Transferring Management Knowledge from the West to the Balkans – Dilemmas, Diversity, and the Need for Congruence

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Abstract

The paper presents and discusses the insights resulting from an evaluative study of a collaborative educational initiative which was essentially set up to enable the process of transferring Western management knowledge into the region of Serbia and Montenegro. Drawing on insights from the literature associated with this kind of international ventures, and utilising a critical framework for a value-centred evaluation of complex social arrangements, we have identified a number of closely interrelated tensions within the collaborative project. These tensions and concerns reflect the issues of pedagogy and participation, the problem of disconnection from local practice; signs of ideological invasion and linguistic imperialism; and problematic nature of western management knowledge and its de-contextualisation in these specific circumstances. Analysis and discussion have resulted in some practical and constructive recommendations for changes in the current conduct and process of the initiative. The key argument is to refocus attention from a mechanistic input-output mode of knowledge transfer towards acknowledging diversity, power asymmetries and inherent complexity in this type of social interventions, and facilitating collaborative learning and open dialogue among the involved actors.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper has been prepared as part of a reflective evaluation of an *international* knowledge-transfer initiative, centred around the development and delivery of management education courses in Serbia and Montenegro (part of former Yugoslavia). The project began at the time of the region's recovery, transformation and development following civil war, international military interventions and economic sanctions during the 1990s. Drawing on the experience of a group of participants on the educational programme over a period of time (2002-2004), our intention has been to contribute to the emerging debate about the role and conduct of management education and as a vehicle for 'international transfer of management knowledge and best practice'. We are interested in broadening understanding of the problems, challenges and benefits that have emerged from the initiative and their practical implications.

The rhetoric of development and transition associates international management education with the process of transferring Western management techniques across national and cultural borders. Economic growth isseen as being driven by the acquisition of 'human capital' in the form of knowledge and skills acquired through management education (Grzeda and Assogbavi 1999). The imperatives of 'development' (from a poor, backward to a modern and affluent society) and 'transition' (from a communist regime to free-market economy and democracy) have helped create a new market opportunity for western business and management educational institutions (Case and Selvester, 2000, Kostera and Kozminski, 2001). This opportunity has emerged from an unprecedented appeal of, and demand for, Western-style courses in business and management with an explicit flavour of 'international relevance'.

It is, however, unhelpful to overlook the voices that have exposed the rhetoric of 'development and transition' to critical scrutiny. The linked process of transition appears increasingly problematic. Messages resulting from critical approaches are relevant as they form an interpretative framework for our evaluation. Alongside the 'critical management

studies' movement we note a growing body of literature critiquing the imperative of 'development and transformation' through management education in post-Communist nations. These studies draw on the experience to date with the approaches through which Western management knowledge is transferred to Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) with a varying level of success and benefits. The resulting concerns revolve around the assumptions about the pedagogical, organisational and social dimensions of international knowledge transfer, its relevance to, and impact on, local management practice, and the ownership of the knowledge transfer process reflecting asymmetries of power in socially created milieus.

Taking this critique as its point of departure, the paper unfolds as follows: in the next section, we return to the critical literature with the aim of conceptualising a pragmatic framework within which the evaluation of the concrete management education initiative could be contained. Then, we present the empirical material to illustrate the key issues and tensions emerging from the evaluation. Drawing on insights from the literature and utilising a critical framework for a value-centred evaluation of complex social arrangements, we develop some practical and constructive recommendations for changes in the current process of the initiative and towards enhanced collaborative learning, shared benefits and open dialogue.

2. APPROACHES, CONCERNS AND CRITIQUE

Much experience has been gained of management knowledge transfer in the former countries of CEE (Central and East Europe) in the decade following the events of 1989. After the meltdown of the former Command Economies western-based management consultants and business academics rushed to 'advise' on the values and internal workings of market capitalism, as if 'market capitalism' was some purely technical affair that could be imposed and grafted onto the former communist states without problem or contestation. Towards the end of the 1990s, with continuing economic difficulty in the former Communist Bloc, words of caution began to emerge on the efficacy, ethics and

viability of Western-based management knowledge and best practice prescriptions. In particular, critics began to address problems of ideological hegemony implicit in the neo-liberal imperative of privatisation, trade liberalisation and public sector restructuring (Bello 2002; Falk 1999). Even advisors close to the system of transformation, such as former World Bank economist Joseph Stiglitz and Harvard academic and Government adviser Jeffrey Sachs reviewed their position and questioned the prevailing orthodoxy (Stiglitz, 2002). The conventional, neo-liberal approach to economic transformation advocating a smooth and unfettered process of transition from command economy to market capitalism has been questioned and criticised from a number of positions (see for example, Standing, 2002). Proponents of a 'new institutionalist' perspective (e.g. Whitley 1995; Stark 1992), for example, have highlighted the *path dependent* nature of change, whereby history, institutions and cultural practices shape present response. These and similar studies raise important questions about the context of transformation, and indicate the need for a sensitive approach to any intervention in the post-Communist societies.

Pedagogy and participation: The problem of de-contextualisation

Ownership of, and participation in, the educational process underpinning international transfer of management knowledge has been identified as an important issue that warrants attention and sensitivity. This encompasses the assumptions about the needs, expectations and involvement of the 'recipients' of the knowledge being transferred, the interaction among the actors in the process, the local management practices and nature of the learning process (see for example Jankowicz, 1993, 1995, 1999; Kostera and Kozminski, 2001). From a pedagogic point of view, these knowledge transfer projects are almost without exception prone to clashes of western educators' and recipients' values and assumptions associated with the culture of learning. In societies from within the CEE, the *professor* has traditionally been the owner and caretaker of knowledge. The learning process is a gradual acquisition of the delivered knowledge by listening, note taking and questioning on a *sole authority* basis. In contrast, the Anglo-Saxon approach to teaching centres around *facilitation* of the learning environment on a *multi-authority* basis, with

emphasis on learning objectives, enthusiastic delivery and evaluative feedback. The method of teaching generally aims to encourage self-exploration by student centred learning, helped by group working, discussion and verbal presentation. These differences, if not addressed and moderated in the process of knowledge transfer via educational programmes, could according to Jankowicz (1999), become insurmountable obstacles to the progress of the programmes.

