Viewpoint

My 350 on Brexit: Development Practitioners React to the Outcome of the UK Referendum on Membership of the European Union

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Douglas Bourn

Brexit has raised important challenges to those within education about how best to respond to what is clearly a reaction to global influences, be they concerning refugees, economic migration or a growing sense of alienation from society. The rise of racist attacks post-referendum reflects perhaps a more deep-seated and latent xenophobia in the UK that has perhaps not been discussed openly enough before. These themes reflect a broader dislocation from society particularly amongst many working class communities that is a direct consequence of the impact of globalisation and neoliberal policies on local economies.

However, for development education, globalisation is not a simple economic or social force that needs to be exposed and campaigned against. It is a much more complex phenomenon that brings with it opportunities as well as challenges. One of the challenges of the Brexit vote is to show through education that globalisation can result in the opening up of minds, ideas and experiences to different viewpoints and perspectives from around the world. Development education and global learning in response to Brexit therefore need to be based more on promoting learning that looks at the issues and causes of inequality, understanding power relations and the ideological influences that underpin much of the dominant political ideas in UK society.

Too often development educationalists have tended to respond to the challenges of globalisation by encouraging action against the influences of multinational companies and global forces. What this has done is to ignore the complex influences of globalisation and the conflating of globalisation with neoliberal forces. Whilst there is a danger of education being seen as the panacea for addressing these issues of racism and alienation, there is no doubt that formal education particularly through schools can play an important role in promoting approaches towards learning what globalisation means, why there is economic migration from East to Western Europe and also the broader undercurrents in British society regarding a sense of superiority over other cultures. Merely encouraging and promoting cultural awareness it is suggested here is not enough. What cannot be denied is that some have perceived Brexit as permission for intolerance and racism in society. This makes schools' role in promoting respect and mutual understanding that much harder.

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Frank Geary

Theresa May and the UK government have been repeating the mantra 'Brexit means Brexit', but no one seems capable or willing to define what Brexit actually means. One thing we can say is that for development education Brexit means uncertainty and a major challenge to our values.

Brexit is already creating uncertainty at the practical level of European Union programmes and funding calls. The European Commission's DEAR (Development Education and Awareness Raising) grants call closed on June 21st, two days before the UK voted to leave the EU. It is unlikely that Brexit will have an impact on UK organisations engaged in the current DEAR call, as the UK remains part of the EU until the British government invokes Article 50. There will certainly be an impact on

UK organisation's ability to engage in future European partnership programmes as well as on EU policy and practice on DEAR, although what that impact will be remains uncertain while the status and meaning of Brexit remains unclear. Brexit means Brexit and we are all none the wiser.

More fundamentally, the Brexit vote is a major challenge to values that inform development education, in particular to ideas of global citizenship and universalism. In 2015 the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Accord saw an unprecedented multilateralism as global political processes that grappled with global political, economic, social and environmental issues. One year later, with Brexit and protectionist responses to migration in Europe, we are seeing the opposite. Whatever your views on the merits of the EU, Brexit is a decision to withdraw from the multilateralism of the European project. It is a challenge to the assumptions behind global citizenship and universalism, the idea that we are 'all in it together'. While some voters may have voted leave so that the UK would abandon a protectionist fortress Europe and exercise a more globally minded multilateralism, many others followed the isolationist rhetoric of Nigel Farage.

The Brexit campaign has mainstreamed and strengthened isolationist, protectionist and anti-immigrant rhetoric in the UK. Nigel Farage's anti-immigrant posters sit alongside the rhetoric of Donald Trump and the strong-man nationalism we're seeing in India, Philippines, Russia and across the world. These phenomena are a fundamental challenge to the values of development education. It is more important than ever for development education to be at these faultlines, addressing these challenges and creating spaces to air and explore these issues.

Frank Geary is the Director of the Irish Development Education Association (IDEA).

John Hilary

The British referendum decision to leave the EU offers an opportunity to rethink the principles on which we base our relations with the rest of the world. Do we wish to continue with the imperialist programme that has characterised European policy towards the global South for so many centuries? Or are we at last ready for a new approach? Since the adoption of the Global Europe strategy in 2006, the EU has openly committed itself to the most aggressive programme in its trade relations with other countries, relentlessly promoting the interests of transnational capital at the expense of labour, society and the environment. This agenda has made itself publicly known through the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) under negotiation with the US. The fact that unelected EU bureaucrats have pursued TTIP in open defiance of public opposition was a standard complaint in every one of the debates that I took part in leading up to the referendum, and in comment pieces written on both sides.

Yet the TTIP agenda is not an aberration on the part of Brussels. It is the EU's standard programme for all peoples, seen in the Economic Partnership Agreements forced on African, Caribbean and Pacific island states, and also in the EU's other trade agreements with countries of the global South. The Leave vote means that the British people will no longer be party to EU trade agreements. Yet we knew that Brexit would bring us face to face with a UK political elite that has consistently championed the most extreme neoliberal positions on the European spectrum. We must ensure the British people's decision to reject the EU cannot be twisted into a mandate to pursue the EU's imperialist programme unilaterally.

The Leave vote was a rejection of the political caste. The fact that voters in many traditional Labour strongholds came out for Brexit must be seen as a call for a new kind of politics, here and overseas. Our task now is to help build the movement that turns this new politics into a progressive force for positive change.

John Hilary is Executive Director of War on Want.

