Arianna Briganti
PhD Proposal
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· A working title of the topic area

As a development economist how do I contribute to the establishment of the human capabilities
of the people I work with in the developing countries?

· General overview of the area

A Maori woman speaking to a development worker said: "if you have come here to help us out,
we don't need you. But if you have come here because you believe that somehow your
emancipation is involved with ours, then we will work together." These words describe my
values and beliefs around the duty of a development worker. In what ways can WE work
together? I'll explain in depth what 'we' means to me in this paper.

My research will begin at looking at my lived experience of being a development economist and
a development manager, namely a practitioner aid worker who for the past 10 years has lived
and worked in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Georgia. I recently have moved to the Maldives. I'm
also the co-founder of an NGO[1], which supports women and children in need in several
developing countries. Hugo Slim while talking to a group of ICRC's workers in 2004 has argued:
' I have been hearing terrible things about humanitarianism […], so I was much more relieved to
see my 30 humanitarians […] very committed, a bit troubled, self-critical, sceptical, affectionate,
tolerant, practical and humorous.' This is the best description I would use to explain my
motivation and my sympathy for the aid/development field, that many years ago led me to
embrace my profession. I have always believed that the imperative respect for humanity
(Peters, 1970) has to be defended and the number one priority to aim at for development
workers.

My intention is to unveil different facets of truth (Foucault, 1983), which are often hidden behind
the diverse values held by myself, by the people and institutions I work for in the developing
countries as well as by the western organizations I'm employed by.

My research aims at doing the right thing (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2005, p. 19), focusing on
people-oriented external goals in a value-based conflict (Thomas, 1996) by considering

development management (DM) as a process intervention (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2005, p. 5), which objective is to empower individuals and build their capacities (ibid., p.18). I consider DM as management FOR development -doing the right thing- instead of management OF development, namely doing things right. However in this field, which is full of anomalies, ambiguity, power struggle and filled with a rather slippery concept of truth what is the right thing to do and how? I'd like to find practical ways for improving what I'm doing as a development worker in order to be beneficial to the people I'm working with. Moreover I'd like to contribute to both economic growth as well as to the establishment of their human capabilities (Sen, 1999, p.200) that encourage innovative forms of personal and social evolution, rooted in freedom (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011 p.58), leading eventually also to economic freedom (Sen, 1999 p. 204).

Throughout my PhD research I'd like to show how my critical reflection is impacting on what I'm doing and the quality of it. In other words, I'd like to embrace a metacognitive form of thinking to enable myself not only to be aware of what I'm doing, but to grasp the significance of it and its effects (positive or negative) on others. In Freire's words I'd like to engage in a process of awakening of consciousness (Freire, 1972) to explore and eventually be more aware of myself as well as my role in society. This process might provide me with the power to contribute to the transformation of the reality I work and live in.

However I have sometime experienced myself as a 'living contradiction' since my values of equality and respect for diversity, have been denied in my practice (Whitehead, 1989). As a matter of fact, my values around development are translated into the urge to include the poor in their social, political and economic dimension (Hoogvelt, 2005, p. 121) by addressing unequal power-relations in society (Thomas & Mohan, 2007, p. 184). Moreover I'm very sympathetic to Sen's concept of poverty seen as lack of entitlements (Sen, 1999, p. 204) rather than simply as money. During the past 10 years I have attempted to carry all these values into my daily work as a development manager with the scope to turn them into practice (Mosse, 2004). Now, all these will inform my research, which will represents the meeting point between my professional and personal values, and aims at improving my learning, my practice thus generate new knowledge useful for other's learning (McNiff & Whitehead 2011 p. 14). I see the living contradictions I have experienced as a crucible, in other words there are the source of motivation that informs my profession. Hence, it urges to explore them in depth.