Jankowicz claims that the process of management knowledge transfer must be collaborative and that meaning must be mutually created rather than 'knowledge transferred' (Jankowicz, 1999, p.287). The collaborative learning process should ideally take the form of a public discussion about the role of the local manager / practitioner, and evolve into a process of joint interpretation of managerial roles involving both sides (Kostera and Kozmonski, 2001, Grzeda and Assogbavi, 1999, Case and Selvester, 2000; Elliott, 2003). Ainscough (2005) suggests an active inclusion of the experiences and knowledge of local managers and workers into the content of management courses, rather than expecting the participants to assimilate and listen, and then imitate the Western style, vocabulary, and plots in reinterpreting and retelling their own stories (in the assignments, course-work and projects).

If we take the view of management as social practice, it is appropriate to claim that it is culturally specific and any decision about the content of management courses must take into consideration history, economic and professional development, values, language, and tradition of the environment. Bourdieu's proposition of *habitus* (Swartz, 1997) is helpful in developing such an argument. *Habitus* can be understood as a sociological landscape which forms and is simultaneously being formed by cultural capital, history, and values inherent in the social relations that operate across various *fields* within it. *Habitus* is characterised by the social conditions of its production, is unconsciously acquired, is durable and embodied, and transcends different social circumstances to produce characteristic dispositions to act (Mutch, 2003). From this perspective, the concept of 'international transfer of management knowledge' assumes transferability of a set of principles to different fields of action, where certain practices comply to the 'rules of the

game' which are prior to practice and which regulate it. The issue to be examined here is how a community of practice modifies the experience and knowledge gained outside that particular community (by attending a Western type of management education programmes) in order to embed it into the social and work routines through interaction. This calls for considerations of how power is distributed in a certain community (of practice), and what mechanisms of control are in place that determine and legitimise modes of knowledge acquisition and realisation.

Ideological invasion and linguistic imperialism

In this respect, there is a strong political aspect to Kostera and Kozminski's (2001) argument, which attempts to unravel the invasion by Western management literature of the intellectual and social space in the economies in transition. These authors create the metaphor of a 'religious crusade', whereby the western educators, consultants, and academics represent 'the enlightened and morally superior voice' (2000, p.340) Drawing from experience in Poland, Jankowicz (1999), for example, expresses particular concerns about the use of language in creating meaning and the specific culture of the learning situation. Not only is there no obvious translation in local languages of some words used in Anglo-Saxon business discourse ('marketing', 'leadership', even 'manager') but the meaning of such words will always pose a problem of translation and understanding, given their historical formation and particularist origin. Therefore, the dominant use of the English language implies a much wider issue of problematic assumptions made about the nature of management knowledge, the awareness of the contextual specificity of local management practice, and about reproduction of values, ideology and power relations. Furthermore, this kind of cross-cultural education project, according to some authors, can be accused of cultural and linguistic imperialism (Ainscough, 2005; Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994). Case and Selvester argue that such 'imperialism' is being constructed and reproduced through the operation of 'modern universalizing rhetorics' (2000, p.14) They see an ethically problematic side of the process as closely resembling 'a renewed phase of western ideological invasion' in which course participants are being *willingly enrolled* through a process of subjugation.

There is a tendency in some literature (e.g. Kvint 1990) towards simplistic characterisation of communist / socialist management style as bureaucratic, cautious, resistant to change and totally ignorant of Western methods. By denigrating the technical and social skills of the 'pre-transitional' manager such a view risks typologising Eastern management as inherently 'bad' and Western as inherently 'good'. Critical sociology associates the concept of transferring Western management knowledge to economies in transition via educational (academic or training) programmes with a new rhetoric of hegemonic legitimation – legitimation of markets, of trans-national capital, of Western science and technology, and of Western notions of progress that in turn legitimises the violence of modernity. (Banerjee 2003, Banerjee and Linstead, 2001; Bandy, 1996; Giddens 1994, Mitroff and Linstone, 1993). This kind of rhetoric has been reinforced by continuous reiteration of the statements about the local economic and business context as less advanced, traditional and backward. It implies that the behaviours and the historical, political and economic tradition inherent from the previous system should be up-lifted and enhanced through management education to match the 'superior' ones. The 'modernisation' and advancement of the local context should mirror the 'progressive' development of the superior, Western economies – hope, underlying illusion, and expectations of 'a universalizing vision of modernity' (Case and Selvester, 2000).

