

## POST-DEVELOPMENT POSSIBILITIES FOR LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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### POST-DEVELOPMENT AS ONTOLOGICAL POLITICS

A post-development approach to world-making has arisen from a critique of the idea that development, especially economic development, is yoked to capitalist growth. This approach extends the long tradition of critique that has accompanied the hegemonic rise of a mainstream development project focused on the ‘problem’ of less developed regions of the world (Escobar 1995; MacGregor 2009). The deconstructive project of post-development thinking

- unhinges notions of development from the European experience of industrial growth and *capitalist expansion*,
- decenters conceptions of Economy and de-essentializes economic logics as the motor of history,
- loosens the discursive grip of unilinear trajectories on narratives of change, and
- undermines the hierarchical valuation of cultures, practices and places.

In essence, this project has proposed a complete unravelling of the unexamined certainties of modernist social science as applied to social and economic development.

The post-development agenda is not, however, anti-development. As we see it, the challenge of post-development is not to give up on development, but to imagine and practice development differently. Thus post-development thinking does not attempt to represent the world “as it is,” but the world “as it could be.” In this sense it breaks from the commitment to epistemological realism that underpins so much mainstream and radical social analysis. Accepting the inevitable performativity of language—its power to create the effects that it names (Butler 1993, 2; Law and Urry 2004)—post-development thinking attempts to perform new worlds by generating new and experimental discourses and practices of development.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos outlines what is at stake when we reject the intellectual landscape that has been colonized, as he sees it, by the hegemonic monocultures of modern science and high culture, linear time, hierarchical classification systems, scalar spatial framings and capitalist growth dynamics (2004: 238-239). Freed from these systems of thinking, the positivity of

“development” and “developed” or “leading” regions is not set against the negativity of “underdevelopment” and “less developed” or “lagging” regions. Instead we are able to appreciate how developmental thinking has produced a sociology of absences—“non-existent” places, regions and nations where any vestige of (self-defined) development has been “disqualified and rendered invisible, unintelligible, or irreversibly discardable” (238). As a counter to this evacuated landscape, post-development thinking works to reinstate and create multiple and different knowledges, temporalities, forms of recognition (as opposed to classification), trans-scale relationships and dynamics of productivity. By establishing ecologies of difference at the centre of world being, we can take an ontological and political leap and begin to imagine and enact a wide range of possibilities for local and regional development.

One way to illustrate the difference a post-development approach makes is to contrast it with the latest in high modernist thinking on regional development as represented in the World Development Report entitled “Reshaping Economic Geography” (World Bank 2009). In this document places are located on a developmental continuum determined by their distance (to markets), density (of market activity) and divisions (preventing freedom of trade and migration). Development is conceived as inherently uneven, unidirectional and capitalist (though not needing to be named as such, because economists have rendered non-capitalist economic activity non-credible or non-existent):

Growing cities, ever more mobile people, and increasingly specialized products are integral to development. These changes have been most noticeable in North America, Western Europe, and Northeast Asia. But countries in East and South Asia and Eastern Europe are now experiencing changes that are similar in their scope and speed. **World Development Report 2009: Reshaping Economic Geography** concludes that such transformations will remain essential for economic success in other parts of the developing world and should be encouraged. (World Bank 2009: xix)

This report has a different message: economic growth will be unbalanced. To try to spread it out is to discourage it—to fight prosperity, not poverty. But development can still be inclusive, even for people who start their lives distant from dense economic activity. For growth to be rapid and shared, governments must promote economic integration, the pivotal concept, as this report argues, in the policy debates on urbanization, territorial development, and regional integration. Instead, all three debates overemphasize place-

based interventions. (World Bank 2009: <http://go.worldbank.org/RBDWKOYCYC90> accessed 9 November 2009)

We are familiar with the sectoral transformations needed for economic growth—the changes in work and organization as agrarian economies become industrialized and service oriented. This Report discusses the spatial transformations that also must happen for countries to develop. Higher densities, shorter distances, and lower divisions will remain essential for economic success in the foreseeable future. They should be encouraged. With them will come unbalanced growth. When accompanied by policies for integration calibrated to the economic geography of nations, these changes also will bring inclusive development—sooner, not much later. (World Bank 2009: 32)

