in developing countries) understand that working together allows them to identify more opportunities and more solutions to problems.

Rather than sympathy or pity from the “developed” world (Andreotti, 2014), developing countries could be acknowledged as offering a service urgently needed: more natural resources (forests, rivers, mountains, seas) with greater and richer services (agriculture, recreation, tourism, culture, fish stocks, minerals, etc). These ecosystem services are degrading due to the mistakes already made. Communities in developing countries are inheriting these treasures, and it is everyone’s responsibility to respect them. Under this principle, everybody may benefit in the long term and work as equals. Or as the Kogis in Sierra Nevada-Colombia suggest (Edwards, 2010: 18-19): the native communities in the south are the Big Brothers who are waking up to support the Younger Brothers (western societies and developed countries) to stop destroying the natural world. This type of approach could promote a more realistic focus and promote a more democratic global governance and sustainability (Huckle and Wals, 2015).

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