Problematic nature of western management knowledge

> In today's professional education, particularly at business schools, there is, first and foremost, the need to replace a variety of specialised tools of analysis that ill equip the students for the complex, real life problems they encounter in their professional lives with the kinds of thinking skills, and knowledge that meet the challenges of the 'new knowledge / information age'. (Mitroff and Linstone, 1993, p.vii)

It is opportune at this point to recognise the relevance of the 'intellectual project' of critical management scholars (Read and Anthony 1992, Mitroff and Linstone, 1993; du Gay et al, 1996; Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Holman, 2000; Fournie and Gray, 2000; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Grey, 2002; Clegg and Ross-Smith 2003; Trank and Rynes, 2003, Cicmil and Hodgson, 2004). They have acknowledged that academic business education has become a complex and challenging task. The critical management writers have questioned the effectiveness, level of reflexivity, and ethical and aesthetic aspects of management education and skill development in the Anglo-Saxon/neo-liberal world. This kind of work draws attention to the process of perpetuation of instrumental rationality as a dominant value system through the scientific claims behind the nature of management knowledge, promoted through the imperatives of 'performativity', 'risk management' and universal 'best practice' approaches. Tools and techniques that form the backbone of the content of management courses and their popularity, have been criticised as totally biased towards a particular way of thinking – instrumental and normative - which promotes without reflection the imperatives of the modern era of scientific successes and technological expansion (the Western achievements). Flyvbjerg (2001) echoes the views shared by the critical management proponents that there is an urgent need for balancing instrumental rationality with value rationality, which involves serious considerations of the reflexive analysis and discussion of values and interests as 'the prerequisite for an enlightened political, economic, and cultural development in any society' (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.3). This means going beyond and above the usual imperatives towards incorporating the concerns for environment, well being, identity, equality, aesthetics and harmony into management education.

3. CONTEXT

Western educational programmes in business and management have increasingly been gaining legitimacy in the Balkans and in Serbia and Montenegro, reinforcing 'Europeanisation' as a dominant economic and social paradigm. In the preceding sections of this paper we raised the concern about the widely accepted imperative of 'transition'

which, as part of the 'peace and development' rhetoric, often promotes the Western form of business and management education as an important factor in the successful accomplishment of the process of economic and political transition. In the subsequent sections, we present the insights generated from our evaluation of the specific educational initiative in the region. Our aim has been to reveal the level to which various participants in our international educational programme share the argument embedded in this meta-rhetoric, and to what extent the concerns discussed in Section 2 are relevant and real in the context of this initiative. The intention is to also identify some constructive trajectories towards improving the current conduct and management of the collaborative project.

The venture that we are analysing here involves two collaborating partners: a multidisciplinary team of academics from a British University based in South-West England (from now on SWUni) and a local branch of a UN governed educational establishment (from now on UN/EC) with Headquarters in Belgrade (Serbia and Montenegro) which aspires to contribute to the recovery and development of the Balkan region. The collaboration has developed from the initial request put to the University by the UN/EC directorate to contribute to the design and delivery of masters-level business and management courses across the region. The British (SWUni) team of six academics was formed as a collegiate network led by the authors of this paper, of whom one is Yugoslavian born and had served as the initial point of contact and then coordinator between the two institutions. The modules led by the British team to date include Human Resource Management, Economics for Managers, Strategic Management, and Operations and Project Management. The host institution insisted from the start that these modules resembled as closely as possible the format, structure and content, including the core textbooks, adopted at the British University. The modules have been delivered in weekend-blocks, normally in two cycles (two different locations or cohorts) a year, on what was to formally become the International Postgraduate Programme in Management Studies (IPGMS programme), set up by the UN/EC (including the Director and affiliated local professors) as part of their wider educational mission in the Balkans region.

In the case of this management education initiative, a number of institutional actors have had significant interest in the issue: the local educational institution (UN/EC), the British academic team, the UK University and its business school, the students and by implication their local businesses / organisations. They all nominally share an interest in management education, but their unique roles and objectives form a polyphonic conflict of voices and expectations. It has transpired that this initiative could not purely be altruistic. There have always been political as well as economic agendas. In the same way, it has been a kind of international joint venture, a cooperative agreement which has to be handled sensitively: "The success of alliances tends to be dependent on how they are managed and the way in which partners foster the evolution of the partnership." Johnson,G and Scholes, K (2002:203). A significant factor is trust, which Johnson and Scholes divide into two elements: trust which is competence based, where the partner believes that the other has the competence and resources to fulfil their part of the alliance, and character-based, where each partner trusts each others' motives, attitudes and integrity. The complex social milieu created by this collaborative agreement has been characterised by continuously negotiated positioning of actors' various interests, agendas and identities through interaction, communication and learning making the intended knowledge transfer initiative contingent and complex. This has formed the context of our evaluative study.

The focus and method of the evaluation

Flyvbjerg (2001) has developed methodological guidance for an evaluative enquiry driven by value-rational deliberation and discussion of goals, values and practices in concrete complex social situations. To engage in value-rational evaluation means to pursue broader observational goals beyond instrumental measures of performance, such as dialogue (that keeps normative observing open rather than narrow, Weick, 2002), holistic thinking, situational awareness and sensitivity to big picture. This is enabled by the consideration of four value-rational questions:

- Where are we going with the kind of decision making exercised in this context?

- Who gains and who loses while going there, and by which mechanisms of power?
- Is it desirable?
- What should be done?

These value rational questions focus on, and problematise that, what is taken for granted, made obscured, or hindered by the operation of the orchestrated belief system and by knowledge-power relations in the specific environment where the project is situated. We have incorporated Flyvbjerg's evaluative questions into our analysis of evidence from our collaborative project, using it as the overarching evaluative framework. This is deemed appropriate as the four value rational questions embody the pragmatic theoretical considerations of conflict, values and power in social interventions labelled 'management knowledge transfer', discussed in Section 2.