What is so remarkable about this report is its pragmatic “acceptance” that economic growth is uneven and its refusal to inquire into the causes and consequences of this unevenness for places on the “lagging” end of the development continuum (Rigg et al. 2009). Here we see the normative vision of Chicago School economics laid out with celebratory naiveté—complete with a unidirectional and singular trajectory of development that will enrol all places into one integrated system modelled on advanced capitalist economies. The report and its recommendations will, no doubt, reverberate through all the international institutions that the World Bank is connected to, influencing policy and practice on the ground (Mitchell 2005). Its performative effect will be to perpetuate a vision of the world in which localities and regions are presented with no alternative but to hitch themselves to the engine of capitalist growth or, where this is not feasible, for people to move to successful regions.

From a post-development perspective the Report’s hopeful adherence to world trickle-down seems anachronistic, its blind belief in the market foolish and the failure to account for the environmental consequences of continued growth, as we have known it, immoral. So what might post-development offer instead?

### **LOCAL AND REGIONAL POST-DEVELOPMENT IN THEORY**

A post-development approach to local and regional development starts from the premise that space has not already been colonized by capitalism. When the prevalence, density, and efficiency of capitalist economic relations are not used as the gauge of development we are free to apprehend social space in many different ways. Places are not situated within a hierarchy of

valuation in which cultures are modern or primitive and economies advanced or backward. The bald indices of human development (infant mortality, calories consumed, longevity, etc.) will still display vast disparities across regions of the globe. But there is no projection of a singular pathway towards improved well-being. Development objectives can be opened up to local assessment and it becomes possible to imagine many different development pathways that build on local assets, experience and expectations.

While the discourse of capitalist hegemony is rampant in economic science, the murky reality is that most of the world is sustained by diverse economic relations, many of which cannot be framed as capitalist. Within development studies this heterogeneity of economic relations in the global south, or majority world, is a major focus of the sustainable livelihoods approach (Chambers and Conway 1992; Scoones 1998). In both the majority and minority world the economic identity of localities and regions can be appreciated using a weak theory of economy that inventories the variety of enterprise types and forms of labor, property, transactions and finance that coexist in any one site. Figure 1 shows the diverse economy frame that we have used to ‘map’ economic space. Capitalist economic relations (including capitalist enterprise in which surplus value is produced, appropriated and distributed on the basis of waged labor, private property, production for the market and mainstream finance) are only the tip of the economy iceberg. People in places and regions are sustained by a vast array of non-capitalist and alternative capitalist enterprises, unpaid and alternatively paid labor, alternative private and open access property, non-market and alternative market transactions and alternative and non-market finance. In many of the so-called “lagging regions” within nations there is a vibrant diverse economy that has sustained people and ecosystems for generations (Carnegie 2008; Gibson-Graham 2005; Pretes and Gibson 2008). Colonial and modern development interventions have often undermined or destroyed local networks and practices of social and environmental habitat maintenance, thereby contributing to the poverty that is taken as an indicator of lack of development (Gibson, Cahill and McKay 2010). A post-development approach does not ignore the need expressed by many in such locations for change that will increase well-being, but starts from a standpoint of “not knowing” with respect to how to move forward, allowing both practical and normative visions to emerge from the local or regional context.

The very idea of development implies a dynamic of change over time. But when development dynamics are not conceptualized in terms of the systemic logics of the capitalist growth machine (e.g., commoditization, proletarianization, mechanization, specialization, capital accumulation,

concentration, capital and labor migration) we are able to imagine many other dynamics that operate and could be purposefully stimulated. A post-development theory of change appreciates the complexity of interdependent developments and co-developments but sees ethico-political decisions, rather than structural imperatives, as capable of activating development pathways that will unfold in unpredictable ways. By humbly acknowledging up front the uncertain outcomes of our actions, we can monitor and attempt to minimize the damage to extant, functioning economic and ecological systems, as new interventions are introduced.

