

The Kuala Lumpur conference has brought together 300 participants from 70 countries on the theme of “Partnerships for Societal Impact”. The International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) hosted this conference on Values and Higher Education on 15-16 November, for faculty and staff of the IIUM and invited guests, under the coordination of Professor Razak, former Chair of the International Association of Universities and newly appointed Rector of the IIUM.

The three invited international contributors included Budd Hall, UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in higher education, Hilligje van Landt, Secretary General of the International Association of Universities and Betsan Martin, Alliance for Responsible and Sustainable Societies, from Aotearoa New Zealand.

Professor Tan Sri Dato Dzul kifli Abdul bin Razak is among a select number of visionary higher education leaders in the world who has a capacity for articulating big ideas and for finding ways to transform ideas into the life of universities which have been privileged to have his leadership.

I met Professor Razak through the UNU Regional Centres of Expertise circles where he contributes to leadership in higher education and sustainable development within UN circles and beyond. In particular he is engaged in decolonizing education and with a clear eye on Malayan traditional values he is dedicated to bringing the philosophical concept of Sejahtera to knowledge transformation.

Sejahtera, is a living local framework with the context and history and language of its own land and people. It has deeper acceptance than the rather generic and prescriptive concept of Education for Sustainable Development.

Professor Razak referred to two values based concept: Falsafah Pendidikan Kebangsaan (FPK), is an educational philosophy which is core to the National Malaysian curriculum to ensure balance and harmony of the intellectual, the emotional, the spiritual and the physical dimensions of the human person.

To this he added the concept of Sejahtera. Sejahtera is an Indigenous Malay concept that is difficult to translate into English, but refers to qualities of abundance, happiness, prosperity, peace and tranquility. It underscores that indigenous knowledge and wisdom have their own uniqueness, strength and relevance in the face of contemporary crises.

These values concepts give impetus to the agenda of decolonising the curriculum, and becoming free of ‘ranking’ mania and broadening the criteria for career advancement to include community engagement and Community Based Responsibility. With outstanding power point graphics Professor Razak refreshed the UN SDGs, the concepts of Sejahtera and FPK along with knowledge democracy

A precis from an article by Professor Razak offers the best insight.

Although Sejahtera is often translated as ‘well-being’ or even ‘prosperity,’ its inherent meaning is much more than that. In fact, spans the macrocosmic-microcosmic nexus

relating humans to the external environment – nature and fellow beings, including other species. It is microcosmic because it embraces the ‘self’ and the inner (esoteric) dimensions, including spiritual consciousness.

Taken together *sejahtera* can be described as a balanced lifestyle summarised by at least ten different elements neatly woven into the acronym SPICES, namely spiritual, physico-psychological, intellectual, cognitive, cultural, ethical, emotional, ecological, economic, and societal dimensions.¹

Professor Razak has a keen commitment to the role of Indigenous knowledge in decolonising higher education. All students are required to give community service during their studies, and two villages near the university will be involved. One of these communities has an Orang Asli hospital – a hospital for the Indigenous people, many of whom are still forest dwellers.

Dr Hilligje on ‘University Autonomy’ – building on her leading role at the preceding IAU Conference. Professor Budd Hall spoke on ‘decolonisation and knowledge democracy.’ As UNESCO Co-Chair with Dr Rajesh Tandon on Community-Based Learning and Social Responsibility the Alliance has a special interest in this work – which largely expresses responsibility through supporting community learning through a mentoring programme. There are eleven hubs for mentor training throughout the world – one was just starting in Malaysia. Betsan spoke on ‘ResponAbility’, a concept of relational justice with humans, other life forms and the land. An abstract of her paper included is below with a link to the full paper.

Amongst the many presentations at the IAU Conference, one stood out. Prof. Mandla Makhanya, Vice-Chancellor of the University of South Africa (UNISA). He was asked “Are we adapting to or shaping a transforming world?” And his response:

“We are de-universalising the knowledge systems of the global North”

The Kuala Lumpur conference has brought together 300 participants from 70 countries on the theme of “Partnerships for Societal Impact”. The IAU under the leadership of Hilligje van’t Land, Secretary-General of the IAU feels like it is doing well. Given the climate of fiscal pressures on universities, our networks which support and connect us are also facing difficult times.

After all this I was very honoured to join Professor Hall and Professor Mahazan Mutalib at a full day seminar on Community Based Research – many of the people we met at the conferences were there and in a more round table setting we were able to hear much more about their work and interests. The following day we drove way into the centre of the jungle to meet with an Orang Asli community. The conversation was in Malay so I can’t convey what was said. Their own language is not written. We were able to fully appreciate their hospitality and fine musical presentations to honour our visit.

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¹ Razak, Dzulfliki (2018) Decolonizing the Paradigm of Sustainable Development through the Traditional Concept of *Sejahtera*. In Fadeeva, Z; Galkute, L. Chhoker, K.B. (eds) 2018) *Academia and Communities: Engaging for Change*. United Nations University. UNU-IAS Books. <http://collections.unu.edu/view/UNU:6601>