The main source of data is a set of transcripts of semi-structured interviews involving the representatives of the key stakeholder groups associated with the programme: the UN/EC officials, local academic staff, the students[1], and the UK academic team. Fifteen interviews were conducted over the period January – March 2005. The interviews were designed as 'semi-structured' in order to achieve two things: to guide the discussion and keep it within the research boundary, while simultaneously encouraging deeper insights and reflection involving both the interviewer and the interviewee. A list of leading questions was prepared and used, as consistently as possible, in each interview case (see the left hand column of the summary table, Table 1). The questions were formulated with the intention to encourage deep and reflective accounts on the basis of which it would be possible to evaluate the quality of the collaboration, its process and outcomes, and the level to which the concerns of ownership, participation, ideological imposition (or otherwise) of the Western values, and the appreciation of the local context and practices. The analysis and interpretation of the interview material was supported by the insights from course documentation, student feedback, minutes of meetings, and personal

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[1] One of the limitations of the study is the availability of students for the interview. The sample is biased towards younger, less experienced and female.

introspection of lecturers and administrators on this programme (see also Upchurch and Cicmil, 2004)

The interviews lasted between 50-80mins each. The language used in the interviews with the local academic staff and students was mainly Serbian. The transcripts were then translated into English. On many occasions, this was done in collaboration with the actual interviewees. This practice added an important dimension of validity and collaborative sense-making of the interview accounts.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF ISSUES AND TENSIONS

Table 1 illustrates the key insights that emerged from the analysis of the empirical material. The overall conclusion is that the problematic issues raised in the literature with regard to this kind of social interventions are relevant to this particular venture. A better understanding of the tensions and concerns could lead to some practical and constructive recommendations for changes in the current conduct and process of the initiative, towards an enhanced collaborative learning, shared benefits and less risk.

Although the Balkans region has obvious similarities with most of the Central and East European countries, including its Slavic tradition, it is, at the same time, a volatile and very specific region, with its dynamic recent history, and unique social, cultural and educational characteristics (Upchurch and Cicmil, 2004). In the particular case of Serbia and Montenegro, the specificity includes the historical heritage of the preceding system – the legacies of state socialism (self-management based socialism in former Yugoslavia); the mode of the macro-economic transformation, and the general business environment including the nature of business relationships (e.g. trust and cooperation in supply chain) (Czaban *et al,* 2003). Following the October 2000 Revolution in Belgrade, new soil for the potential transference of western management techniques was uncovered in the new federation of Serbia and Montenegro. These specific characteristics of the region have been an important concern in the analysis of the empirical material. The following

sections are devoted to the discussion of the issues summarised in the bottom row of Table 1, using Flyvbjerg's methodological guidelines for a value-rational evaluation.

Tensions related to the views on purpose and expected benefits of the programme or *Where are we going with this international initiative of management knowledge transfer?*

The ideals of efficiency and performativity, promoted by management tools and techniques, are perceived by the majority of participants in the IPGMS programme as being of key relevance at this stage of the country's development. The aspirations towards embracing the principles of privatisation and market economy and their significance are frequently augmented by making reference to the tradition and heritage of the previous system (self-managed socialism), where –

> *people didn't care about 'performativity' because of the false sense of protection given by welfare state, self-management and socialist idea.*[I8-student]

It is not surprising therefore, that the students see the exposure to well developed, tried and tested management tools and techniques that are believed to be behind the progress of the developed Anglo-Saxon world, as one of the major benefits of the international programme. For example, a typical comment was:

> *it opens up different worlds, possibilities; it informs me about how people do things elsewhere, so I can understand management better holistically. This will enable me to manage and assess more effectively, and to make better decisions.*[I4-student]

For others, the consequences are paradoxical and puzzling:

> *Kind of liberation from the traditional way of thinking and attitudes towards 'management'. We grew up in an anti-business, anti-management culture. Managerial ideology used to be equated with 'capitalism' and was exposed to*

severe attacks and resentment. Now, our 'mouths are full of management' [I5 – local academic]

There is a concern that business and management education has, consequently, become a short-sighted fashion rather than a real contribution to the country's development and recovery:

> *The environment now supports this status of 'being a manager' as a professional or vocational achievement but I do not think that we, as a collectivity, as a nation, understand the 'problem of management'. Where are these newly qualified managers going? What type of knowledge are they equipped with (apart from the label) and how many do we need? These are key problems…'* [I5- local academic]

We have identified the voice of caution and concern about the neglect of other critical factors for a successful process of peace, development, and transformation, the neglect resulting from too strong a focus on 'management knowledge and skills' imported form the western developed economies. There is a doubt about the real impact of this programme on the process of transition in the region:

> *No progress… the notion of 'development' is diluted. In the process of change 'tolerance' is the key; tolerance between the old and the young, the traditional and the new* . [I5-local academic]

TABLE 1

Views:	Students	Local academics	British lecturers	UN/EC official policy
On aims, expectations from, and success of the programme	opportunity to 'listen' to world-renown, international academics - reaching to the outside world, after a decade of international blockade and sanctions - life-long learning opportunity - new career prospects	- developing mutual respect and learning among all the parties involved; - '*Peace…should really be one of the key words in describing the aim of this programme*' - access to the knowledge and skills that are relevant to the market economy - re-educate the local managers / practitioners to adopt 'management' methodologies and techniques instead of the	- to build management capacity in Serbia, appropriate for the privatising business environment - to compensate for the disastrous consequences of the war in the region, NATO bombing and economic sanctions - collaborative research - broadening knowledge about the region; personal development - new teaching experience for British team - enhanced reputation of the	As the Executive Director of UN/EC always reiterates verbally, and in the UN/EC documentation: '*I want to educate people who will use that knowledge for the benefit, safety, and well being of this troubled country; hopefully not just leave to work abroad.*

