

Introduction

Mariano Pavanello
University of Pisa

1. The history of development aid in Italy is poor in anthropological experience. It is legitimate to wonder whether that void should be filled, and with what.

The present issue of *l'UOMO* is intended to foster discussion as well as a critical awareness of a problem that as anthropologists we cannot ignore.

Italy is one of the seven leading industrial nations, and it is one of the world's leading donors in terms of volume of allocations for aid. These two features involve a high degree of responsibility concerning strategic choices that may influence the future of human life.

There are more than five billion people on the face of the earth, and the despoliation of natural and energy resources through exploitation and pollution represents a very serious threat to the survival of human kind.

More than two thirds of the world's population live in what we call "underdevelopment" conditions. Overcoming immense disparities is an avowedly shared objective of all nations, and the way to achieve this objective is what everyone refers to as "development". How this goal can be achieved while safeguarding the very conditions of life on our planet is a problem that, despite authoritative theoretical work (cf. Leontief 1977), still remains unsolved.

2. Development aid is a bilateral or multilateral question based on the mechanism of international reciprocity. This principle has been reconfermed by recent Italian legislation covering the reorganization of cooperative action (law 49 of February 26, 1987: "New regulations for cooperation between Italy and developing

countries"). One of the conditions of this reciprocity is that action should usually be requested by the interested party.

The stimulus to transformation is translated by power elites in Third World nations into a wish to impose a process of accelerated development on their countries. This is consistent with the interests of the industrialized nations, but it is also likely to cause errors, distortions, and loss of efficiency because of the technical and organizational inadequacy of the local human and institutional resources.

In developing countries, the generating force of growth is not supply, as per Schumpeter's thesis (1934), but demand (see also Ferro 1971), which in turn stimulates supply from the developed countries. What is asked of the west and the east alike is a preponderant share in change, while the experience accumulated in traditional areas is undervalued.

Where change is successful, the cost of development is very high and involves the disintegration and marginalization of traditional social realities.

Modernization is an apparently obligatory objective for societies in which population growth and low productivity do not permit short-term alternatives. Moreover, it is a political and economic objective for local governments interested in developing a national industry. In addition to the problem of raising capital and incurring debt, the main difficulty is the poor or non-existent training of local labor and the weakness of infrastructure. The use of this labor force may, in the medium range, involve even lower productivity and the ongoing presence of outside workers at the training level as well as others. Thus change may already have taken place in a society, while progress is still to come.

Outside intervention is chiefly institutional, and what is put up for discussion (even before an assessment of the extent of change) is knowledge and the whole life style of the local populations.

From the economic standpoint, this procedure stimulates a demand in Third World countries before the mechanism of supply can be established. It is the opposite of development from the bottom up, in the sense of the possibility of the traditional communities making choices. Rather it is guided development after the model of industrial society.

In this scenario, philosophical and scientific thought is directed to a redefinition of the consistency and objectives of the development that we experience historically (cf. Gabor & Co-

lombo 1976; Meadows, Meadows, Randers & Behrens 1972; Perroux 1981), while it also challenges the legitimacy of its expansion (cf. Nash 1981).

Pitt (1976: 10) says rather schematically that «in most of the development literature there is an assumption that there is a continuous evolution ... from a traditional state towards a modernization ... some (e. g., the development agencies) regard this process as desirable and beneficial; others (e. g., the Marxists) see it as exploitative».

In my opinion, the problem is not just the definition of the nature of the process. It is rather one of reconsidering the hypothesis that the development of traditional societies coincides with the expansion needs of our model of economic growth.

3. The world economy is certainly not subordinate to our reflections, but we cannot neglect exact definition of the status and limits of the professional application of anthropological knowledge in the service of development aid, otherwise the contribution of anthropologists to cooperative efforts cannot but be ambiguous.

The use of the anthropologists in colonial administrations was connected to an old attitude of sociological optimism of a positivist kind. Radcliffe-Brown remarked in 1930 (p. 279): «How long the peoples of India and Africa will permit us to exercise control over their destinies, or how long we shall continue to think we have the right to do so, I do not know. But in carrying out our self-appointed task we may make some steps in acquiring the systematic knowledge which will ultimately permit us to control and direct the processes of social change in our own societies».

What used to justify the application of ethnological knowledge was the need to adjust administration to the demands for a workable formula of coexistence (cf. Malinowski 1945). Nowadays it is the philosophy of new development that sets the goal of modernization for countries that are optimistically called «emerging».

