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Analysing the European Union-Japan dialogue through the lenses of knowledge for development

Abstract

The European Union-Japan political and international development dialogue is resurging through the Strategic Partnership Agreement recently agreed between the two actors. The current paper argues that in order for this agreement to deliver on its promises, the EU and Japan need to build on their similarities, but more importantly on their differences and lessons learnt through their distinct international experiences. While common values and norms have helped them to agree on such document, building on their differences will help both actors to make this bilateral dialogue more productive and strategic. Using the theoretical lenses of policy entrepreneurship used to consolidate knowledge for development on horizontal cooperation, the paper questions how sharing their experiences as international donors can be of strategic relevance for both the EU and Japan.

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Key words:

EU, Japan, SPA, policy entrepreneurship, knowledge for development, international aid

Introduction

The European Union (EU) and Japan are two global actors which have built their bilateral relation over the last few decades, based on their similarities as civilian powers, promoters of human security and defenders of sustainable development and democracy (Hosoya, 2012, Tanke, 2016). The two landmark agreements from 2018, the Economic Partnership (EPA) and the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), have been designed with the core objective to deliver on the 21st century cooperation and dialogue between the two actors (Gilson, 2020). These two agreements have been completed by the Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure, adding since September 2019 a first concrete dimension and an indication on what will be the content of the renewed dialogue on political and international development cooperation. Hence, the current paper looks at the implications for this bilateral relation and analyses the potential for knowledge sharing and exchange of lessons learnt by both the EU and Japan in the more than five decades of development cooperation with countries around the world. More concretely, the paper aims to conclude on how and if the two actors can reinforce each other's policy entrepreneurship building on their knowledge for development.

While the potential of the EU-Japan trade agreement has been largely analysed by previous authors both in the context of historical trade conflicts, but also bilateral declarations and agendas (Gilson, 2016, Suzuki, 2017), the Strategic Partnership has been covered to a smaller extent (Hosoi, 2019). More specifically, the resulting international aid and development dialogue has not been analysed in the existing literature, and this comes to a great surprise, given that both Japan and the European Union are leading international donors. They aim for the status of big like-minded donors (Gaens and Vogt, 2015), and important budgetary

resources have been allocated to development policy by both of them. Thus, Japan was the biggest ODA donor in the 1990s, and the EU has recently featured itself as the biggest global donor (European External Action Service, 2019).

It is in this context that the implications of achieving a binding agreement with political and international development implications should be carefully analysed. The current article aims to fill in this gap and at the same time applies a novel theoretical framework, looking at the EU and Japan as policy entrepreneurs in international development. Moreover, the paper problematizes how their policy entrepreneurship in international development is related to their different knowledge for development, and how such potentially complementary knowledge brings in new dimensions for their bilateral international development dialogue. At first sight, this can seem in contradiction with the current discourse on how similar norms have brought the European Union and Japan closer than ever before (Berkofsky, 2012). However, building on such differences is not at odds with this discourse, and, on the contrary, helps to make their international development dialogue more mature and better tuned to the current international aid landscape. It also helps both actors to fulfil their ambitions of being ‘responsible global actors’ (Mayer, 2015, p. 9).

The paper is structured in four remaining parts. The next section contextualises the EU-Japan international development dialogue and introduces the importance of knowledge for development. The subsequent section analyses the link between policy entrepreneurship and knowledge for development, while introducing the relevance of analysing the EU and Japan as knowledge actors in international development. The fourth section explains the policy implications when analysing the EU and Japan as policy entrepreneurs through their knowledge for development, while the final part takes this analysis as a basis for assessing the potential of a strengthened EU-Japan dialogue on knowledge for development.