	- contribution to the <u>recovery</u> of the country, enabling <u>transition</u> to a more efficient market economy, and better <u>performance</u> of local organisations	current chaotic and haphazard style	UN/EC through the input of Western academics with international credentials, (attractive, serious) - <u>transferring</u> new ideas, cutting-edge knowledge, and teaching practices to UN/EC students and staff - to help <u>train</u> local academics and enable them to run the modules / programme – 'to train the trainers' - broadening international <u>network</u> is the current strategy of the University (SWUni)	*Hopefully, it will create more employment, better standard of living and economic security.*
On international character of	- the Western professors are thought of and	- should be the space for exchange of experience, knowledge and collaborative	- <u>attracts</u> more students and <u>motivates</u> academic staff - problematic, as it is mostly <u>one</u>	

the programme	respected as 'repositories of valuable knowledge' - exposure to new ways of thinking, reflective evaluation, *'opened my eyes and changed the way I look at and understand the world. … It has trained me to think more 'holistically'*	work with mutual respect rather than favouring the Western input over the local academic capabilities and practices - need Western academics and syllabi to attract fee-paying students	way transfer of privileged Western knowledge to the 'recipient'; delivered by staff who are not from the region - the international nature of the programme should encourage the exchange of knowledge and experience among Western and local academics, but it has not been the case	
	Students	Local academics	British lecturers	
On the content and pedagogy of the programme (nature/type of knowledge and	- exposure to well developed, tried and tested management tools and techniques; cutting edge knowledge from the	- need to also include less 'managerial' subjects within the IPGMS programme: culture studies, history, systems thinking and globalization.	- should encourage creation of indigenous management knowledge - international case studies are needed in the curriculum - varying degree of	

choice of subjects; syllabus content; pedagogic approaches and styles; ownership; learning process and application in local context)	West - prefer holistic, multidisciplinary approach to <u>syllabus</u> by Western educators with an emphasis on the issues of *communication, leadership, and teamwork,* importance and relevance of which to the economic and political development of the region is increasingly being acknowledged. - appreciate novel,	- should integrate social, ethical and cultural aspects into the <u>syllabus</u> of management education, as these are seen as inseparable from the process of transition and transformation - There should be a closer link with the <u>needs</u> of <u>local</u> economy; <u>case</u> <u>studies</u> from local organisations; '*In this field, research in the local context is absolutely necessary.*' - need to conceptualise and consolidate the IPGMS programme curriculum <u>locally</u> and to take <u>ownership</u> of it, rather than almost entirely depending on	customisation from module to module of the original Business School's courses to fit the delivery pattern and interests of the students/managers in the region; still lacks input reflecting <u>local</u> context and practices - not clear how the knowledge gained during the course is then <u>embedded</u> in <u>practice</u> - excellent and very able <u>students</u>; satisfactory exam <u>performance</u> so far - problems with assessment procedures, quality assurance, and general <u>programme</u> <u>structure</u>; practices accepted at UK business schools not evident in this programme	

	less formal, inclusive interactive <u>teaching style</u> of British lecturers	inputs/templates from Western business schools		
On the level and quality of participation and collaboration in the programme design and delivery	- would like to have more frequent and direct <u>contact</u> with the British <u>lecturers</u>, to further develop ideas	- There should be an incentive for <u>collaborative research</u> - poor scholarly <u>integration</u> of the local and British teaching <u>teams</u> - problems with uncritically <u>importing</u> the Western syllabi for management modules, including the names and 'catchy phrases' in the programme; need for local consolidation and input	- unsatisfactory – not enough time and incentive for the local staff and British academics to engage in the <u>collaborative development</u> of the module - UN/EC does not encourage collaborative or local <u>research</u>	
Summary of key <u>tensions</u>	1. Multiple, equivocal and contingent aims and objectives of the initiative echoing the polyphony of voices; 2. Heavy 'Westernisation' of business and management programmes through the involvement of British			

and concerns	academics / experts, and a tendency to minimise the input of local colleagues / academics; 'taken-for-granted' value system embedded in the Western tradition and reproduced in the syllabus being transferred to a local context; relevance to local managers and application of the transferred knowledge in local practice; 3. Consequences of the unique tradition of education in the region being now confronted with the enthusiasm as well as novelty associated with the business and management development and education; 4. Political and power relations and agendas at individual and institutional levels affecting the perception of 'international collaboration' and 'trust'.

The implied doubt is actually an argument for a much broader approach to the process of development and for integrating social, cultural, historical and 'identity' related aspects into management education programmes rather than pretending that they are 'neutral' vehicles of knowledge transfer. A senior local academic, a doyen in sociology of regional development, expressed reservations about the process of management knowledge transfer in the form of Western-framed educational programmes and using it as 'shock therapy' to induce the economic transition effectively:

…in a way which ignores the specificity of our context. These specific characteristics are the tradition and culture embedded in, for example, the social structure of extended family, household, patriarchate, ritual, the notion of 'caring' which in many important ways were the building blocks of 'self-management'…. We must take into account the spirit and basic social and moral values as part of that transformation towards the better state of 'privatisation'. This mentality of 'radical change' has marginalised 'togetherness' as an important aspect of our value-system. [I7 – local academic]

The British educators see their involvement as both pragmatic and eclectic (see Table 1). They share the belief that the programme enables the transfer of ideas from the West to the developing region and approve of it, but strongly argue that much more collaborative work on the course development, research and application is required among the local academics and local managers. The objective of international networking and new research opportunities came out strongly in the interviews with SWUni staff, echoing the prevailing strategic aspirations in the competitive environment of the British higher education, and particularly Business Schools. It was felt, though, that this objective was not seen as imminently valuable by the local academics. The British team found low propensity of the local academics affiliated with the UN/EC establishment to do collaborative research surprising, given their professional and scholarly reputation and the quality of students on the courses.

