

6-1-2002

Going International in Extension: A Done Deal?

Thomas J. Gallagher

Oregon State University Extension Service, tom.gallagher@orst.edu



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Recommended Citation

Gallagher, T. J. (2002). Going International in Extension: A Done Deal?. *The Journal of Extension*, 40(3), Article 2. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol40/iss3/2>

This Commentary is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Extension by an authorized editor of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clemson.edu.



June 2002 // Volume 40 // Number 3 // Commentary // 3COM1



PREVIOUS
ARTICLE



ISSUE
CONTENTS



NEXT
ARTICLE



POST
A COMMENT

Going International in Extension: A Done Deal?

Abstract

The author describes three previous JOE Commentaries on internationalization in Extension and recounts the lessons he learned through his own experience in Ukraine. He argues that, while not a "done deal," an internationalized Extension is just such a good deal that it will be the norm for the future.

Thomas J. Gallagher

Leadership Development Specialist
Oregon State University Extension Service
Corvallis, Oregon
Internet Address: Tom.Gallagher@orst.edu

The 21st Century Report (ECOP, 2001) identifies globalization--of the financial, service, manufacturing and agricultural sectors of our economy--as having a "profound influence on all facets of American society." The report adds that "the challenge for Extension is to provide leadership to demonstrate local implications and potential consequences of an interdependent world." The report focuses on improving the Extension system in the United States, but it is clear to the authors that Extension now operates in a "global village" and that our future will be determined, in part, by the role we choose to play in this larger community.

My concluding comment is that internationalization is not only a good idea, that it serves us to share with and learn from others, but that it is an idea that is now readily doable given the evolution of technology. Indeed, it may not be possible to stop the internationalization of Extension, even were it desirable to do so. But first . . .

Recent JOE Commentaries

Three commentators writing in the *Journal of Extension (JOE)* in the past 2 years have argued that it is through internationalization, in part, that Extension in the United States can be improved.

[Anne-Michelle Marsden](#), in the December 2000 issue, describes how, after 15 years in her position as an educator in family and consumer sciences, she thought she understood the core of addressing diversity. That is, she says, until "I had spent just 1 month . . . in the remote Toledo District of Belize." The experience, she writes, gave her "a deeper and more profound understanding of the term 'change agent'" and gave her more resolve and confidence to do her job well.

[Larry Lev](#), in the August 2001 issue, describes how a sabbatical year in France got him out of his "comfort zone" and "into a whole new mode of experimentation." The experience, he continued, gave him "a good shove to close out old projects and move on to something new." As we well know in Extension, it is hard to part with old programs with established constituencies.

And most recently, in April of this year, [Barbara Ludwig](#) referred to the ECOP report and its reference to the "changing faces of America" and then added her vision of international work in Extension. She described international work as growing beyond the concept of overseas assignments to one of participation in a worldwide network using the WWW technology and in international organizations, such as the Association for International Agricultural and Extension Education.

These commentators have helped me refine my own ideas and compose my own commentary on Extension, motivated by a recent trip to the Ukraine.

Lessons from Ukraine

This past April I presented one of my leadership training modules, "Understanding Yourself as a Leader," in Uzhgorod, the western most city in Ukraine. I was part of a team from Oregon State University's Office of International Research and Development. Our goal was to help the post-Soviet nation develop its own capacity to respond to emergencies.

I presented the module, essentially in the same format as I offer it in Extension in Oregon, to leaders of the Red Cross, executives and doctors in the regional hospital, and principals of the local schools, about 100 in all. The module was well received, and as a result of this trip I am now having all of my leadership modules translated into Ukrainian.

The lessons I wish to offer, however, are not about training content or practice, but about the Extension Service as an institution.

Concept of Extension

I had no stronger "aha!" from the visit than "Extension is a very powerful and valuable concept." At the training sessions, I introduced myself as being from the division of the university where faculty are assigned to make scientific information available to citizens for practical use. The participants were uniformly unaware of such a notion--that a university could be a resource in such a direct way. They were very impressed with specific examples I could offer of how faculty were helping citizens and communities in Oregon.

It was clear to me that Ukraine--a largely agriculture nation the size of Texas with 50 million people--would benefit tremendously from an Extension-type institution with similar programs. I returned to Corvallis with an even greater respect for what Extension means in the United States.

Letting Go of the Past

A second aha! was that the seven decades under Soviet rule had created a highly bureaucratic and not very creative society. People were hesitant to let go of what had worked (and even things that had not worked) in the past. Not only had the physical capital, such as buildings and roads, atrophied under communist rule, but human capital had atrophied, too. With no reward, and sometimes punishment, for independent thinking, there were fewer leaders and managers who exhibited an entrepreneurial style as one might expect in the United States.

However, interest in "what was possible" was growing, particularly among those who had visited the West and among young people. My sense was that, although the interest was growing, it would be necessary for change in the near future to be well planned and incremental--with low risk.

Volunteerism

One of the distinguishing characteristics of America has been our tradition of forming voluntary organizations to solve shared problems. The concept of "self help" had, certainly, withered under Soviet rule. Central planning had taken away the opportunity for individuals and non-governmental groups to get anything done without approval. There was no equivalent of Extension or of such institutions as The Kellogg Foundation to provide resources "to help people help themselves."

I heard several times from Ukrainians that the term "volunteer" had come to mean "conscript" under Soviet central authority. But, since gaining their freedom in 1991, Ukrainians have been rediscovering the power of community, initially at the family level, but increasingly at the neighborhood, interest group, and city level. One Ukrainian thought it was quite impressive that OSU Extension has nearly 50,000 volunteers, none of whom was conscripted.