Contextualising the EU-Japan bilateral dialogue in international development

The SPA is the new political framework that aims to consolidate the cooperation between the EU and Japan on a range of policy areas, including international aid and development. While this agreement has been described as being rather aspirational (Kirchner and Han Dorussen, 2021) and only offering an institutional framework within which more concrete bilateral policy initiatives are still to be established, the Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure has come to fulfil such ambition. It is aimed to provide concrete content to the reinforced partnership between the EU and Japan by jointly promoting quality infrastructure in third countries (European Union and MOFA, 2019). This Partnership has been perceived as a response to the increased Chinese assertiveness in international trade, development aid and as a global rule shaper (Kirchner and Han Dorussen, 2019). While there is no direct mention to China, the Partnership showcases the need for sustainable connectivity, with projects being developed in an international system based on rules and open trade leading to ‘mutually beneficial’ relationships (European Union and MOFA, 2019). Thus, the new bilateral frameworks become a key response of both the EU and Japan at a time when the ‘global liberal order is under enormous pressure’ (Berkofsky, 2020, p. 1). In this context, specific areas of bilateral coordination mentioned in the concluding statement of the EU-Japan Summit include monitoring the evolution of events in Xinjiang and Hong Kong (European Union and MOFA, 2021).

These new institutional frameworks seem to have managed to step up the level of cooperation and coordination between the EU and Japan. Japan has shown interest in materialising such ambitions and has started to work together with the EU in Africa, while the EU has showcased the importance of cooperating with Japan to achieve the EU action plan for

security cooperation in Asia (European Union, 2018). Yet, this is not without important inherent tensions. The EU and Japan are yet to sign a potential Framework Partnership Agreement allowing an institutionalised, thus more stable Japanese participation in the EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions. Equally challenging has been the EU-Japan cooperation on deployment of common patrols in the South China sea (Berkofsky, 2020), meaning that Japan is still working much closer with the USA than the EU when dealing with its most pressing security concerns. This shows that there is indeed a lot of potential to still be unlocked, opening a space for the SPA and the Partnership for Sustainable Connectivity to become better tuned instruments able to support closer cooperation and coordination between the EU and Japan on topics that go beyond the economic and trade dialogue (Kirchner and Han Dorussen, 2021).

Within these bilateral frameworks, the international development provisions of the SPA make references to how ‘the Parties shall enhance the exchange of views on development policies, including through regular dialogue, and, where appropriate, coordinate their specific policies on sustainable development and poverty eradication at the global level’ (European Union and MOFA, 2018, p. 13). The aims seem even more ambitious in reference to the ‘exchange of information and cooperation between their respective development agencies and departments and, where appropriate, coordination of in-country activities’, complemented by the exchange of ‘information, best practices and experiences’ in the area of illicit financial flows (European Union and MOFA, 2018, p. 14).

Knowledge sharing appears in this context as a core element of the international development dimension of the SPA and of the EU-Japan international development dialogue. This is also confirmed in the documents from the latest High Level Policy Dialogue meetings on Development Cooperation, concluding in February 2021 that topics of relevance for bilateral coordination and dialogue should include ‘emerging donors, assistance to Asia and

Africa, as well as [...] global challenges such as the COVID-19 response; [while both] sides agreed to continue cooperation on these issues, attaching importance to connectivity' (European Union and MOFA, 2021, online).

It comes to no surprise that such references are made given the importance of knowledge for development as a core concept in international development since more than two decades. In the late 1990s, the World Bank started describing itself as a knowledge bank and several initiatives including the Global Development Network were born out of this vision (Stone, 2003). This policy perspective shared by both scholars and World Bank representatives proposed knowledge for development as a more complex concept. Localising knowledge due to 'the overwhelming variety and complexity of human societies' (Stiglitz, 1999, p. 7) became a policy concern in order to ensure that development initiatives had a positive impact and were well received by local actors. In addition, this same vision highlighted how the countries that benefit from development aid should have an active role in the translation process (Ellerman, 2000, Stone, 2017) and be situated in 'the driver's seat' (Stiglitz, 1999, p. 8). In practice, this shift in the World Bank vision on how to plan its interventions translated into a central role being given to local actors and a desire to create trust-based relations with those that were the targets of the different programmes in a more horizontal and demand-driven approach to international development. This initiative had flaws and its application meant contradictions with beneficiary countries still feeling constrained by conditionalities (Sawamura, 2004). Nevertheless, it was one of the first international attempts to account for the influence of knowledge in international development and of how local realities may contradict donors' expectations.