The multiple agendas, expectations and background of the participating individuals and groups have surfaced spontaneously during the interviews. There is no easy way in which these can be reconciled, but the very recognition of the underlying tensions are already a step forward in enhancing mutual understanding. Moving on along the guidelines of Flyvbjerg's methodology of value-driven social inquiry, we will now explore the question of 'Who loses and who gains and by which mechanisms of power?' by analysing and discussing the voices of enthusiasm and achievement, as well as those of conflict, resistance, and marginalisation.

Enthusiasm and achievement alongside conflict and resistance or *Who loses and who gains and by which mechanisms of power?*

In this section we attempt to unravel the tensions related to conflicting views on progress *vs* risk, participation *vs* exclusion, student centred vs professor centred pedagogy, and de-contextualised knowledge transfer *vs* its relevance to local practices, emerging from the empirical material. The explanation, as summarised in Table 1, evolves around several issues. One that we particularly wanted to explore is the perception of the nature (robustness, potential and promises) of the transferred management knowledge and whether any of the concerns already raised in the reports about similar experiences (see Section 2 above), are relevant in this context. More directly, how is the image of 'the western management knowledge', as a powerful and promising input into the process of transition in the region, being constructed and reproduced and to what extent has it become a ruling illusion?

A number of interview accounts resound a dominant imperative behind the introduction of this international educational initiative as being the delivery of the *cutting-edge, relevant knowledge.* Yet, what seems interesting and warrants further exploration is the participants' understanding of, and views on, what 'cutting-edge, relevant' might mean in

the context of business and management knowledge, and what kind of processes (delivery, learning, and application) are deemed appropriate to support such an imperative. In the process of our exploring this issue with the interviewees / participants further, several important and related arguments surfaced which we will explore here. One relates to the 'international' character of the IPGMS programme (i.e. its Westernisation). Another reflects the concerns about the timing of this kind of developmental intervention and the lack of measurable beneficial impact on the local economy, organisations and individuals.

Representatives of both students and staff believe that this kind of internationalisation of academic education gives them a distinctive edge, useful knowledge, and the feeling of '*citizen of the world*'. Therefore, the more it replicates the Western style (of educational organisation, pedagogy and course content) – the better.

> *'Serbia and Montenegro were in a vacuum, kind of cultural and economic isolation, for too long… people had to deploy a 'survival strategy' – for bare survival. People have lost confidence in their own worth and ability, in the possibility of things getting better, in future development… Under such conditions, there is a widely shared feeling that the new knowledge, developed elsewhere, out there in the world, has bypassed them. This has lead to a formation of a particular attitude towards the Western developments. We uncritically consider everything from the west as 'better' and 'correct'.* [I5-local academic]

Another significant concern expressed by the local academics is the need to conceptualise and consolidate the programme curriculum.

> *It is not only that we believe in this fashion and assumption that if it is from the west it is better, but it is very difficult here to agree on any locally developed idea because the educational context is also political and reflects the general*

culture of disagreement and favouritism and use of power as it is at the societal and economic level of leadership. [I6-local academic]

The concern is that the 'instrumental focus' on setting up the educational programmes has redirected attention from an important group of beneficiaries – the local businesses, organisations and society at large. Several British academics on the team reiterated the need for establishing a clear system of evaluation of these benefits. As expressed by one of the local academics;

The programme of transition, as originally proposed, has not been completed yet… in other words we are not at the stage of its implementation where this kind of education could have direct impact. The effect of such premature introduction of management education in this form is its commercialisation, which in turn creates new structures of power, losers and winners…'. [I5-local academic]

This has wider implications. One of them is a remarkable discouragement of local input into management modules on the programme despite an obvious intellectual potential and credentials. A frequent explanation given by those close to the EC establishment is that *'Most of our good, well known professors have not caught up with the most recent developments'.*(I9-local academic), partly due to the economic and political troubles in the past decade and partly due to the culture of tenured professors resists emerging knowledge which may contradict their firmly held beliefs. Management and business courses are perceived as a revolutionary attempt to break away from their traditional home, the well-developed scientific field of Economics. Paradoxically, there is a feeling of potential, subtle threat to the local academics, their work, reputation, standards, and standing:

'We have now got this problem of uncritical introduction and acceptance of terminology and, inevitably, of educational programmes from the West. This is reflected in the selection of external partners and professors – which is, in my

view purely 'instrumental'- driven by the need to justify the 'international nature' of the programme, and to attract numbers of fee-paying participants to whom this international dimension appeals'[I7 – local academic]

Simultaneously, the style of traditional University education (and particularly the faculty of Economics) in the region is now being labelled by both students and some academics as 'obsolete'. What is seen as new and novel with the 'western' style of the delivery of management courses is its holistic, multi-disciplinary nature of informality and inclusivity implying a shift of power in the classroom, (Table 1). The involvement of the lecturers from the West whose pedagogy inherently transmits values of 'marketisation' through fee-paying-student centred teaching strategies (also known as customer orientation) (cf Kumar and Usunier, 2001) conflicts with relationships established by the state governed academic education between students and academics. These influences are interfering with the traditional fabric of HE in this region.

The practical implications of the tensions associated with the programme or *Is it desirable?*

Management knowledge, transferred from the West, is widely perceived by the key parties as a key factor for economic progress and development of this troubled region. Such statements are frequently followed by comments on the need for contextualisation of the imported, Western management 'best practices' so that they are made relevant to the local needs and local culture. The actual understanding of 'contextualisation' and the process through which it could be achieved varies. The key elements of such process are: tighter collaboration and mutual learning among the academics involved – local and British - on course design, syllabus, and case studies to integrate local conditions with the theoretical propositions

1. more active research in the area of business and management in the local economy – by UN/EC staff and through student dissertation projects
2. more active involvement of local managers in the programme

3. the students own responsibility for learning, consisting of listening to the delivered material, internalising it, comparing with the real needs in their organisations and their own practice, modifying the western methodologies to suit local conditions, and implementing the revised models of action and behaviour.