In sum, there is nothing like a simple comparison, made possible by an overseas assignment, to learn about ourselves and what we take for granted. As the other commentators predicted, I am more motivated to serve and better able to focus on how and what to serve. My already high valuation of Extension was raised even higher.

An Aha! with Angst

If I have one aha! from the experience that is unsettling, it is that I felt a strong "sameness" between the institutions there and here.

The institutions in Ukraine are struggling to become relevant and valued; they have been isolated from the change of the world around them since 1917. Now they find they must change quickly, but they lack practice. I could not help but note how many of our own institutions, particularly our resource agencies, are also struggling to continue to be relevant and valued.

Extension has always worked closely with people and the "real world" and has changed with the times. But, as the ECOP report proposes, even greater change is required to keep up with the times ahead of us.

Can't Be Stopped

Returning to the original topic of the internationalization of Extension, the earlier commentators argued that international experience helps us to be more effective "change agents" and can free us to explore "new modes of experimentation." If Extension wants to close out some old projects and get on with some new ones in this century of globalization, international experience may provide the insight, the motivation, and the direction.

But as important as overseas work is, Barbara Ludwig reminds us that we don't have to go overseas to be engaged in international discussion. As she notes, *JOE* is now read by people around the world. When you write an article for *JOE* you are engaging in a worldwide discussion of best theory and practice. I predict our discussion will trend from one that is inward looking to one that looks outward, that quite literally is part of a global conversation.

Ludwig also reminds us of an international organization, the Association for International Agricultural and Extension Education (AIAEE), which offers an international Extension conference, newsletter, and journal. Such organizations can lead to lifelong benefits for faculty here--and "there."

Through my experience in the Ukraine, I now have several new colleagues with whom I trust I will be working with for years to come--and the Web makes regular communication so easy. In closing, I would argue that the international interest in Extension is so high, and the technology for communication now so supportive, that the internationalization of Extension can't be stopped. While not a "done deal," it is just such a good deal that it will be the norm for the future.

Sources of Further Information

For information about the OSU Ukraine project, see:

http://osu.orst.edu/international/oird/ukr_network/

The leadership training module is available in English and Ukrainian at

<http://osu.orst.edu/extension/opod/leadership.html>

References

Lev, L. 2001. Leave home! International sabbaticals as unfreezing experiences. *Journal of Extension* [On-Line]. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2001august/comm1.html>

Ludwig, B. G. 2002. Global in our backyard. *Journal of Extension* [On-Line]. 40(2). Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2002april/comm1.html>

Marsden, A. 2000. Walking the mile barefoot. *Journal of Extension* [On-Line]. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2000december/comm2.html>

Discussion

Author: [Nancy Baskett](#)

This was a great article. I had some of the same thoughts and experiences in Siberia. Nancy

Date: 6/26/2002

Author: [Tom Gallagher](#)

Nancy, When you mention same thoughts and experiences, I was wondering if it was about my "angst" issue. I must admit that sometimes Extension seems so, well, Soviet. That sounds more harsh than intended, it is just that Ukrainian institutions are now part of the more-or-less free market but they are managed by "lifers" who cannot lead change. Perhaps they, and we, need fewer lifers and more leadership from outside the institution?

Date: 6/27/2002

Author: [Julie Francis](#)

I feel that in Australia we have the same problems.... the fight to stay relevant. I think the key is to stay in touch with the community and ask them what they want. It was interesting to travel to the USA last year and investigate your extension system, particularly in regards to small farms. Your nation is far ahead of ours in that we are only just starting to act on the (long-recognised) idea that small farmers need separate targeted information, different to the style and type of information we provide to traditional farmers. However I learnt that there are still many small farmers dissatisfied with Extension in the USA; because they don't feel they are listened to. Many people in Australia suggest the key to better extension is to have more staff to enable 1-on-1 extension like you have, and we used to have a decade ago. My visit to the US though has made it clear in my mind that even 1-on-1 extension won't help a farmer if the mindset of that extension agent is to be the expert telling the farmer information, rather than listening and adjusting the focus of the information to suit the farmer's needs.

Date: 7/15/2002

Author: [Tom Gallagher](#)

I feel that in Australia we have the same problems.... the fight to stay relevant. I think the key is to stay in touch

with the community and ask them what they want. It was interesting to travel to the USA last year and investigate your extension system, particularly in regards to small farms. Your nation is far ahead of ours in that we are only just starting to act on the (long-recognised) idea that small farmers need separate targeted information, different to the style and type of information we provide to traditional farmers. However I learnt that there are still many small farmers dissatisfied with Extension in the USA; because they don't feel they are listened to. Many people in Australia suggest the key to better extension is to have more staff to enable 1-on-1 extension like you have, and we used to have a decade ago. My visit to the US though has made it clear in my mind that even 1-on-1 extension won't help a farmer if the mindset of that extension agent is to be the expert telling the farmer information, rather than listening and adjusting the focus of the information to suit the farmer's needs.

Date: 7/15/2002

Copyright © by *Extension Journal, Inc.* ISSN 1077-5315. Articles appearing in the Journal become the property of the Journal. Single copies of articles may be reproduced in electronic or print form for use in educational or training activities. Inclusion of articles in other publications, electronic sources, or systematic large-scale distribution may be done only with prior electronic or written permission of the *Journal Editorial Office*, joe-ed@joe.org.

If you have difficulties viewing or printing this page, please contact [JOE Technical Support](#)