From knowledge for development to policy entrepreneurship

In this context, the idea of the EU and Japan being *knowledge actors* in international development is related to European and Japanese policy efforts and ambitions to develop horizontal cooperation based on localised knowledge, thus combining different types of knowledge and positioning themselves as regional and global policy entrepreneurs. Therefore, we can analyse the role of both the EU and Japan as policy entrepreneurs, aiming at initiating ‘dynamic policy change [...] through attempting to win support for ideas [and] policy innovation’ (Mintrom, 1997, p. 739). The final goal for both actors is that of building cognitive bridges, bringing together different types of knowledge, including local and global knowledge.

The broader literature on policymaking and policy change shows how the actions of entrepreneurs can change the political landscape and how they promote new ideas in particular contexts and using favourable venues, receptive to their innovative ways of solving problems (Kingdon, 1995, Mintrom, 2000, Roberts and King, 1991, Stone, 2014). Hence, entrepreneurs set the agenda by including new items, designing ways of dealing with these issues, implementing specific programs and institutionalising practices that become part of the political routines (Roberts and King, 1991).

‘There is no automatic process that [ensures] new [...] ideas will seep into the consciousness of political and policy elites. Instead, it is necessary to focus on the discursive constructions and agency of [...] entrepreneurs, their research institutes and their networks’ (Stone, 2011, 246).

Their activities include issue framing, networking, establishing the terms of the debate and creating coalitions. Regarding issue framing, entrepreneurs ‘construct and revise *policy frames*,

define new relationships between actors and chart courses of action' (Kaunert and Léonard, 2012, pp. 425-426). Ackrill, Kay and Zahariadis define such role of revising policy frames in the 'presence of ambiguity of information and issue complexity, [when] entrepreneurs craft contestable meaning, which they in turn disseminate [...] in order to activate attention and mobilise support or opposition' (Ackrill et al., 2013, p. 873). In this sense, entrepreneurs are expected to play a more important role in contexts of increased uncertainty and complexity of issues, and to be those actors that have the ability to promote solutions to different dilemmas. Transnational and supranational structures are examples showing how ambiguity can be a barrier in taking policy decisions and choosing between solutions. Entrepreneurs help to find appropriate ways of dealing with problems and to build coherent narratives around how particular norms and policies can be the response to pressing policy problems. Thus, they promote shifts and redesign the policy and political landscape.

More importantly, joint efforts can enable the achievement of policy entrepreneurs' goals. Concretely, this can be accomplished by building networks and coalitions able to bring together different types of knowledge. The discussion that unfolds in the next sections shows that similar ambitions, yet complementary policy experiences can constitute an important enabler for policy entrepreneurs to cooperate. The next section looks at the EU and Japan as aspiring policy entrepreneurs through their knowledge for development, based on a comprehensive two-stage fieldwork, including interviews with policymakers, NGOs and think tanks representatives in Brussels and Tokyo, between 2015 and 2021 (more than 60 interviews were conducted and fieldwork continued until saturation). The fieldwork also led to the identification of concrete EU and Japan international development policies. In this sense, the European Union efforts will be mainly analysed in the context of its good governance and partnerships approach (Carbone, 2010, Del Biondo, 2016), aiming to address the aid effectiveness agenda. The Japanese knowledge for development will be placed in the context of its experience with

triangular cooperation and self-help efforts with the objective to achieve self-reliance in the developing world (Sawamura, 2004). The analysis focuses on both policy frames and building of networks by the EU and Japan as aspiring policy entrepreneurs in knowledge for development and horizontal cooperation.

The EU and Japan as policy entrepreneurs consolidating and deploying their knowledge for development

The case of the European Union

Concerning the European Union, it has been considered ‘a complex and relatively recent development actor, whose status in international development policy has been challenged from various corners’ (Orbie et al., 2016, p. 1). During the last decade, the EU has accumulated an important know-how on horizontal cooperation, reframing its approach to international development. This can be understood as an interinstitutional effort and a much-needed response given that, in the words of the European Parliament president, the EU ambioned to ‘leave behind the self-reflective phase and start listening to the partners’ (Schulz, 2010, p. 4).