When ethical action is seen as contributing to developmental dynamics, we are able to imagine supporting and initiating processes that produce widespread well-being directly (rather than via the circuitous route of capitalist industrialization) (Healy and Graham 2008). We can begin to explore the contributors to system resilience and start to mimic natural ecological dynamics that sustain habitats and maintain diversity (Gibson, Cahill and McKay 2010). With this widened vision of economic ecologies of productivity we can think about ways that local and regional development might build sustaining economies that start with the assets at hand in any place. To summarize, the post-development approach to local and regional development

- recognizes and builds upon the diversity of economic practices that sustain livelihoods;
- recognizes market and other transactions as constitutive of community;
- recognizes and expands the diversity of development pathways;
- emphasises relationships rather than logics of development;
- acknowledges and builds upon the economic interdependence of individuals and groups;
- starts with what is in place and builds from there (in other words, it is assets-based and path-dependent).

How might such a post-development approach inform policy and planning on the ground?

## **POST-DEVELOPMENT PATHWAYS**

Cultural analyst Raymond Williams reminds us that the modern term “region” originates from the Latin words *regionem*—direction, boundary, district—and *regere*—to direct or to rule (Gibson, 2001: 643):

In imperial and church government, and later in the development of centralized nation-states, region thus became not only a part, but a subordinate part, of a larger political entity. (1983:264-265)

In a similar hierarchy of meaning the term “local” became positioned as only ever the product of dynamic political and economic forces that operate at a larger scale. Thus local and regional

development has traditionally been seen as subordinate to the rule of capital which operates on a global scale. The place of planning and policy is to align regions and localities in such a way as to capture the dynamism that emanates from the logic of capitalist development.

A post-development local and regional development agenda involves taking back the economy as an ethical and political space of decision and the locality and region as sites of differentiation and possibility. The normative vision that might guide development interventions will be grounded in the specificities of place. In this section we review various cases where communities and regions have attempted to create different development pathways as they travel, guided by clearly stated ethical principles. Our commitment to the slogan of the World Social Forum, “Another world is possible,” has drawn us to experiments with building local and regional community economies in which

- well-being is increased directly by a variety of mechanisms,
- surplus generation is used as a force for constituting and strengthening communities,
- a commons is created, shared and replenished,
- new economic subjects are created.

### **1. Cooperative culture guiding regional development**

In the economically depressed and war-ravaged Basque region of Spain Father José Maria Arizmendiarietta, a Catholic priest versed in emancipatory social theory, set himself the goal of promoting unity in a society fractured by civil war and political division (Gibson-Graham 2003). Starting in the 1940s, he initiated over the subsequent decades some 2000 study circles on socialist, humanist and religious topics. Out of these groups emerged the future leadership of a complex system of worker-owned cooperatives that forms the basis of what is today one of the most successful and resilient regional economies in Europe. Beginning in 1956 with one cooperative business making paraffin cook stoves for a largely unserved domestic market, the Mondragón Cooperative Corporation (MCC) now spans a diverse range of sectors supplying international markets. It produces consumer goods (e.g., domestic appliances, furniture, and sports equipment), capital goods, especially machine tools for the automotive, aeronautic and domestic appliance sectors, and industrial components. It is also involved in construction, health care, education, housing, social security and pension management, business services and retail. In 2008 the MCC employed just under 93,000 workers, with 83% of those working in the Industry Area being worker-owner co-operators (<http://www.Mondragón-corporation.com/ENG/Economic-Data/Most-relevant-data.aspx> accessed 12/11/09).

There are a number of keys to the success of the experimental development pathway initiated in Mondragón. At the core of regional economic transformation are a set of cooperative ethical principles including open admission, democratic organization, the sovereignty of labor, the instrumental and subordinate nature of capital, participatory management, payment solidarity and inter-cooperation. These principles guide all economic decisions. They have shaped the economic development of the community ensuring that meeting the needs of the many is put before individual gain. Potential members are, for example, assisted to raise the initial capital needed to become worker owners and the relatively flat pay scale minimizes income disparities in the region.

