

Three aspects of reflection to decolonize Service Learning in its practice

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Service Learning (SL) includes academic learning, field experience and service to the community. In response to a wide variety of situations, many variants of SL have emerged. Among those, there is the International Service Learning which combines academic learning and service to the community in an international context, or the humanitarian or critical version of the SL that focuses on the collaborative dimension with partners in Southern countries (global south).

IngénieuxSud which is a course-project, set up in 2013 by UCLouvain and the NGO Louvain Coopération, would correspond to this last type of SL initiative. This course-project is taught to students of the Science and Technology Sector of UCLouvain, and also to students from foreign universities. By group of 8 students (4 Belgian, 4 local), they collaborate remotely throughout the academic year to solve a technical problem that was reported by a local partner in the concerned Southern country. In Summer, Belgian and local students meet in the Southern association or company for at least one month to implement the commonly imagined technical solution. During the academic year, students attend several lectures that develop the following learning skills: systemic approach, political and social change, global vision, intercultural communication, sustainability, innovation, etc. They also present their project in front of a transdisciplinary panel and fill in throughout the year a portfolio in which they have to deliver a self-reflective report on their project and its components.

During the *IngénieuxSud* course-project, we are working with students and partners to deconstruct the colonial vision which, by its natural link with the development cooperation, could reinforce the unique imaginary "dominant versus dominated" among the participants. In the framework of *IngénieuxSud*, the decolonization of knowledge and skills is based on deepening three aspects which are **the partnership, the vision of progress and the pedagogical methodologies**. These three topics will be developed during the presentation.

In SL, the host institution in which the group of students performs its mission is generally defined as a partner. In the case of *IngénieuxSud*, we consider **several partnerships in parallel**, namely the link between UCLouvain to companies and associations hosting students (Belgian and local) but also the collaboration between UCLouvain with the other universities from which originate the local students with whom Belgian students collaborate. Being involved in the different facets of SL, students do not want to be considered as "mere tourists". To them, utility and service, intrinsic to SL, should therefore be considered as undisputedly positive moral objectives. However, the SL contributes, through the students who serve the community and the community which accepts help and support, to maintain a "paternalistic" relationship. This framework limits the reflection on the reciprocity that the partnership relation should contain. In the context of *IngénieuxSud*, we explore all kinds of partnership through five potential dysfunctions: asymmetry, manipulation, the illusion of similarity, the denial of conflicts, the confusion in outcomes. The teachers of *IngénieuxSud* as well as the partners develop tools that make it possible to go beyond these dysfunctions and to solve some of them.

Questioning the vision of progress and development is the second axis of the decolonization of knowledge that *IngénieuxSud* aims. The commonly accepted vision of progress is that of the unique history that assigns a different value to cultures, placing them ahead or behind according to those who possess or not knowledge, science and technology. In this global colonial imagination, those who possess technical abilities are considered as problem solvers and others as problem makers. The risk of *IngénieuxSud* by working directly on these technical topics is to root this vision deeper into the

beliefs of students, and thus to reinforce the stereotypes that themselves condition their attitude and behaviour. Several pedagogical activities are in place to counter these visions, which question the relationship between technology and social change.

Pedagogical methodologies constitute the third axis to work on the decolonization of knowledge. We have revisited the way we prepare our students for the intercultural experience which is intrinsic to *IngénieuxSud*, evacuating the students' vision of meeting a static culture, to culturalize everything they encounter during their internship in the South. The most original and challenging component of *IngénieuxSud* is to put in place an environment in which the Belgian and local students establish a real, fair and well-balanced collaboration throughout the full process. By relying on their common student condition, they have a base to start thinking about the technical project. In the mixed groups, each student learns to recognize, appreciate and build on the knowledge and skills of others.

As practitioners and teachers, this kind of education program forces us to face the pitfalls that can still stand in the way of decolonized knowledge. To our point of view, it is mandatory to set up this type of complex program for questioning our ambiguities and our relationship to power and governance.