My thesis will gather qualitative data by using a participatory research method drawing insights from Freire's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (Freire, 2007), which focused on respect for individuals and groups. I will use living theory methodology and hence the action research – reflection cycle, which considers the 'I' as a vector of change (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011 p. 8). I will enrich the research with different perspectives, namely my standpoint as a development worker, the one of the people I serve in the developing countries as well as those of the key political decision-makers such as the local Government and the Development Co-operation Agency (a European governmental body) that employs me. I'll utilize triangulation (Pinder, 2009, p.104) to acquire knowledge even if it is subjective and value –laden; still it represents a crucial insight into people's cultural identity.

· Identification of relevant literature

I will commence by exploring the literature concerned with the different meaning of development, thus analysing and showing familiarities with key authors such as Thomas, Chamber, Cooke, Sen and Korten. Moreover I'll engage in the process of analysing institutional development around the meaning of poverty (Engberg-Pedersen, 1997) by examine the merge of Neoliberalism and the work by Polanyi (Polanyi, 1944), which strengthens the feature of capitalism such as free-markets, competition between individuals and industrialization all leading to economic growth. I'll be focusing as well on Structuralism, which explains development as resulting in a modern industrial society controlled by international agencies and by the Governments.

I will engage in the large and controversial debate about how intervention should act in order to mitigate the defects of capitalism and lead to market-efficiency theories approach (Allen & Thomas, 2004 p. 47), considering different agents of development such as NGOs, international organizations, markets and states as "entrusted" for others' development (Trusteeship) (ibid,. p.41). Even if interventionism attempts to meet human needs by recognizing that eliminating poverty is crucial for the development of the 'South', it is still unclear to me how it is possible to intervene in order to avoid reinforcing the already existing inequalities (Mayoux, 2005).

More than 50 years of development interventions have set up on the one hand too ambitious targets for example the aim agreed at the United Nations World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995 to reduce by half by 2015 the proportion of people living in extreme poverty. On the other hand have shown poor results. I'll explore diverse recent publications by practitioners such as '*Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and how there is another Way for*

Africa' by Mojo (Mojo, 2009); '*Why nation fail'* by Acemoglu & Robinson (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012); '*I didn't do it for you'* by Wrong (Wrong, 2005); '*An imperfect offering- Humanitarian action for the 21st century'* by Orbinsky (Orbinsky, 2008) to name a few, which provide some clues.

Drawing from my 10 years professional and personal background and above all from the actions taken by those practitioners and organizations that are engaged in identifying alterative path to sustainable development, I'll attempt to find modes of analysis that will assist in understanding and evaluating future experiences in different parts of the world, however new and unexpected they may be. Thus, I aim at contributing to knowledge through the development my own living theory (Whitehead, 1989) and improve my practice. Some of the context-specific practitioners and organizations I'll draw on are those by the Nobel Laureate Mohammed Yunus founder of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh [2], Sanjit 'Bunker' Roy founder of the Barefoot College in India [3] and Pancho Otero founder of Prodem Foundation/BancoSol in Bolivia. I want to question the status quo by considering the work of institutions that in my view do not mirror my values related to people-centred development, equity, fairness, and respect for diversity instead they engage in rhetoric such as the Word Bank, International Monetary Funds and the United Nations. These are however active in the developing scene since the Second World War, hence play a fundamental role in the international development scenario, are key decision-makers and are emulated by many other minor organizations. I'll include in the analyses a vast quantity of grey material (i.e. mission reports) that has been written by like-minded practitioners during their overseas assignments in various countries.

All the above is to show that my findings and assertions will be grounded in validated evidence and tested against critical examination (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011 p.122).

· Key research questions
  The aim of my research project is articulated in terms of the following research questions:

I. How do I contribute to the empowerment of individuals and support them in building their human capacities?

II. How can I use my personal and professional experience as a development economist/ manager to develop my living theory methodology?

III. How can my research make an original contribution to knowledge in the framework of sustainable development?

IV. How can I turn the living contradictions I have experienced into a crucible and learn how to become a person whose mind is free and can fully live its values?