The EU participation in the global debate concerning the importance of locally owned solutions was approached mainly from the perspective of the Paris Declaration (Holland and Doidge, 2012, OECD, 2005), talking about the importance of aid effectiveness at the intersection between the ownership of solutions by local (developing countries) actors, the alignment between donors in order to allow the use of local systems, and mutual accountability, meaning that donors and beneficiaries hold each other mutually accountable for development results (OECD, 2005). Yet, the first European Consensus on Development failed to fully acknowledge the role of new partnerships and horizontal cooperation, missing the opportunity

of policy framing, and talking instead about the North-South cooperation and the ‘North-South solidarity’ (European Commission, 2005, p. 30), showing verticality in a relation that was still based on conditionalities. The European Commission Communication on democratic governance brought in a new initiative, the European Community Governance Incentive Tranche with the ACP (Africa, Caribbean, Pacific) countries, which aimed at rewarding the countries performing well on a variety of dimensions, ranging from combating corruption to access to healthcare and justice, media freedom and public finance (European Commission, 2006). This sort of initiatives continued to incorporate a hierarchical vision in the dialogue between the EU and its aid partners and beneficiaries. However, the importance of local knowledge was better incorporated than in the European Consensus on Development. This is mainly because of how good governance in developing countries was defined by the European Commission, referring to both ‘ownership over conditionality’ and ‘dialogue over sanctions’ (Carbone, 2010, p. 22). In addition, in order to benefit from the European Community Governance Incentive Tranche, a joint framework was proposed, placing together the European Commission and the beneficiary country, with the European Commission elaborating a Governance Profile, and the beneficiary government working on an Action Plan that would get to incorporate the local knowledge and understanding of good governance.

Yet, the Governance Profile did not fully manage to change the policy framing of the European Commission from a North-South to a more horizontal international development vision. This is because it was not intended to be elaborated ‘jointly with the partner country but its content [was intended to] be shared [not negotiated, nor agreed] with [the] partner country during the programming dialogue’ (European Commission, 2009). The weaknesses of this approach were shown even more clearly when the exercise came to be implemented and the definitions adopted by the European Commission showed much less integration of the local visions and knowledge than initially proposed. The inclusion of market-friendly environments

in the economic dimension of good governance and the link to terrorism in the security part, as well as to the management of migration flows justify why developing countries continued to see the European Commission ways of working with good governance as an attempt to introduce new conditionalities instead of making use of local knowledge. This led to ‘a paradoxical situation in which the EU [seemed] preoccupied with improving its development record and image, but at the same time [failed] to take into account the voice of the developing countries’ (Carbone, 2010, p. 27).

In addition to these new European Commission ways of working with good governance, the EU has worked with other policy tools aimed at consolidating its framing of horizontal cooperation, such as the establishment of strategic partnerships. The EU has championed the use of partnership with countries and regional organisations around the world, and budget support is the concrete policy tool through which the EU has aimed to materialise its partnership ambitions¹. ‘Partnership has often been associated with ownership, the idea that recipient countries take the lead in the formulation of development strategies. Partnership-based development also entails that development programmes are targeting recipient needs rather than donor self-interest’ (Del Biondo, 2016, p. 1238). Thus, a partnership approach has become in this context an alternative policy frame through which the EU has aimed to promote its vision on horizontal cooperation. Such proposal was institutionalised in the Cotonou Partnership Agreement, aiming to deploy these new policy ideas. 48% of the 10th European Development Fund went to budget support, and this was, in the words of Development Commissioner Louis Michel, a proof of ‘mutual trust’ between the EU and its African partners (Michel, 2008, p. 3). Yet, while showing EU leadership and adaptability to the international agenda, the partnership approach had also important weaknesses. It was closely related to the

¹ Interviews on Zoom with European Commission officials, 8th-28th September 2020

good governance agenda and thus shared its flaws in terms of perceived conditionality from beneficiary countries. In addition, it did not remain immune to internal critiques².

