

## *Sociology and Development Issues*

### *Université du Québec professor lectures at UP Baguio*

■ By Narcisa Canilao

*Including a critique of certain NGOs in North America and Europe*

Dr. Dmitri della Faille of the University of Quebec was in UP Baguio, June 27, 28, and 29, 2011 to share his sociological reflections on development issues, drawn from his researches, developmental practice, and teaching of international development. UP Baguio faculty and graduate students, mostly from the College of Social Sciences, attended the lecture series.

Is development studies still relevant? No and yes, depending on how development is defined. In his first lecture, Della Faille initially cautioned that he would approach the question “Is Development Studies Still Relevant?” not from nowhere but from the perspective of one multiply located as a development researcher, teacher in a graduate program in development, and an observer of development studies programs in Europe and North America. First, he defined development (choosing to give indicators or components rather than the meaning), as pertaining to poverty alleviation, gender equality, health education, autonomy of decision-making, providing solutions to problems of society, among others.

Della Faille then came up with a three-fold typology of study programs in development: international development, local/national development, and disciplinary programs on development. The first type is most visible in Europe and North America, and has two sub-types – international studies (strategic) which includes studies in political science, macro-economics, and history; and international solidarity or cooperation studies which is closest to the missionary vision. The second type, local/national development studies is usually taken by local administrators who want to develop expertise in, for example, sustainable development. Such an



Dr. Dmitri della Faille

expertise may be exported to other countries. This type of development course works closely with governments and state agencies, and it is not expected to be critical of development. The third type are the disciplinary programs – anthropology, economics, history, agro-economy, statistics, and other disciplines, that study or include development among their topics. In his development studies typology, della Faille said, it is the strategic type of international development that is most popular among students, while the solidarity type of international development studies is the least popular.

So, is development studies still relevant? If development means “imposed social change,” “helping” or “aid,” the exportation of development’s “birth defects” (pertaining to the post-war context of the rise of development), if development stud-

ies is not truly but only nominally inter or multi-disciplinary – then development studies is no longer relevant. But yes, development studies remains relevant if it is a venue for understanding and mulling over solutions to inequalities, if it adds the important ingredients – “responsibility,” “sustainability,” and if the multi-leveled complexity of development discourse and theories are analyzed vis-à-vis the realistic *habitus* of developing and participating communities. Conceived in this way, development studies can continue providing well-trained and skilled work force in development work.

#### **Some Critical Reflections on NGOs**

The graduate class of SDS 271 (Ethical Issues in Development) was the venue for della Faille’s second lecture. Normally above and away from criticism and censure, NGOs became the object of sociological analysis here. The main theme of the lecture was: while NGOs present themselves as non-state on the one hand, and non-market on the other, in reality they are structurally isomorphic with government and the market. Big international NGOs based mostly in North America and Europe, are of course the objects of della Faille’s structuralist analysis, because it is these NGOs that he has researched, especially their presence in Africa and Latin America. He especially takes issue with the way these NGOs have called themselves “civil society” and having been the most visible, the way they have monopolized the title to themselves, to the exclusion of other bona fide civil societies such as other types of societies working for causes – religious, the arts, labor unions, grassroots, militants, and minorities. This has been tantamount to the latter groups being branded, and actu-

*continued on page 11*

## Sociology, from page 8

ally treated as “uncivil society.” MASDS student A.K. Riva wittingly translates this hierarchical distinction as that between the *sibilisado* (civil society) and the *barbariko* (uncivil society).

These NGOs are not really non-state. They are structured like governments, they have hierarchies. They work closely with the state, and at worse they are instrumentalities, or extensions of the state. Some NGOs in developing countries, according to della Faille, are actually results of calculations of foreign governments in order to disrupt local political organization. In another sense, if political entails coercion, it is wrong to say in the case of some NGO's that they do not coerce, and thus they are more statist rather than civil societies.

On the other hand, these NGOs are really not non-market, because some do business, act like corporations, and in the case of a few, make profit. It is hence wrong to say that NGOs are non-profit organizations. Furthermore, it cannot be denied that some NGOs promote neo-liberalism. Particularly in the 1990s privatization trend, some NGOs functioned “to fill in” the functions that governments were not able to do. Another neo-liberal dimension of these NGOs is revealed in the way they are in competition with each other in terms of access to public platforms, funding sources, number of converts or volunteers, and authority on a subject, which in this case is their commodity.

In the area of problematization, NGOs choose which aspect of society they problematize and the problem becomes their specialization. In calling attention to their special problem field these NGOs resort to advertising tactics - appeal to emotions through heart-breaking or gruesome stories, arguments of authority (I lived there myself, I am a political scientist), and appeal to statistics.

### Is There a Future for International Development?

In this third lecture, della Faille once again clarified the concept of development which has a specific history, having been



**Work Force.** The 2011 Alumni Homecoming is being handled by a core group that has been meeting regularly on reunion concerns. College Deans like Dr. Wilfredo Alanguí and Dr. Raymundo Rovillos have also dropped in and the UPB Cooperative has sent in their reps. We are inviting interested faculty and alumni to join us. In photo: (front row, from left) Luchie Maranan, Lelet San Luis, RR Rovillos, Vickie Costina, Zenaida Baoanan; (second row, from left) Janice Domogan, Nadine Navarro, Gloria Rodriguera, Ofel Valencia, Julie Calica, Yzanne Merced. For details, pls. text us through contact numbers: 09175062959/ 639176277358

a north to south initiative in the post-war, to remedy extreme economic inequalities among nations and to establish long-lasting peace. Earlier shifts in geopolitics due to the collapse of European empires and the emergence of the US as a global power accompanied by theoretical shifts resulting from seeing nature as a commodity, and new ways of organizing knowledge contributed much to the emergence of international development.

Recent changes in these early determinants and conditions for international development are now creating unprecedented challenges to the concept of international cooperation and unidirectional transfer of knowledge, expertise, and material as well as financial resources. If “international” formerly pertained only to nations, now global partnerships also encompass non-state actors, and institutions. International development, if it has to have a future, will need to rise to the challenges brought about by: failures of economic development policies in the last 40 years, contestations of development from the academe, new focal points, for example, war on terrorism, realigning funds earmarked for international development, rise of MNCs, reconfiguration of geopo-

litical dynamics, and contestations on powerful nations, the UN, the World Bank and the IMF as major actors in development. From a sociological point of view, international development may disappear in 2 or 3 decades, more and more “development” is disappearing and being supplanted by other buzz words. Ultimately, della Faille prognosticates – “We expect a downscaling of objectives as the logic of the market persists.”

The three lectures and the rich exchanges with the audience following every lecture were a timely input into the ongoing review of the Master of Arts in Development Studies (MASDS) by the graduate program faculty through the initiative of College of Social Sciences Dean, Dr. Raymundo Rovillos and other graduate program faculty. Dr. della Faille holds a Ph.D. in Sociology, and has pursued post-doctoral researches in Mexico and Canada. His research interest is the link between knowledge, discourse and underdevelopment. It is hoped that his short stay, and the deep acquaintances he's had with local NGOs and UP Baguio faculty will lead to continuing long-term collaborations with him and the University of Quebec. ■