- Methodology

    I will engage in the use of living theory action research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011) as a methodology to develop my own path towards the generation of new knowledge. The ontological 'I' will be at the centre of my investigation (id.) and I'll organize my thinking in terms of what I'm experiencing at the moment (Ibid., p.47.)

    Participatory research will be used as a method that enables myself and the local people I serve to become agents of change (Sen, 1999). Moreover as Hart (2001) stated I'll follow the 'methodological inventiveness', namely I'll experiment innovative ways until I find the one that is right for me.

    Moreover drawing from Freire's work (Johnson, 2005, p.87) I'll instigate the people I work for to start a colloquial dialogue (id.) in order to raise awareness on the common problems affecting all of them. Hence, I'll utilise narrative methods (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991), multimedia approaches (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2009) as well as semi-structured interviews.

    My research will commence by looking at two main standpoints namely at the 'I', and at the part of the local population I serve in the developing countries whose human capabilities I'd like to support. However I have access to the local population only via two main decision-makers, whose perspective, aims and values need to be revealed in my analysis if I want it to be participative, authentic, inclusive and fair. These are: the local Government of the developing countries that determine how to intervene on the population and with what kind of intervention and those western governmental agencies, bound up with the local Governments through political bi-later agreements. The latter allocate the budget to run the development initiatives. Thus, I'll critically reflect upon the four actors' values and use triangulation (Pinder, 2009, p.104) to show up anomalies or conformities between them. I will also raise the issue related to whose standpoints prevail, in other words whether there is an actor who imposes its truth (Foucault, 1983) on the others and which are the consequences?

· Timescale /research planning

The following action plan has been developed following the notional action plan suggested by Whitehead and McNiff (McNiff &Whitehead, 2011 p105).

Research Stage	Major activities	Estimate/ Actual		Time plan				
		Costs	Duration (in weeks)	I year	II year	III year	VI year	
Preliminary Readings	Collect all the documents, books, articles, grey material and various theories related to living action research and to my filed of expertise.	To be found out	To be found out					
Identify my concern and why I'm concerned	I am concerned because I hold values of equity, social justice and fairness, thus I can't pretend not to know that the majority of the people in the world are neglected the right to exist, thus to leave a dignified life. By identifying my concerns I'll also advocate the urge to take action and							

	embrace a strategy, which encompasses both social and economic sustainable development.						
Data gathering in order to show the situation as it is	I will gather data that show how the international development co-operation field (which I'm part of) operates, analysing pros and cons of the strategies in place and achievements. I will also gather data related to my 10-years professional experience and that of other like-minded practitioners who have tried to find a way to effectively help vulnerable people around the world.						
What can and what will I do; gathering data to show as the situation unfolds	By using living action research as a methodology I'll engage in participatory work in order to grasp an insights on the four main stakeholders' standpoints,						

	values and aims. I'll compare them, challenge them, find similarities and divergences and attempt to find a meeting point between them. This should contribute to the development of my own living theory and hopefully lead to new knowledge on how to be instrumental in the establishment of the human capabilities of the people I serve.							
Evaluation of my influence; ensure that any conclusion I reach are reasonably, fair and accurate; test the validity of my claim to knowledge and modify my concerns, ideas and practice in light of the evaluation	I see the development scenario as transformational: 'the end of one thing becomes the beginning of something else' (McNiff,2000; McNiff et al., 1992). It's messy and ambiguous, hence the evaluation of my practice, of my claim to knowledge and the development of my own living theory							

	will be a challenging process, which I'll have to strictly test through the validation of others such as theorists, practitioners, colleagues and above all against those cynics critical towards the utility of the humanitarian/ development world							
Write the final research thesis	Sum up all the data and writing final report							
Totals			4 years					

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[1] Non governmental organization
[2] http://www.grameen-info.org
[3] http://www.barefootcollege.org