The complexity of the problems to be solved suggests a multidisciplinary integration of method (cf. Streeten 1976). Anthropology is being asked to provide the tools of knowledge that other fields formally lack. The task that is required of our discipline is no longer one of supporting the good government of primitive or underdeveloped peoples but to offer guidelines that will make it

possible for the dominant development model to be consistent with the realities of the local situation.

It is the very nature of the anthropological approach that makes the response ambiguous.

In the paper Schneider wrote for this issue shortly before his premature death, he concluded by saying that what «characterizes us ultimately is our greater sensitivity to the relativity of values among human beings». This often places anthropologists too much on the side of the indigenous population, in the eyes of those who work in the field of cooperation. By training, the anthropologist is better able to understand the reasoning of so-called “developing peoples” than are the people responsible for helping them. Therefore we often tend to think about the perversity of our development model more often than those who are called upon to extend its frontiers.

The general opinion is that independent development of traditional societies has been blocked by contact with Europe. We are not capable of imagining what the history of peoples of ethnological interest might have been had they not come in contact with Europe. The contrast between “independent development” and “imposed development” may thus seem totally otiose. There is, however, ample room within which the history of traditional societies continues to follow its own course. This arouses and still satisfies most anthropological interests. In this context many anthropologists tend to be very suspicious of anything they think might reduce this margin. The concept of development aid is too reminiscent of the “controlled acculturation” or “planning” (Bastide 1971) that marked the colonial and the immediately post-colonial periods. That is to say, the past everyone tries to repress in order to spare our discipline the old charge of being an *instrumentum regni*.

4. The disappointments caused by the failure of many ambitious programs and the scanty results of heavy investment have since the end of the 1960s stimulated thought about the capabilities and limits of aid policies as well as about the way governmental and international agencies work. One of the themes is the inevitable gap between the economic and technical objectives of any action plan and the human reality on which it acts.

In some industrial countries, especially the United States, sensitization has led government institutions to employ an increasing number of experts trained in anthropology to plan,

assess, and carry out their programs (cf. Hoben 1982). The increased reciprocal interest of aid workers and anthropologists is reflected by a rich literature (cf. among others Pitt 1976; Brokensha, Warren & Werner 1980; Horowitz & Painter 1986).

There are two misunderstandings in this picture that should be cleared up. The first is at the root of the philosophy of aid and consists in the equation "traditional = underdevelopment = irrational". Thus aid cannot be conceived of except in the framework of transforming the reality that is presumably in need of assistance.

The second misunderstanding concerns the figure and role of the anthropologist. This can be summarized in the idea that if what is traditional is irrational, then the anthropologist's task is to make this reality comprehensible so that it can be manipulated.

Anthropologists involved in development action often experience this misunderstanding as a major contradiction, but it is also true that the need for anthropology – and the social sciences in general – more often betrays disorientation on the part of those responsible for aid policies (cf. Myrdal 1972).

To overcome these misunderstandings the very notion of "development" must be de-mystified.

The literature on the subject is too vast to be summarized. I shall limit myself to pointing out that the concept derives its operational capacity only from the antithesis of its opposite, "underdevelopment" (cf. Freyssinet 1966). It is not very different from the pair "progress/tradition" and refers more or less to what we mean by the idea of "modernization" (cf. Lerner 1964; Rogers 1969).

This opposition is strictly ideological (cf. also Bernstein 1979) not to say deceptive in operational terms, since it flattens a multifarious reality into bipolarity, a reality whose structure derives precisely from various kinds of differences. In plain language, it means reducing all social and economic forms of the present and the past, all of them different from the ideal type of "modern society", to a single category.

Economic theory has hitherto been based on a uniform definition of development (cf. for example Rostow 1960) accompanied by presumably objective parameters. The economists have, moreover, always accepted as givens (*ceteris paribus*) political and social institutions and cultural and psychological variables (cf. also Higgins 1968).

The inadequacy of the theoretical models has led many economists to critical reflection (Hirschman 1983; Nafziger 1975;

Phelps Brown 1975), which ultimately brings them to anthropology (Gregory 1982; Grossi 1983; Marchionatti 1985).

Faced with the theoretical and practical difficulties of development aid, economics has adopted the concept of *self-reliance* (Seers 1979) where two ideas come together. The first is that external stimulus must be aimed at endogenous growth factors; the other is that there is real development in a society when the effects of growth are redistributed according to a plan that is consistent with internal potentialities.