The 'international' agenda of the UN/EC leadership attracted a greater number of students and enhanced the legitimacy of the post-graduate programme but did very little to initiate and encourage the dialogue between the western and local academics in *'the areas of mutual interests, the design of the module, the overlaps, and the discrete aspects of the syllabus'* [I10-a senior local academic). There is very little evidence of the active involvement of local managers and businesses in providing feedback on or input into the courses in relation to the applicability of the course syllabus, to the real practical problems that they face in their working environments.

At the same time, concerns are raised about the premature and haphazard introduction of this kind of management education programmes creating unintended but significant consequences. One of the potential consequences is the creation of the 'elite' through commercialisation of (management) education, and also the role of 'customer' given to the fee-paying students which now empowers the students to express their demands more openly and eloquently. The danger is in reinventing the wheel of the Western education. In the West, as a consequence of changing governmental support and sources of funding of higher education, 'the power of business and students has increased substantially vis-à-vis business schools.' (Trank and Rynes, 2003, p.192) The 'performativity principle' that businesses adopt (also known as short-termism) (Trank and Rynes, 2003), impacted the business schools curricula in the direction 'away from theory, abstraction, and general knowledge toward a narrow focus on the immediate skills needed for first jobs' (p.193)

Of particular concern has been the tendency inherent in this concept to marginalise, ignore or deny the subtleties of cultural, political and historical factors in shaping the development of knowledge, and to treat the international transfer of Western management

theories and knowledge as a mechanistic process of transmitting ready-made, tried and tested principles. Some students in the interviews fiercely denied any form of unconscious subjugation to the hidden ideology of management knowledge delivered by the Western educators. They feel they can distance themselves from covert influences of such knowledge. They will receive it, analyse it, chose what seems reasonable and useful and implement it in local circumstances of their organisation. The rest will be rejected. Interestingly, all the interviewed students expressed interest and enthusiasm about being exposed to new ways of thinking, problem solving and behaviour. They resisted the notion of uncritical import of universal management techniques. For them, the process of learning includes such awareness:

> *I hope to be selective in terms of what I decide to implement or adopt from what is presented to me in the course. I listen carefully, and then I make my choice in terms of applicability. This means that I will apply what I have learned when I recognise the situation that fits the knowledge of a particular method.* [I4-student]**.**

The literature and evaluative reports warn that the process of 'knowledge transfer' is unlikely to be one based on prescription and norms of behaviour generated outside the local environment. Rather, the process of knowledge transfer will be both constrained and propelled by the historically determined experiences of those being 'educated' and will be subject to patterns of accommodation or resistance of the actors.

Without exception, all the respondents emphasised the importance of communication and collaboration among and between all groups of stakeholders. Yet, there are differences in emphasis depending on the agenda of a particular stakeholder group. (Table 1) The obstacles that exist to a more effective cooperation among local and British academics in the course design and delivery are said to be the *divide created through 'unequal treatment' in terms of respect given to their expertise, assumptions about what is 'better', 'more beneficial' or 'more attractive' to students'.* [I5-local academic]

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The concerns captured thorough interpretation of the interviews present a valuable source of themes for reflection, improvement and more fruitful future cooperative activity. Yet, it is important to discuss the conditions under which these diverse views, expectations and values can be constructively debated among the stakeholders of the IPGMS programme, rather than marginalised or neglected leading to conflict and stifling of future opportunities. We propose two practices: one is the adoption and nurturing of the multiple perspectives approach to problem solving in social situations (Mitroff and Linstone, 1993; Weick, 2002) and the other is the practice of public reflection and critical dialogue (Raelin, 2001)
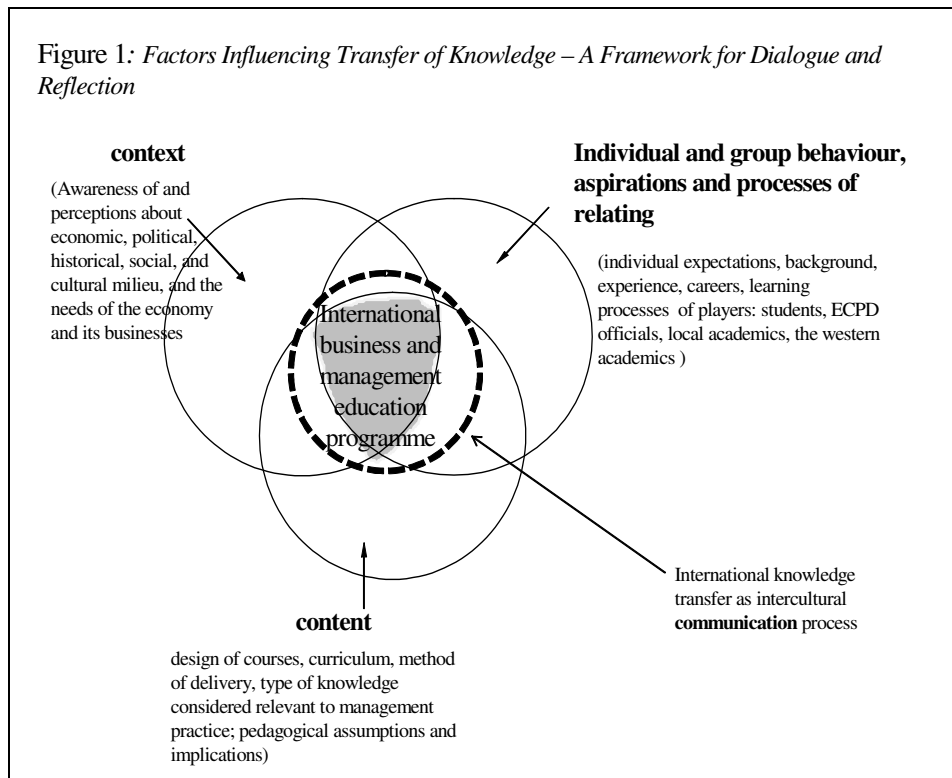
The multiple perspective approach to evaluation and collaborative learning
Education across cultures is ultimately an anthropological concern and should be treated as the process of international communication, resonating with the view that knowledge creation, dissemination and learning are communicative, relational, socially negotiated processes. It is important to understand the process of management knowledge transfer as a deeply social and political process involving individual and collaborative meaning-making in context and resulting institutionalisation, which in turn creates new forms of legitimate classifications and boundaries, new inclusions and exclusions, giving primacy to certain voices while silencing others.