More recently, the last European Consensus on Development (European Commission, 2017) builds on this previous experience of trying to bring beneficiaries in the ‘driver’s seat’. The document draws the attention to the importance of innovative engagement with more advanced developing countries, by stating that ‘these new partnerships will promote the exchange of best practices, technical assistance and knowledge sharing’ working with ‘these countries to promote South-South and triangular cooperation consistent with development effectiveness principles’ (p. 47). This refers to allowing and supporting the participation of new donors, which can help their peers (other developing countries) in their efforts, making use of their development experience, while counting on the EU support to share lessons learnt and best practices (Serban, 2021a, Serban, 2021b). Thus, the EU aims to acknowledge that emerging countries have recently developed solutions to similar problems and are better placed to advise their peers by suggesting and building together policy solutions in which they are assuming new roles, using new forms of horizontal cooperation based on local successes³.

As a policy entrepreneur the EU appears to increase its use of networks that have the potential to also raise its profile as an international development knowledge actor. By framing its international development programmes based on horizontal exchanges of knowledge and facilitating the use of the local knowledge by developing countries emerging as new donors⁴, the EU positions itself as a policy entrepreneur actively deploying policy frames and using networks, enacting the use of the development knowledge developed by the actors in the Global South. Such policy frames support the deployment of local development visions, which are

² Interviews in Brussels with DG DEVCO officials, 17th-31st May 2016

³ Interviews in Brussels with DG DEVCO officials, 17th-31st May 2016

⁴ Interviews on Zoom with Latin American diplomats, 10th-24th October 2020

organically grown out of lived experience, instead of being policy solutions born out of a distant success in the North⁵.

Combining policy framing of its aid policy through horizontal cooperation and the building of networks including new donors, these recent developments point that the European Union might indeed be on the path to become an international development policy entrepreneur focused on knowledge for development, incorporating new policy frames accounting for local knowledge and developing networks encouraging policy ownership from a wider range of aid actors. This gives more centrality to networks of new donors which even if promoted at the international level since the 1990s have not been easily incorporated in concrete EU policy documents and initiatives⁶.

The case of Japan

Turning to the case of Japan and its knowledge for development, it is an internationally recognised leader in triangular cooperation (OECD, 2014), defining this new form of development dialogue as ‘the support to or the promotion of South-South Cooperation (SSC)’ (Honda, 2013, p. 101). This includes the financial and knowledge support for the dissemination of good practices and successful stories of development in the South. Japan has focused its international development vision on the importance of triangular cooperation from the inception of its international aid agency (JICA) in 1970. The partner countries with which Japan has worked include actors from all over the developing world, ranging from countries in Asia to countries in more distant regions like Latin America and Africa. This is significantly different from the European Union, in general, and the European Commission, in particular,

⁵ Interviews on Zoom with Latin American diplomats, 10th-24th October 2020

⁶ Interviews on Zoom with Latin American diplomats, 10th-24th October 2020

which have only recently built policy frames showcasing their approach to horizontal forms of dialogue with the developing countries (Serban & Harutyunyan, 2020).

The recognition of Japan's success and indeed policy entrepreneurship through triangular cooperation has not only come from its peers with the DAC Review as one of the many ways in which the Japanese success story has been highlighted by the other OECD donors (OECD, 2014). What is even more important, the recognition of the Japanese fruitful approach to triangular cooperation is also a constant element used by its partners in developing countries in order to describe their experience when working on common projects with Japan. Such actors include Latin American partners like Chile, Brazil, Argentina and Mexico, countries in South-East Asia such as Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, but also countries in the Middle East and Africa, such as Jordan, Tunisia and Egypt. The way in which they describe the cooperation with Japan focuses on how this framework is 'reinforcing [their] identity as new donors, building on locally owned solutions and fostering the desire to share the success stories and continue a peer learning process in which [they] get to improve [their] own visions'⁷. Thus, it can be argued that Japan has not only managed to build earlier than the EU a convincing policy frame on the importance and use of horizontal cooperation in international development and aid policies, but it has also managed to build recognition within a wide range of actors and indeed build a network that could evidence its ability to play a leading and entrepreneurial role in knowledge for development and horizontal cooperation.