Gerard McCann

With the UK set to leave the EU in or around 2020, the implications of this move for international cooperation and development policies are complex and extensive. At the time of the referendum on 23 June 2016, the EU was party to 1,139 bilateral and multilateral agreements with countries outside the twenty-eight member states. This included formal international agreements on trade, development, common foreign and security policies. The breakup of the EU means revision and renegotiation of key development policies such as the Economic Partnership Agreements, the Cotonou Treaty, the Consensus on Development and a bank of other significant transnational policy arrangements.

The UK's role in this architecture cannot be understated in that on accession to the European Economic Community in 1973 it had negotiated for development cooperation agreements that represented almost a third of the world, including overseas territories and former colonies. The Overseas Development Institute warned that the impact of Brexit for developing countries would be in the region of £3.1 billion in the first year. This contraction – if not mitigated – will effect trade, aid, developing markets, remittances and currency fluctuations. Indeed, £1.2 billion of the international aid budget from the UK per year is channelled through the offices of the EU. Will this be supplemented post 2020? Furthermore, the UK will, according to most financial analysts (Barclays, Bank of England, Morgan Stanley, Credit Suisse), go into recession in the period immediately after the exit.

The anticipated 10 percent drop in the UK's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) will reverberate across the developing world. Risks are anticipated for former colonies, Commonwealth countries and overseas territories and include: exports from developing countries to the UK going down, commodity prices falling, wage depression, tourism dropping, infrastructure projects reducing, UK agri-food protectionism, investments being constrained and, as mentioned, with the pound falling in value, remittances to the developing countries being worth less. Problematically,

the most controversial aspect of post-EU Britain will be that of a migration policy which could collapse into a racially constructed mechanism to restrict movement to and from developing countries. International cooperation and development policies will invariably be impacted by Brexit. The countries involved and development agencies have a lot to get lobbying for over the next three years.

Gerard McCann is a senior lecturer in International Studies at St. Mary's University College, Queen's University Belfast.

Stephen McCloskey

The economist Paul Mason argued that: 'The Brexit vote was an insurrectionary protest against neoliberalism, globalism and cultural contempt'. Perhaps, but it certainly reflected a deeply divided society along class, cultural and geographical lines; divisions accentuated by the post-2008 austerity politics that have largely targeted vulnerable communities and sectors of society. Brexit could, therefore, be viewed as further evidence of a growing chasm between the lived experiences of a state-neglected and increasingly alienated working class and the NGO sector which they no longer regard as a positive part of their lives. Concepts that are championed by international NGOs such as global citizenship and interdependence were, if anything, negatively configured in the Brexit debate suggesting that they are now largely disconnected from 'leave' communities.

A Charity Commission research report published recently suggests that overall public confidence and trust in charities has fallen to 5.7 (from 6.7 in 2015) out of ten. Overall, respondents said that they are more likely to trust small charities (57 percent) over large ones (34 percent) and charities that operate in the UK (61 percent) over those that operate internationally (31 percent). These are worrying conclusions for international NGOs and perhaps signal that the public regard the international non-governmental sector as part of the same institutional elite against which they were rebelling in the referendum vote.

Reflecting on Brexit, Oxfam's Duncan Green asked: 'Would it be better to pull back from the day to day trench warfare of Whitehall and go long term, working with youth, investing more in development education, working on public attitudes to race and 'Otherness'?' There can only be one answer to this question if the international development sector is to reclaim lost credibility and relevance in the communities that voted leave. Many leading international NGOs walked away from development education in the late 1990s and abandoned the kind of coalface global learning so clearly needed today. Why then be surprised at wholesale consumption in leave communities of stereotypes about migration and the global South? The international development NGOs need to re-embrace development education and support delivery in poor communities that should, after all, be their core constituency.

Stephen McCloskey is Director of the Centre for Global Education, Belfast.

Susan McIntosh

The shockwaves of the UK vote are still reverberating, but a key question still remains why did so many in the UK wish to leave the European Union whilst Scotland is being dragged kicking and screaming from it! What was the difference? My view is that education made the difference. Not just in schools (in fact not nearly enough in schools) but in communities up and down the country, at bus stops, in shops and in pubs, in fact anywhere people came into contact with each other. Scotland's referendum on membership of the UK union in 2014 was called a full eighteen months before the actual poll, in contrast to the European referendum which was called with only four months' notice. The UK referendum allowed for arguments to be developed and the case for and against to be fully debated. The grassroots movement which grew during the campaign, particularly on the 'Yes' side was unprecedented in modern Scotland.

This political awakening resulted in a growing dissatisfaction with the established political class and the two party rule which had prevailed for

so long at Westminster, although really just the one party, Labour, in Scotland. At the next General Election in 2015 Labour was all but wiped out, returning only one MP to the SNP's 56! Scotland had an option and chose it, in England there was no such choice.

When it came to the referendum on European Union membership every area in Scotland voted to remain; they did not believe the largely negative messaging about Europe emanating from the media and had experienced 'project fear' before. Economic arguments and scaremongering about being overrun by migrants (often no distinction made or recognised between refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants from the EU or elsewhere!) gained very little traction in Scotland and I would argue that this had everything to do with a population which had seen through the media spin and downright lies and knew that the establishment was peddling its own lines for its own ends!

This is what education can do and what Global Citizenship in particular is about, with critical thinking, media and political literacy being at its very core.

Susan McIntosh has been the Co-ordinator of Scotdec, a global education centre based in Edinburgh, for twenty years.