The concept of multiple perspective method is proposed here to acknowledge the inherent complexity of the knowledge transfer ventures and to enable considerations of ambiguity of the goals among the collaborating parties, their diversity, historical and cultural differences, changing identities and above all the socially embedded complex process of communication among groups and individuals involved.

The multiple perspective approach requires holistic, simultaneous, and synchronous consideration of multiple aspects and interests (Mitroff and Linstone 1993, Weick, 2002; Cicmil 2004). It encourages the examination of the bigger system beyond the immediate confines of the educational initiative. This involves recognition and legitimisation of a variety of domains of interests and perspectives which influence the definition of its goals, benefits, objectives, and quality of outcomes of management education as part of economic transition. The idea is to promote and support a dialogue that welcomes different ideas and critical engagement with diverse world views and experiences. The concept of multiple perspectives and unbounded systems thinking is proposed with an underlying moral and ethical agenda – one that supports the principle that asking questions and challenging assumptions in a responsible way is a sign of respect for others and a way of going beyond the boundaries of our own perspectives, beliefs and cultures.

Figure 1 graphically represents a multiple perspective framework that captures the complexity of international transfer of western management knowledge through management education. The framework is useful as a basis for a constructive and reflexive dialogue with those who play an active role in deciding about international educational programmes and in determining how to meet the objectives and benefits they would like to see met with a specific knowledge transfer project in a local situation.

Figure 1: *Factors Influencing Transfer of Knowledge – A Framework for Dialogue and Reflection*

context

(Awareness of and perceptions about economic, political, historical, social, and cultural milieu, and the needs of the economy and its businesses

Individual and group behaviour, aspirations and processes of relating

(individual expectations, background, experience, careers, learning processes of players: students, ECPD officials, local academics, the western academics)

International business and management education programme

International knowledge transfer as intercultural **communication** process

content

design of courses, curriculum, method of delivery, type of knowledge considered relevant to management practice; pedagogical assumptions and implications)

The practice of public reflection for collaborative learning and cooperation on educational projects

The ability to appreciate and simultaneously hold conflicting perspectives is not easy to gain. There is a need for the creation of 'open spaces' for dialogue among the parties involved, to encourage a critical engagement with issues related to transition and internationalisation, building trans-national literacy and translational solidarity by focusing on interdependence, self-reflexivity and 'critical cosmopolitanism', rather that on normalisation, coercion and persuasion (Figure 1).

Reflection as the practice of 'periodically stepping back to ponder the meaning to self and to others in one's immediate environment about what has recently transpired' (Raelin, 2001, p.11) illuminates actions, beliefs, and feelings experienced by both self and others, thus providing a basis for future action. This is possible, according to Raelin, if reflection

takes a public form- that is, if it is practiced in the company of others who are also 'committed to the experience in question' (*ibid,* p.11). It pre-supposes critical consciousness, that is the ability to embrace holistically and simultaneously multiple perspectives of an issue of concern), accountability and transparency, and self-reflection in the process of learning.

Learning practices through dialogue and public reflection can be threatening unless accompanied by an environment which intellectually and emotionally supports individual learning and development (Raelin, 2001). Reflective practice also considers data beyond our personal, interpersonal, and organisational taken-for-granted assumptions to explore historical and social processes (cultural background) behind individual knowing and in that process of learning to include those groups which might be marginalized, or previously left behind, in a specific educational setting.

We emphasise the importance of reflecting on the objectives of the UN/EC initiatives. Most importantly there is the need to express publicly a moral-ethical dilemma of the level of involvement of local educators / academics in designing and delivering courses against the image of western professors as the repositories of 'valuable knowledge'.

Concluding remarks

Having been involved for three years in the development programme of management education and knowledge transfer, we believe it is important to facilitate a reflective and critical deliberation about the process and outcomes of knowledge transfer and learning. This paper has been a reflective exercise in itself. The organisational field of 'international transfer of management knowledge' (particularly from the West to the nations undergoing economic and political transformation), is yet to be fully explored and evaluated in the light of micro-dynamics that goes on between various actors involved and of its implications for the society at large. We argue for an open, public, and participative dialogue between the groups of actors on both sides – the provider and the recipient – utilising the principles of collaborative learning from experience through

public reflection (Raelin, 2001), founded in a version of the multiple perspective method for decision making and dialogue in complex social arrangements (Mitroff and Linstone, 1993; Cicmil 2004). The overarching intention is to promote the need for communication, collaboration and tolerance in these and similar initiatives which are, as our study shows, prone to conscious and unconscious stereotyping, ideological imposition, and untested assumptions about congruence of views, agendas and expectations within the created social coalition.

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