One of the main sources of the Japanese success in this form of development dialogue is its unique position as an international actor, having started the work on South-South and triangular cooperation while Japan was still a recipient of international aid⁸. The Japanese

⁷ Interviews in Tokyo with diplomats from a range of Latin American, Asian, Middle East and African countries, 11th-28th November 2019

⁸ Interviews in Tokyo with JICA officials, 2nd-23rd October 2019

vision on its main advantages as an international development partner focuses on its philosophy of self-help and jointly created solutions. For Japan, its self-reliance approach is based on a

‘spirit of jointly creating things that suit partner countries while respecting ownership, intentions and intrinsic characteristics of the country concerned based on a field-oriented approach through dialogue and collaboration. It has also maintained the approach of building reciprocal relationships with developing countries in which both sides learn from each other and grow and develop together’ (MOFA, 2015, p. 4).

Jiyo Doryoku (as self-help is called in Japanese) became one of the main policy frames that reflects the idea of self-reliance. This has been praised for not containing political, nor economic conditionalities. The self-reliance frame has also been key in order to actively incorporate local knowledge in the joint work between Japan and its developing countries partners, highlighting the importance of local ownership⁹. Self-help has been present in the Japanese vision on ODA since its first Charter in 1992 (MOFA, 1992) and its importance has been reconfirmed in the subsequent charters (MOFA, 2003b, MOFA, 2015). Motivated by the spirit of *gambare* or persistence, the way in which Japan understands self-help relates to how ‘every developing country can develop well if people make the necessary effort and devote themselves to the development process’ (Sawamura, 2004, p. 31). In practice, different from the EU, this did not only involve that conditionalities were left out of the Japanese international development approach, but local partners were also expected to bear with (some of) the local costs of the projects implemented with Japanese ODA. The aim was to provide an institutionalised framework to start their self-reliance journey. This in turn has allowed the building of a network of actors that could spread their own knowledge for development, in an

⁹ Interviews in Tokyo with diplomats from a range of Latin American, Asian, Middle East and African countries, 11th-28th November 2019

environment in which such new donors were enabled to share lessons learnt between themselves, including development successes and failures while learning from their peers¹⁰.

Similar to the EU, the Japanese approach still needs to answer pending questions. One of the recognised difficulties of this journey has been to understand ‘how can the helpers supply help that actually furthers rather than overrides or undercuts the goal of the doers helping themselves?’ (Ellerman, 2009, p. 4). Nevertheless, Japan has displayed successes when building horizontal cooperation, and gradually the term ‘triangular’ is being replaced with ‘trilateral’, aiming to highlight even more how Japan looks at the new donors as equal partners¹¹. Aid beneficiaries are situated in the driver’s seat, and at the same time become the protagonists of a mutual learning process in which local knowledge is placed at the core of the aid efforts. This unique approach justifies also why Japan may be one of the very few sources of good practices and lessons learnt from triangular settings, possibly the only policy response to the question on how helpers can support the doers to help themselves, by learning together and building knowledge in a horizontal, reiterative and continuous process.

The inclusion of ownership as a core principle on the international development agenda (referring to the ways in which donors have started to plan their projects and programmes, here including the EU) can be largely related to Japan’s ‘key role’ in having self-help principles incorporated in the OECD policy frames (MOFA, 2003a). The recognition that ‘the Japanese model of development assistance-with its strong emphasis on local self-reliance-should be looked at more closely by other aid providers’ (King, 1999, p. 27 in Sawamura, 2004, p. 33) can be considered as one of the motivations for introducing ownership as a key dimension in the international development efforts since the 1990s.

¹⁰ Interviews in Tokyo with from a range of Latin American, Asian, Middle East and African countries, 11th-28th November 2019

¹¹ Interviews in Tokyo with from a range of Latin American, Asian, Middle East and African countries, 2nd-13th December 2019

Yet, while ownership was considered an important addition to the aid effectiveness agenda and the EU itself made use of it through its good governance initiative, the partnership approach and the related budget support policy tool, the self-help ideas are to a large extent much more far reaching. They tend to follow different epistemological principles than ownership:

‘Ownership may be partly a reflection of the structural adjustment policy which was imposed on recipient policy in the 1980s. On the other hand, the idea of self-help efforts is more endogenous and participatory. It could be said that ownership is likely to be based on a top-down approach, while self-help efforts are more bottom-up and process-oriented. Ownership is generally given to those who have at least minimum capacity since ownership without such capacity results in failure. Thus, it may be that self-help efforts are a necessary condition for ownership’ (Sawamura, 2004, p. 31).

