INTRODUCTION/INTRODUCCIÓN

Ready to discuss our future?
The Kapuscinski Development Lectures

“We cannot understand our problems if we don’t think of them at a global, planetary scale.”
Ryszard Kapuściński, Shadow of the Sun

What world do we want? And how to achieve it? When we are designing our future, words matter. Interaction between people, expertise, and leadership play important roles as well. For 13 years, thousands of students and top global thinkers have been exchanging important words contributing to our future at the Kapuscinski Development Lectures (KAPTalks). Come and join the community!

Here you can ask Esther Benjamin or Alaa Murabit about leadership, ask Toyin Aderemi about including people with disabilities in development, confront your views on gender with Bandana Rana, or discuss a sustainable future with Wanjira Mathai. And how about asking Francis Fukuyama about the end of history, challenging Joseph Stiglitz, Thomas Piketty, or Tony Blair on inequality, learning from Esther Duflo how to reduce poverty effectively, or reforming the world financial system with Kristalina Georgieva?

In 2009, two development agencies—the European Commission and the United Nations Development Programme—decided bravely to go outside their big boxes and create an independent platform for discussing development. We would never have been able to do it alone. Universities, their professors, and students play crucial parts in this exercise. Universities are an obvious spot for critical thinking and airing opposing views, making recommendations, and confronting numbers with reality (and vice versa!). To date, we have proudly partnered with over 70 top universities: mostly from Europe but also from other continents.

Over 130 KAPTalks have been organized by leading universities from around the world. They have triggered interest among students in global issues and development. Former and upcoming heads of state and government, Nobel Prize laureates, professors, and practitioners have joined debates on our most pressing global challenges.

The KAPTalks were the brainchild of Maciej Popowski, then a director in the European Commission’s development department (and now...
acting director-general for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement at the European Commission). Since the beginning, the series has benefited enormously from the support of Ryszard Kapuściński’s wife Alicja and daughter Rene. The first round of lectures was organized in the so-called new EU member states, which joined the Union in 2004. Even though these countries became donors, their societies perceived themselves to a large extent as recipients of aid. This meant there was a pressing need to talk to people, to explain and discuss the role of Poland, Latvia, or the Czech Republic in global development. The series of lectures formed a new phase of the 2004–2005 public campaign run by United Nations Development Programme in Poland entitled “Time to help others!” with the headline “Poland is a paradise*/ *for over a billion poorest people in the world,” which effectively stirred the public debate on development. These nations from Central and Eastern Europe are also learning fast about their role in contemporary global development due to the war in Ukraine and the millions of refugees fleeing the country to their neighbors.

Though originally aimed at raising awareness about development, the KAPTalks soon became a platform for challenging conventional wisdom in development as Jan Vandemoortele, father of the Millennium Development Goals pointed out. From old-fashioned 1.5-hour monologue-style events in 2009 with 80 students in the classroom, we have made a long journey to interactive discussion using online tools in the 2020s with thousands of contributions from around the world.

The narrative has also changed. From speaking about development and donor-recipient relations, our audience moved to discussing partnerships and global challenges. These include education, sustainable development, human rights, COVID-19, migration, gender, digital transformation, and many, many more. This is where theory, research, and analysis meet development practice and policy. The policy is looking 20, 50, 100 years ahead but is rooted in today’s problems, such as the war in Ukraine, COVID-19, or climate adaptation.

The lecture series honors Ryszard Kapuściński, Polish journalist and writer who died in 2007. Kapuściński was often called the Third World chronicler thanks to his coverage of development of African, Latin American, and European countries. His books were translated into 40 languages with the most popular being The Emperor, Shadow of the Sun, and Shah of Shahs. Kapuściński was focused on human development, on individuals with their stories, aspirations, or limits. But at the same time, he was able to pull these individual stories together, drawing conclusions at a much larger scale. This particular skill is crucial in discussing and designing the future—that is, being able to focus on people but at the same time be able to look at the bigger picture of global challenges and solutions.
Now it’s your turn to take Kapuściński’s approach forward and contribute to this discussion on our future! Hear what top thinkers think about global challenges, and raise your voice as well. Join KAPTalks at https://kapuscinskilectures.eu/.

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**REFERENCES**