

Development, Global Futures and IS Research: A Polemic

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Development

- Complex multi-level process for all individuals, organisations and societies
- Not something possessed by one group of countries as distinct from another
- ‘Developed’ and ‘developing’ countries distinction unfortunate and/or offensive

Individual Development

- Gandhi (1949)
- Mandela (1994)
- Members of the far right in Europe

Development = 'Free Trade' Driven Economic Development?

- Self-interest and ignorance are the main drivers of this simplistic argument
- 'Free trade' is normally good economics for the economically powerful
- Ignorance of other cultures/ways of life is a key feature of our 'globalised' world

Global Futures

- Cynic – ignorant self-interest is the dominant mode of human behaviour
- All major religions and many philosophies reject this viewpoint

We Are Not Helpless

‘Every action we make depends on what we have come to be at the time, but what we are coming to be any time depends on the direction of the will’ (Humphreys 1951)

Historical Lessons

- African slavery
- Child labour in mines
- Institutional racism in South Africa
- Women's suffrage

Some Contemporary Challenges

- Adequate food, clean water, health care and child education for all
- Obesity and starvation
- Spiritual poverty e.g. materialism, pornography

The Role of ICT

- ICT deeply implicated in approaches to development and global futures
- E.g. various digital divides
- E.g. ethnocentrism
- E.g. gender issues

What Can IS Researchers Do?

- Study *particular* individuals, groups, organisations and societies in detail and in context (Walsham 2000)
- Celebrate diversity in general but make judgements on unacceptable elements of diversity

Adopt Critical Perspectives

‘By critical perspectives we mean modes of theorising and research practices which regard ... knowledge and its related technologies as socially constructed and enacted, which take those practices to be historically and culturally contingent; and which are understood to be shaped by vested interests and power’ (Saren and Brownlie 1999)

Teaching

- Students are not customers
- We are not selling metaphorical soap
- We have responsibility for our syllabuses
- Link ICT to wider agenda of development and global futures

Publishing

- *MISQ* and *ISR* are not the top journals
- Infiltrate such journals?
- Or create alternative outlets?
- Open up the black box of power relations and vested interests in journal categories

Institution Building

- We need more critical IS researchers with broad agenda on editorial boards; as referees; submitting their work
- More papers of this type at ICIS?
- Role of AIS?

Working Groups 8.2 and 9.4

- Keep up the good work
- Come together periodically
- Be inclusive of other relevant ‘disciplines’: sociology, development studies, philosophy, anthropology ...

This Licence to Rant Has Now Expired