This policy framing together with the recognition from its network of partners in the Global South highlight the Japanese policy entrepreneurship in horizontal cooperation, creating, similar to the EU, a space for Japan to leverage on the use of knowledge for development which was tested out elsewhere. Accounting for how both actors, the EU and Japan, have developed their knowledge for development, and more importantly, have supported their partners in applying their know-how to solve local problems shows that their international development presence has been motivated by similar ambitions. Yet, Japan has acted as a better consolidated policy entrepreneur in horizontal and triangular cooperation, while the European Union has experimented with different types of policy frames and use of networks from positive conditionality and good governance to partnership and budget support. However, recent EU ambitions to participate more in triangular cooperation show that horizontal cooperation may indeed be an area of bilateral strategic complementary between the EU and Japan.

The SPA and its implications for Japan and the EU as development knowledge actors

Knowledge sharing on horizontal cooperation can thus represent an area in which the different, yet complementary EU and Japan experiences can help in making the new EU-Japan SPA more strategic. The current section underlines some of the policy consequences of this process.

The SPA can offer the institutional setting allowing the exchange of best practices, while the new Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity can enable opportunities for common endeavours, such as common infrastructure projects in Africa, a priority geographical area for both actors, and a continent on which Japan is still to show the advantages of its self-help approach, while the EU is still to unleash the potential of its partnership approach (European Union and MOFA, 2019). The Japanese experience of mutual learning or inter-learning, ‘linked with the Japanese tradition of knowledge development’ (Sawamura, 2002, p. 343) and with the ‘the Japanese aid approach [...] of collaborative knowledge production’ (Sawamura, 2002, p. 346), together with the long history of the EU presence in Africa can be the basis for building a stronger entrepreneurial role for both actors in the region.

Moreover, it is important to understand which may be some of the reasons why Japan may be interested in sharing its horizontal cooperation experience with the EU. Japan itself recognises the importance of its international development know-how when stating that it has faced ‘many successes and failures, and has accumulated a wealth of experience, expertise’ and lessons learnt (MOFA, 2015, p. 3). The Japanese Development Cooperation Charter goes on and states that ‘such experience, expertise and lessons [learnt] contribute to addressing development challenges facing the world today, and the international community also has high expectations in this regard’ (MOFA, 2015, p. 3). In addition, ‘Japan has built a rich stock of experiences during its own economic development process and can make them available for

developing countries through aid, [...] respecting recipient's own values and needs. Indeed, this is Japan's unique contribution to the international community as well as its major responsibility' (MOFA, 1991, pp. 80-81).

This involves that by sharing the Japanese experience on triangular cooperation with strategic partners such as the European Union, Japan can consolidate its policy frame on horizontal cooperation, while at the same time reinforcing its network of actors 'so that it can play a leading role in creating international norms' (MOFA, 2015, p. 13). To address its ambitions from the Japanese Development Cooperation Charter and consolidate its entrepreneurial role in international development knowledge, Japan can reinforce its engagement with other actors such as the European Union and use the new SPA as a framework for exchanging knowledge for development and lessons learnt on horizontal cooperation. This would in turn support Japanese efforts in making the international dialogue more akin to incorporate the Japanese knowledge on how to use aid more effectively, expanding its network of actors and consolidating Japan's entrepreneurial role as a knowledge actor at a global level¹².

When moving into discussing about future perspectives of this potential bilateral dialogue, the importance of exchanging lessons learnt between the EU and Japan should be emphasised at two different levels: at the level of policymakers and at the level of development implementers. On the Japanese side, there is a tradition of having officials from JICA relocating to Brussels, London or Washington in order to shadow best institutional practices from other major donors¹³. Yet, if the EU-Japan dialogue is to make full use of the institutional framework offered by the SPA, actors from both sides can use the advantages of accessing a broader development knowledge network. Increasing the strategic use of such network would also help to materialise the policy ambitions framed through triangular cooperation, including mutual

¹² Interviews in Tokyo with Japanese officials and stakeholders, 1st-11th November 2019

¹³ Interviews in Tokyo with Japanese officials and stakeholders, 14th-31st October 2019

learning, supporting the consolidation of both the EU and Japan as policy entrepreneurs by building a broader network of knowledge on horizontal cooperation.