Another principle, that of social transformation, is consciously enacted via the consolidation and reinvestment of the surplus (net profits) generated by the cooperatives. Early on in the growth of the cooperatives, it became clear that there was a need for an overarching financial institution that could manage co-operator savings and marshal the surplus of the entire cooperative complex to foster new cooperatives and create more jobs. With the formation of the *Caja Laboral Popular* or Working People's Bank, the cooperatives as a group made the decision to require that the profit shares of individual co-operators be deposited in the bank until retirement. This created a pool of surplus available for investment in new cooperatives including, eventually, one charged with the development and nurturing of cooperative businesses. They offer rigorous business planning and provide on-site assistance with cooperative start-ups, guiding their development for several years until they are able to manage on their own.

On the basis of internally generated wealth and expertise, Mondragón has been able to create a multi-sector cooperative economy and engender region-wide prosperity. This post-development pathway has not been without pitfalls and problems. The early success of Mondragón was built on the emergence of new communal subjects able to navigate ethical decisions around individuality and collectivity, present gain and responsibility to future generations. But maintaining high levels of worker ownership has become one of the major challenges in an organization that in recent years has thrived by expanding into Europe and Asia, absorbing capitalist companies and including a non-cooperator workforce. Driven by a primary commitment to Basque regional development, the MCC has become a hybrid organization in which the ethical issues of cooperativism, place loyalty and internationalism require continual

debate and re-negotiation. The adherence to cooperative principles is an ongoing struggle rather than a fait accompli.

On the MCC website the inspirational views of Father Arizmendiarietta are still to be heard:

The present, however splendid it may be, bears the seeds of its own ruin if it becomes separated from the future.

<http://www.Mondragón-corporation.com/ENG/Co-operativism/Co-operative-Experience.aspx> (accessed 12/11/09)

In the Basque region of Spain we have an example of a longstanding, experimental, path dependent form of post-development that continues to inspire people around the globe to be the future they want to see.

## **2. Social/solidarity economy movements guiding regional development**

In the Canadian province of Quebec another successful experiment in economic development driven by social values has unfolded over the past few decades. This French-speaking “nation” of some 7.5 million citizens has a long history of strong labor unions, cooperatives and mutual benefit associations. Over the past two decades community activism and other social and environmental movements have gained organizational strength. While once co-existing in relative isolation, in the late 1990s these sectors, organizations and issue-based movements identified themselves together as members of a “social” or “solidarity” economy. The social economy refers to “a set of activities and organizations stemming from collective entrepreneurship” organized around certain principles and operating rules that put community benefit before private profit (Mendell 2009, 186). The language of the social/solidarity economy has been an important mobilizing tool, allowing this new movement to demonstrate that they are an essential part of the Quebec economy. Recognition has led to political clout (Neamtan 2008).

The post-development pathway followed in Quebec has involved the development and integration of institutions capable of orchestrating an alternative style of economic development. Initially, drawing on funds marshalled by unions (Fonds de solidarité) community initiatives emerging from community economic development corporations were supported in low income neighborhoods. Many new social enterprises committed to providing “*new services* that meet *new needs* or *previously unsatisfied needs*” were developed (Mendell 2009, 179 emphasis in original). By the

early years of this century, the Quebec social economy included 935 childcare centres, 103 homecare enterprises, 671 credit unions, 180 worker cooperatives and 72 worker-shareholder cooperatives that together provided 167,302 jobs (190). These enterprises are not substitutes for public provision. Given the magnitude and job-creating power of the social economy in Quebec the movement has established a working relationship with the provincial government, demanding “the same kind of support for our collective enterprises that the government has given to the private for-profit sector” (Neamtan 2008, 272). Most importantly they gained operating costs for their coordinating institution, the Chantier de l’Economie Sociale, that have increased from \$250,000 per annum 1996-98 to \$650,000 per annum 2006-08 (Mendell 2009, 187).