In practice self-reliance is the philosophy of independent development based on the supposition that one of the fundamentals of the process of change is an increase in a system's productivity (cf. Hart 1982). In Third World countries, and especially in Africa, national systems suffer from an intrinsic weakness that largely derives from the failure to integrate local economies. The role anthropology can play in this context seems valuable. Anthropologists are not usually involved at the level of complex or national systems but rather at the level of local communities; and often in developing countries ethnic identity is something quite different from national identity. To imagine local communities as economic systems means grasping the economic nature of the network of kinship and alliance links that constitute the visible structure of those societies.

Any traditional production process responds to an internal logic of economic balance. To increase productivity means modifying that equilibrium and reaching a new level of efficiency. We are not speaking of capitalistic enterprises but of social groups. The tension inside the group may reveal imbalance (when costs are higher than income in the average of the local production units) and shift the society's interest toward different forms of production in which a balance is restored between costs and income.

5. Edmund Leach acutely remarked that there are two kinds of anthropologists (1970). There are those whose aim is to study how in exotic communities people spend their lives from the cradle to the grave and those who hope to find general laws of human behavior by comparing different cultures. Hence there are anthropologists who argue that the state of "otherness" and "differentness" is all but irreducible, and there are others who believe that the so-called "primitive" peoples are much more like us than they seem.

The contraposition of formalists and substantivists in econo-

mic anthropology is an emblematic example of this dichotomy of approach.

An authoritative echo of this conflict, now overcome in many ways, appears in the paper that the formalist Schneider has written for this issue, while on the side of the economists there is the substantive option offered by Marchionatti in his paper on the decline of development economics.

The conflict between "development" and "underdevelopment" is apparently overcome by the substantivists in their refusal to acknowledge an economic dimension to so-called "primitive" societies (Dalton 1961, 1969; Polanyi 1980; Sahlin 1972).

I say apparently because Dalton (1971*b*, 1974) theorizes development as the increase in *per capita* production through technological and institutional modifications, and he defines this process as the introduction of the economic dimension to societies that traditionally lack it. This thesis is similar to that of the neo-Marxist economist Baran (1967): the key to development is industrialization.

The substantivist position actually repropose the ideologic conflict with increased vigor by translating it into rather absolute terms: "modern = economics" versus "primitive = non-economics". However expressed, this idea masks a single thought: development is the transition from a "non-modern" condition to one that adjusts to the model of industrial society (market, planned, or mixed economy). If traditional societies do not experience an economic dimension, then «to speak of the economy of a primitive society is an exercise in unreality. Structurally, economy does not exist. Rather than a distinct and specialized organization, economy is something that generalized social groups and relations, notably kinship groups and relations, do» (Sahlin 1972: 76). In this case the development of these societies can only be the fruit of radical transformation.

The substantive thesis makes a hazardous mixture of theory and practice, as Belshaw also suggests in the paper he wrote for the present issue. The identification of formal economic theory with the market economy does not allow for a distinction between the level of theoretical analysis, which can comprehend different cultural phenomena, and the level of concrete historical-social determination of facts and transformation processes. The danger is that of confusing economic rationality with cultural specificity. The evolution of traditional societies towards different forms of organization thus follows the line of the crisis of cultural identity

being compromised by the intrusion of the industrial development model. "Development from below" would thus be merely an anthropological fancy.

Many anthropologists reject the principle that "difference" is irreducible and advance the hypothesis that change includes development if it involves not so much an increase in production as an increase in productivity (Epstein 1962, 1968, 1973; Salisbury 1962; Schneider 1974, 1975). The difference between these two points of view is substantial. A technological change that increases the productivity of labor, as per the classic example of the replacement of a stone axe or hoe by one of steel (cf. also Carneiro 1968), is organically consistent with the system and determines its internal development. Increased productivity generates new ways of reinvesting production factors and leads to increased and diversified consumption: it is the society that changes and alters the ratio between costs and income.

On the contrary, to make development dependent on cultural change in the sense of a reorganization of social relationships and technological transformation, means conceptually resolving economics in the society without defining the casual relationship productivity-consumption-change.

6. Dalton (1969), seconded by Marchionatti in his article, says that neo-classical economics may be useful for examining the market aspects of mixed economy situations, but it is not helpful in completely traditional ones.

In the economies of local groups, the commodities sector is actually an offshoot of the subsistence sector. The contraposition of the two is illusory, as is the attempt to see a structural connection between the commercial sector of local economies and the modernization process at a national level. «Although self-sufficiency and commodity economy may be represented as polar opposites, they are nevertheless always combined in the organization of groups at any level» (Hart 1982: 9). This may help explain why Lewis's model (1954), based on the reconversion of surplus workforce from the subsistence sector to the capitalist sector, has not proved universally valid (cf. also Arrighi 1969).