This will also help both actors to deal with one of the major symptoms of the development fatigue: the high number of promises for which both developed and developing countries have failed to deliver adapted responses. Of relevance for development implementers, static results-oriented (logframe) approaches have already proved their limitations on the ground. This is why there is an increasing acceptance of the fact that more realistic visions are needed, following the principles and practices of problem driven iterative adaptation (Floate et al., 2019), instead of solution driven programmes, incorporating more the local knowledge, building on local legitimacy. In this sense, while the EU has a broader experience in the African context, Japan has a more established presence in Asia. Mutually building on this network of experiences and actors will help both actors to access better the local knowledge and consolidate their entrepreneurial abilities in implementing horizontal cooperation initiatives¹⁴.

Triangular cooperation is only one example of a topic that can be crucial for such exchange, yet other topics can be introduced gradually on this bilateral agenda. They can include the nexus between international development and security, gender and environmental issues, ensuring that the European Union-Japan dialogue grows, deepens and becomes increasingly strategic for both actors¹⁵.

¹⁴ Interviews in Tokyo with Japanese officials and stakeholders, 14th October-11th November 2019

¹⁵ Interviews in Tokyo with Japanese officials and stakeholders, 14th October-11th November 2019

Concluding remarks

Previous authors have agreed that ‘European and Japanese contributions to global governance are essential, and that they will become of ever greater importance’ (Mayer, 2015, pp. 9-10), yet they have concluded that the two actors are still ‘in real danger of losing sight of each other’ (Mayer, 2015, p. 3). While the current article has adopted a much more optimistic vision, it does share the idea that the EU-Japan dialogue on development and international aid should be treated with caution. Moreover, even if the idea of a shared global responsibility has been a long-stated objective, it cannot be materialised if the two actors do not get to share the core of their international presence around the world, through the knowledge that they have gained by implementing development programmes and projects, and if they do not share their lessons learnt. The EU-Japan dialogue has still an ‘unfulfilled potential’ (Nakamura, 2015, p. 22) and the same can be said about their exchanges in terms of international development knowledge in general and horizontal cooperation more particularly, that can potentially reinforce their policy entrepreneurship by expanding their network of actors and supporting them in delivering on their policy frames and objectives. Building on the common normative ground in areas such as environmental norms (Schreurs, 2015), food security norms (Berends, 2015) and the preference for development cooperation over military presence (Midford, 2012), we can arguably understand how the two actors have developed similar approaches relevant to the aid and development policies. This has started even before signing an SPA, so we can expect this exercise to become only more relevant in the new institutionalised frameworks waiting for the different lessons learnt and international development experiences to be shared.

The current article has provided an argument for an emerging area of institutional exchange between the two actors in the context of the new Strategic Partnership and of the

related Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity, i.e., horizontal and triangular / trilateral cooperation. Differently from how the dialogue between the European Union and Japan has been presented in the literature, the argument developed here has highlighted the importance of building on the differences in development knowledge, and not only on similarities, which have and will indeed continue to help forging the bilateral cooperation and the EU-Japan entrepreneurship in international development. Given the scarcity of resources, the need to learn more and use better horizontal cooperation will only increase with time. Even if the new EU financial framework for 2021-2027 may have the potential to renew the EU discourse, delivering on this discourse remains a completely different issue, a matter of practice to be polished. To achieve this, the European Union may need to turn to other international donors such as Japan, showing how flexibility is not only part of the policy frame describing the EU financial approach to international development, but also a policy practice for the EU as an international development knowledge actor. On the side of Japan, it may be of strategic relevance to start sharing more the internationally recognised experience gained through its cooperation with developing partners and, through this, shape international norms in international development and aid. The SPA and the Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity provide in this context an institutional opportunity for both actors to start a journey aiming to accomplish such ambitions and support each other in this endeavour.

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