The Chantier is a democratically organized representational body that negotiates with government on behalf of its social economy membership. It functions as a support organization that networks social enterprises, unions, cooperatives and non-profits, creating internal markets, securing public sector markets, providing training directly and ensuring that colleges and universities meet the training needs of the social economy. It is also a social innovation hub for the sector that produces regular community maps and identifies new opportunities for enterprises. Innovative initiatives are sought out not primarily in order to solve problems in the community, but to build capacity.

The Chantier is committed to economic democratization which means, among other things, collective and community ownership. One of the main barriers to community ownership and wealth-building is the lack of appropriate legal frameworks and accounting norms for social enterprise. To address this lack, the Chantier is developing social accounting techniques for measuring collective value-added as well as formulating new legal instruments and entities for the social economy (Mendell 2009, 189). It has created its own investment tools so that it can support enterprises focused on maximizing social and environmental returns on investment, rather than financial return to financial institutions and shareholders. In 2007, as part of its co-construction policy, the Chantier obtained a government grant to establish the Fiducie du Chantier de l’Economie Sociale, a financial institution that offers long term patient capital for enterprise development. In a province in which the manufacturing and resource sectors, especially pulp and paper, are struggling or facing closures, the challenges for employment generation are great. So far social economy developments have generated impressive job growth in a multitude of small establishments. Whether this sector can ever fully replace the employment levels associated with large scale industry is unclear.

Post-development possibilities in Quebec have been realized by a partnership between social economy actors and policy makers in government. Together they have provided an enabling environment in which needs in households and neighborhoods have been directly met with childcare, homecare, artistic outlets, accessible finance and housing. Surplus has been deployed to strengthen the social economy, which has been able to meet the issue of economic development “head-on, without losing our value system” (Neamtan 2008, 270).

### **THEORY AND POST-DEVELOPMENT POSSIBILITY**

Mondragón and Quebec present inspirational experiments with ethically driven regional development that have created economies focused on producing direct social benefit. In both cases great importance has been placed on a non-capitalocentric language of economy and support for emerging economic subjectivities. The role of intellectuals in helping to consolidate new developmental pathways is publicly acknowledged. In the case of Mondragón, Father Arizmendiarietta introduced theories of economic and social justice and the model of the Rochdale co-operators to unemployed youths and helped them conceptualize new forms of economic organization. In Quebec, university based researchers are involved in collaborative partnerships with government and movement actors mapping, documenting, conceptualizing and measuring the social economy as part of a strategic mobilization to gain prominence in policy arenas (Mendell 2009, 202). To take another example, in Brazil where solidarity economy activism has grown dramatically in recent years, social enterprises are being set up in university incubators. The incubator at Universidade Regional do Noroeste do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul, for example, is part of a university extension program that

...promotes citizenship, work and social inclusion, supported by principles and values of the solidarity economy (co-operation, self-management, solidarity, valorization of the worker and sustainable development). (Lechat 2009, 164)

Building on Paulo Freire’s vision of empowerment through popular education and participation, these incubators not only advise about business development but cultivate newly knowledgeable subjects of a distinctively Brazilian solidarity economy.

In all these contexts we see intellectuals or academics working alongside others in research collectives. This observation offers a key to thinking about the role of concepts and theories in local and regional post-development. As thinkers we can choose to contribute to an enabling environment in which specific, place-based strategies for increasing well-being will emerge. If we

start from the premise that there is no one theory or pathway of local and regional development, how might we bring our conceptual training to bear on the making of new worlds?

