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CUCS
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VI CONFERENCE



CITIZENSHIP AND COMMON GOODS

University and international cooperation for safety,
environment and sustainable development

Book of abstracts Trento 19-21 September

Università degli studi di Trento

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The **University of Trento** (www.unitn.it) and the **International Cooperation Centre** (www.cci.eu) have organized the **6th CUCS Conference**, held in Trento from September 19 to 21, 2019. CUCS is the University Coordination for Development Cooperation, a network of more than 30 Italian universities.

The CUCS Conference series is designed and organized within the Italian academic community, with the goal of creating platform for mutual exchange and knowledge sharing among students, civil society organisations, scholars, policy makers, international agencies, national and local governments, profit and non-profit organizations and any other actor engaged in international cooperation for development, active citizenship, sustainability, human rights. CUCS conferences have become a forum to improve and share development cooperation practices, methodologies, processes and policies, to enable networking, exchanges of experiences as well as developing innovation and proposals for policy making.

CUCS Trento 2019 has created such forum through 4 plenary sessions, 18 parallel sessions and workshops, one round table and two side-events, where more than 300 participants shared their views, lessons learned and open challenges in such broad topic. A co-design and sharing knowledge perspectives have been taken, under the full recognition that development cooperation is part of all the three pillars of the academic mission: research, training, knowledge-sharing.

In the last decades development cooperation has undergone deep transformations, with new agendas, actors, approaches and goals. This has changed the related debate at international and national levels. CUCS Trento 2019 aimed at reflecting these changes

and to share the main open challenges and the innovation opportunities to face them in an increasingly inter-related and complex global dynamics.

The theme of CUCS Trento 2019 has been inspired by such continuous evolution of development cooperation, with special focus on **citizenship**, in its local and global meaning, and on the management of **common goods**, long-standing issues that are increasingly critical for sustainable development within the present and future global dynamics.

Citizenship has been intended as a network of relationships between local actors, institutional subjects, profit and non-profit organization, scientific research and innovation, a challenge for integration inclusion empowerment and ownership at local level, as keys to combine security and sustainability.

Common goods have been intended as natural and cultural resources, a complex environment that needs to be protected and valued, following a logic of balance of powers that allows to address and overcome disparities and to manage conflicts and inequalities, which are also crucial for sustainability in the struggle against poverty and in the sustainable use of resources.

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University and international cooperation for development: the students' perspective

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Introduction

Italian Universities have been long engaged to share their expertise and knowledge for improving European commitment towards low-income countries. Some of them are deeply involved into research projects or best practices diffusion activities, while others actively work on the educational framework in order to improve its own academic offer. This is the case of the University of Genoa, which launched in 2015 an Interschool program named "University-wide Program on International cooperation for development". The program has few counterparts in Europe since it is addressed to students from every School of the University, to whom it provides around 50 hours of teaching contents from different academic fields, together with seminars and events. The peculiar element of the program is the strong project management background that combines both theoretical and practical approaches. These elements are fundamental for the learning experience of the students, as they represent an essential skill for those aiming to develop a professional career in the international cooperation field.

During the program, students have the chance to apply what they have learnt by preparing a project proposal of intervention in low-income countries, together with qualified NGOs or Associations. This activity enhances their educational background and encourages university-no profit partnerships. Every year, the University of Genoa opens a call for proposal and rewards with a grant the four best projects, so that the proponents can turn their project into action on the field. The grants are intended to cover the travel costs and stay expenses, while the support of the Italian and local partners guarantees to grantees the possibility to live an effective and safe experience.

From the University of Genoa's point of view, these grants are a way to improve the connection with all the subjects active in international cooperation for development and to get students involved into important field projects with a strong academic background. This paper focuses on the student's point of view about the abovementioned program and their experience in developing and implementing their own cooperation project thanks to the grant they received.

Methods

The study was conducted with a qualitative method using content analysis approach. The design is appropriate for this study because it allows the participants to describe their experiences focusing on factors that may affect the quality of the program.

The analysis was performed through semi-structured interview on the purposive sample of the 16 students who received the grant in the four editions of the program.

Results

16 students participated to the study (9 females, 7 males): four enrolled at the Medicine and Surgery degree course, six at Engineer degree programs, and the other ones attending courses in the social and humanities area. The target countries of the projects were mainly in Central and Eastern Africa. The participants had different education backgrounds, chose diverse thematic areas, applied a wide set of methodologies and techniques in their projects and cooperated with very different partners. The heterogeneous socio-cultural background of the sample students allowed the researchers to analyze the program multidisciplinary contents and structure from a complex point of view, those of future professionals from different areas, with peculiar projects and expectations for their personal and professional life.

After analyzing the existing situation in the chosen African location, the students verified the real feasibility of the proposed project and made, when necessary, the appropriate modifications and/or integrations. From the analysis of the students' reports delivered at the end of the experience, a strong degree of satisfaction emerged in relation to both the knowledge acquired thanks to the cooperation course, and the skills obtained during the field experience.

Even the associations that collaborated with the students in the drafting of the project and that accompanied them in the chosen country, defined the experience as very constructive, especially for having virtuously linked study/research activities typical of the academy with real situations, typical of the world of work in cooperation.

The outcomes of the study confirm that the course represents a good learning opportunity to introduce students to international cooperation for the development. In particular, its multidisciplinary structure is consistent with both the heterogeneous students' background and the cross-disciplinary skills and competences that are now required to engage in this field of activity. The teaching strategy adopted helped the students to overcome their preconceptions about international cooperation and call them to action by giving the chance of actually getting involved into a project. The grantees all gave positive feedback on their experience, that in several cases motivated them to continue their commitment in the field.

Keywords: Students; University of Genoa; International cooperation; Multidisciplinary course