

Savior Barbie Meets the Global PIEC Student

Those, who are interested in social media and in development studies, have probably come across the new social media trend and critique of traditional western models of development studies: 'Savior Barbie' (See: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36132482>). Found on Instagram, 'Savior Barbie' (See: <https://www.instagram.com/barbiesavior/?hl=en>) represents the relatively wealthy, white, unskilled young person, who goes off to some 'poor' developing country in order to test some theory they've learned in class or dig a well in an African village with other young white people. Of course the intentions are good, in that there is a desire to 'help', but the Savior Barbie is a humoristic critique of what is now known as the 'White Savior Complex' (See the seminal article in *The Atlantic* by Teju Cole: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/>).

Initially developed by two academics from Latin America, PIEC (Post-Graduate International Educating College) turns the traditional 'western model' of development studies on its head. Instead of sending the inexperienced (and probably incompetent for that role) young person to some developing country to 'help them', PIEC brings together students from both low and high income countries as equals, i.e. from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe, to discuss, debate and tackle issues facing a global and globalizing world. The idea is that students from developing countries acquire skills, which they can use back in their home countries, but also western students are allowed to face their own prejudices through real engagement with colleagues from so-called developing countries about the complexities of and western bias built into various conceptions of 'development'. With that framework in mind, recently, the diverse multi-cultural group of Erasmus and PIEC students headed to Paris to visit the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), the IIEP (UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning) and UNESCO's Headquarters.

On the first day of their 3-day trip to Paris, the Erasmus and PIEC students received a tour and lecture about the significance of the OECD by the Deputy Director General of the Flemish Representation in France, Mr. Dries Willems. Afterwards, the students of 'Scenarios for Living in 2030' presented various possible scenarios to members of the OECD's CERI (Center for Educational Research and Innovation) and the PISA study. They debated on how education might look in 15 years' time and were evaluated on their thinking. Lively discussions ensued about possible solutions for rising income inequality, religious radicalization, social well-being and the benefits and dangers of artificial intelligence, where the students were required to defend their positions. In the company of Mr. Tijs D'Hoest, the Secretary General of the Flemish Commission of UNESCO, the students were warmly received for cocktails at the Flemish Consulate by the Director General of the Flemish Representation in France, Mr. Filip D'Havé. On the second day, students visited UNESCO's IIEP, where issues like UN's development goals for education, the challenges of educational planning at national levels as well as the rising problem of corruption in education were addressed. On the third day, students and lecturers visited UNESCO's Headquarters where they heard the plans for the ASPNetwork by its new director Dr. Sabine Detzel as well as about the decline of freedom of the press and the value of science diplomacy for creating world peace.

At the end of the trip, the students were exhausted, but a lot wiser about the roles and capabilities of these illustrious organizations as well as their own roles within the global community. By bringing together students from all parts of the world on an equal footing, PIEC students learn to work together towards a common goal: the creation of peace in the minds of men and women today. Peace, which seems so elusive in our contemporary context, but all the more necessary. If only on a small and experimental scale, by forming collaborative friendships with students from differing socio-

economic, cultural and religious backgrounds, students are provided with a more equitable framework to actually achieve it. The students trip to Paris was a small step towards the larger goal.

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