What characterizes a traditional economy is not the absence of the commodities sector (Bates 1981), nor is the development of self-sufficient societies the automatic result of the introduction of cash crops (cf. also Hart 1982). The difference between "traditional" and "modern", albeit not by nature, is yet one of quality rather

than quantity, not in the formal sense but in the sense of concrete social processes and behavior models. In other words, production models or "the traditional ways of production" are inherent in the systems of social relations and values. The rationality of economics is not in question, but rather its concrete cultural manifestations.

A developed economy implies a plurality of spheres of exchange based on different institutional levels. Industrial economy, from capitalism to socialism, is a variety of developed economy – of which those of Third World countries are a rough copy – characterized by very high energy investment and where the dominant institutional level can be defined in terms of public law. Any other level tends to be absorbed by the prevailing sphere: the "informal" sector, the "hidden" economy, the "black market", the subsistence sector are equally parallel economies (cfr. Belshaw in the present issue), the intimate complexity of which is almost always missed.

The logic of the relations between these spheres is a genuine problem for anthropology and economics alike. On the one hand, different behaviors correspond to the inner needs of each sphere, while they are functional for the mutual relation of interaction. Sometimes the economic and political interests of these spheres are in conflict, as when the increased efficiency of the informal sector is translated into an increase in contractual power *vis-à-vis* the central institutions. National economic policies therefore tend to foster direct investment in change, which apparently can extend the dominant institutional sphere. Bates says (1981: 5) that «to increase food supplies, governments could offer higher prices for food, or they could invest the same amount of resources in food production projects. There is every reason to believe that pricing policies are the most efficient way of securing the objective. But governments in Africa systematically prefer project-based policies. I shall argue that they do so because they find project-based policies politically more useful». The risk is that this policy, which is structurally linked to aid for change, cannot but aggravate distortions in the growth process that have proved to be the historical fruit of "unequal" development (Amin 1976).

7. The concept of development incorporates the idea of something that grows and is transformed while remaining in a state of equilibrium. Speaking of socio-economic systems, the analysis of this process must take account of their component

parts and the structure of their interrelationships. Transformation may follow different lines, but is never the fruit of disturbing action, especially if that action is inconsistent and disorderly.

The key to development may on occasion be productivity (Hart 1982) or technology (McLoughlin 1970), especially when it is soft (Schumacher 1973), or it may be the increase in *per capita* production (Dalton 1974), or all these things together, provided the developing system can organically integrate the changes into its own structure. In this sense development aid cannot be restricted to a "substitute for local capabilities" that may be defective or non-existent but must take the form of an "endogenous accelerator".

Consistency and efficacy – despite what Perroux says (1981: 51) – are not typical features of developed systems, but their opposites are more often symptoms of induced underdevelopment to which "aid" has sometimes given a decisive push.

The anthropological approach thus becomes essential at the level of knowledge, method, and strategy.

Realities that are different worlds from that of the operator must be interpreted. Knowledge does not mean merely being informed about different or "exotic" things. It means having the right method for understanding and interpreting and making those differences mutually traslatable.

The methodological importance of anthropology becomes clear when the problem is to understand whether in a given cultural context the introduction of new elements favors growth in the productivity of "critical" factors and how they can be made generally available (cf. Adelman 1979).

At the level of strategy, the definition of choices and national economic policies responds to needs that transcend the assessment of local requirements. A correct analysis of these needs may contradict the development plan prepared at the national and international level. Hoben (1986) offers a meaningful example of the anthropologist in the role of feasibility analyst.

Ultimately it may be necessary to invert the view of action and rather than speak of "development aid" it may be necessary, as Marchionatti convincingly argues, to «break the circle of underdevelopment».

How and how much anthropology can contribute to a new philosophy of cooperation can only be decided by practice, provided anthropologists are able to assert their specific competence at the level of working out strategic choices.

8. The papers collected in this issue fall into two sections: articles and contributions to discussion. Brokensha's essay is a veritable in-depth critical review of the current state of applied anthropology. The articles by Schneider, Marchionatti, and Gutkind are different theoretical definitions of the application of anthropology to development policies in a gamut of positions ranging from formalism in economic anthropology to substantivism in economics and Marxism in the historical approach to developing countries. The papers by Belshaw and Martinelli, instead, are two vigorous considerations of theoretical questions of great importance, the one concerning systems with parallel economies and the other concerning the technological variable in cultural dynamics. The discussion section has a more colloquial slant and includes critical considerations. The aim of this section is chiefly to offer suggestions for a discussion, certainly already under way in Italy, that may contribute to and increasingly enrich the Italian panorama of ethno-anthropological studies.