We have shown how rethinking the identity of the economy produces a proliferation of ways of meeting material needs in the social economy. While there is a lively debate about theorizing the social economy (e.g., Amin 2009), the conceptual representation of diverse economies is still very much a work in progress (Gibson-Graham 2006; 2008). In particular there is a dearth of thinking about developmental dynamics outside the confines of systemic capitalocentric logics of change. How might we represent the dynamic properties of solidarity economies as they are currently unfolding? How do we represent regional and local development in terms of interdependent developments and co-developments that are consciously initiated by strategic ethical decisions but that evolve in unpredictable ways? There is research to be done in collaboration with practitioners on the ground to recognize new dynamics and help to analyse their trajectories. Graham and Cornwell (2009) have worked with two community organizations in Massachusetts to help identify the ethical dynamics of development that they have activated. They have theorized the tensions and pay-offs in a large cooperative housing organization between, for example, “deciding to meet the *needs* of all tenants for affordable food or to maintain and restore the *commons*—the housing complex itself” (52, emphasis in original). They identify the practices that are “reclaiming the commons” by increasing publicly accessible garden space in the city of Holyoke, and the tough decisions being made about how to share out common space to landless immigrants keen to farm (53). Added to these complex dynamics of interdependence they identify unique dynamics of organizational growth that 1) is membership-led and community driven, 2) emerges through a process of organic/logical evolution, and 3) is fuelled by transforming individuals (55-62). By producing this collaborative knowledge of change, the organizations and the social economy of which they are a part become more credible (and therefore powerful) and available as inspirations and models for development in other regions.

In another context researchers have begun to draw on ecological dynamics of development to understand the choices about development pathways facing poor rural communities in the Philippines. In collaboration with community based researchers Gibson, Cahill and McKay (2010) have identified many of the diverse economic practices and cultural traditions that sustain local social and environmental well-being at the municipal level. Guided by Jacobs’ ecologically inspired discussion of economic diversity and the resilience of regions (2000), they have theorized strategies for strengthening local economies by maintaining and proliferating diverse economic

relations—including both a wider range of sectors as well as different transactions, forms of labor and enterprise types. Here we see conceptual extension as a means of bringing theory to bear on post-development possibilities.

The aim of post-development theorizing about local and regional development does not preclude involvement of people and places with capitalist enterprise, wage labor, formal markets or mainstream financial institutions. This is perhaps where there is most need for new concepts and theories that allow for truly interdependent development. How might localities and regions foster the development of socially and environmentally responsible capitalist enterprises that distribute a share of privately appropriated surplus to community well-being and environmental health as well as providing well paid and secure employment? Working with capitalist corporations to enhance the resilience of diverse local economies will involve very different strategies than those usually pursued by local economic development agencies (see, for example, Gibson-Graham 2006, 181-83).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, academics and public intellectuals are in a position to foster and spread the post-development ethos, including its stance of “not knowing” (or not knowing too much) and its consequent openness to possibility and plurality:

...future society probably must be pluralist in all its organizations including the economic. There will be action and interaction of publicly owned firms and private firms, the market and planning, entities of paternalistic style, capitalist and social. Every juncture, the nature of every activity, the level of evolution and the development of every community, will require a special treatment...not limited to one form of organization if we believe in and love man, his liberty, and justice, and democracy. (Arizmendiarieta, quoted in Whyte and Whyte 1988, 239)

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**THE DIVERSE ECONOMY**

<b>ENTERPRISE</b>	<b>LABOR</b>	<b>PROPERTY</b>	<b>TRANSACTIONS</b>	<b>FINANCE</b>
<b>CAPITALIST</b>	<b>WAGE</b>	<b>PRIVATE</b>	<b>MARKET</b>	<b>MAINSTREAM MARKET</b>
<b>ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST</b> State owned Environmentally responsible Socially responsible Non-profit	<b>ALTERNATIVE PAID</b> Self-employed Reciprocal labor In-kind Work for welfare	<b>ALTERNATIVE PRIVATE</b> State-managed assets Customary (clan) land Community land trusts Indigenous knowledge (Intellectual Property)	<b>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</b> Fair trade Alternative currencies Underground market Barter	<b>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</b> Cooperative Banks Credit unions Community-based financial institutions Micro-finance
<b>NON-CAPITALIST</b> Worker cooperatives Sole proprietorships Community enterprise Feudal Slave	<b>UNPAID</b> Housework Volunteer Self-provisioning Slave labor	<b>OPEN ACCESS</b> Atmosphere International Waters Open source IP Outer Space	<b>NON-MARKET</b> Household sharing Gift giving Hunting, fishing, gathering Theft, piracy, poaching	<b>NON-MARKET</b> Sweat equity Family lending Donations Interest-free loans

## FURTHER READING

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**BIO**

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