

Alternative Development is no longer an alternative – Post-development could be

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Abstract

In the early 1970s, Alternative Development proposals offered new insights based on new concepts, discourses, and practices that purported a paradigm shift away from the economic emphasis of development. In this context, multiple alternative development proposals emerged and, despite some of them having reached a key place in the global agenda, this paper argues that they went through a co-optation process which drove them to lose the opportunity for being a counter-paradigm to economic development. At this point the challenge is decisively to move from 'Alternative Development' to 'Alternatives to Development'. On these grounds, and from a post-development point of view, new options are being imagined and designed outside the "development box", which seem to be overcoming the narrowness of the linear economic development concepts and the naiveté of the alternative development proposals.

Keywords: Alternatives to Development, Post-development, Development Discourses, Hegemony, Co-optation

Mientras las Alternativas de Desarrollo ya no son una alternativa, el Post-desarrollo podría serlo

Resumen

A principios de la década de 1970, las propuestas de Desarrollo Alternativo ofrecían ideas basadas en nuevos conceptos, discursos y prácticas que pretendían un cambio de paradigma, alejándose del énfasis económico del desarrollo. Múltiples propuestas alternativas de desarrollo surgieron y, a pesar de que algunas de ellas han alcanzado un lugar central en la agenda global, este documento argumenta que pasaron por un proceso de cooptación que las llevó a perder la oportunidad de ser un contra-paradigma para el desarrollo económico. De allí que el desafío actual sea pasar de las 'Alternativas de Desarrollo' a las 'Alternativas al desarrollo'. Por lo tanto, y desde perspectivas más

allá del desarrollo, se están ideando y diseñando nuevas opciones fuera del molde conceptual, discursivo y práctico del desarrollo, que parecen estar superando la estrechez del desarrollo económico lineal y la ingenuidad de las propuestas alternativas de desarrollo.

Palabras clave: Alternativas al desarrollo, Post-desarrollo, Discursos de desarrollo, Hegemonía, Cooptación.

Introduction

In the early 1970s several Alternative Development proposals were put forward in the development arena, offering new insights based on different theoretical commitments. New discourses, concepts and practices purported a paradigm shift away from the economic emphasis of development. A renewed perception of what development should be and how it could be reached through a more comprehensive understanding was on the way.

From this new starting point, multiple proposals emerged and, despite some of them having reached a prominent place in the global agenda, this paper argues that they went through a co-optation process which drove them to lose the opportunity to become a counter-paradigm to economic development. On these grounds, new options are being imagined and designed outside of the development box, which seem to be overcoming the narrowness of the linear economic development concepts and the naiveté of the alternative development proposals.

We refer to the narrowness of the economic development paradigm as it stems from its belief that one discipline –economy– is able to address all the concerns of human societies; also because since its earlier proponents, such as (Rostow, 1960), until more recent ones, such as the neoliberal consensus, it has had as its main goal the intrinsic dynamic between an increasing production system and the escalating mass consumption that sustains it. This dynamic can only be maintained to the extent that nature is considered a deposit of infinite resources to be exploited while returning the corresponding amounts of waste, which has been proved wrong.

The naiveté of the promoters of alternative development makes itself evident in the process happening during the last few decades, in which their arguments, rhetoric, and even some of their practices have found their way into the mainstream development theory, discourses and practices, as will be explained below. However, instead of being a genuine integration to shift the economic perspective from the core of mainstream development thinking, this way has been paved by co-optation.

Hence, this article is focused on the analysis of this process of co-optation, and on the key features of the new options outside the development box. This article forms a part of a wider body of research undertaken by the author to examine ‘how alternative development proposals relate to post-development thought’, and as such it responds to many of the issues that stem from this concern. It has been

structured as follows: firstly, an examination of the characteristics of what has been known as alternative development is presented. In the following section, we argue that, though it was meant to be a counter-current of thought to challenge economic development, a co-optation process made alternative development lose its opportunity for being brought into practice and achieve some transformations of the core logic of economic development. In the third part, we offer a brief characterisation of post-development proposals and the main arguments that suggest that post-development seems to be in the firm path of theoretical and practical consolidation as an avenue to the welfare of human societies, so long as it avoids the risk of co-optation. The closing section summarizes the article and outlines some of the present challenges for the new options coming forward, away from the orthodox approach on development and, particularly, for post-development.

The emergence of Alternative Development proposals

From the 1940s to the 1970s, development discussions in terms of a variety of strategies and the main precepts lying beneath them focused almost exclusively on macroeconomic issues related to the national income, production, employment and investment, among others (Ayres, 1944; Dobbs, 1947; Lewis, 1955; Liebestein, 1957; Kuznets, 1959; Agarwala and Singh, 1969). Therefore, a series of neglected problematic subjects that required new perspectives and the need of contributions from different disciplines soon became evident. This realisation ultimately underpinned the elaboration of a number of unconventional development proposals, gathered under the category of Alternative Development.

Some widely acknowledged early contributions, which have been fundamental to spurring international discussion and debate concerning the rapid changes to the natural environment, include those from Georgescu-Roegen, (1971), Goldsmith *et al.* (1972) and *The Report on the Limits to Growth* (Meadows *et al.*, 1972). Further notable publications stimulating debates on other topics closely related to the well-being of human societies have similarly been offered. Among them, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources Yearbook (IUCN, 1973) which claimed the need for new global ethics and new economic order; *Towards the Steady-State Economy* (Daly, 1973), arguing more controversial propositions, such as the need to establish a constant economy and cease the endless economic growing; and those that questioned the western developed lifestyle (Schumacher, 1973) were, at that time, part of this innovative current of thought.

Since then, a wide variation of themes has joined the set of Alternative Development proposals, turning it into a broad blanket category where extremely diverse points of view can be found. Included amongst them, for example, are inequality in access, use, and distribution of multiple resources, such as land, water or food (Colom-Jaén and Campos-Serrano, 2013); the promotion of democratic pluralism and citizen participation (Verkoren and Kamphuis, 2013); the rejection of

authoritarian regimes (Dorussen, 2005); the empowerment of vulnerable communities (Johnson, 2005); explicit anti-capitalist schemes (Sharpe, 2010); religious approaches (Bhalotra *et al.*, 2014); projects that challenge global institutions (Kokko *et al.*, 2014) alternative practices as bases for local development (Coughlin, 1996), as well as communitarian initiatives (Mangone, 2008); green pressure perspectives (Adapon, 2015); feminist approaches (Pati, 2006); alternative consumption paths (Maxwell and Sheate, 2006); and cultural critics (Platteau and Peccoud, 2011) to name only a few.

In terms of the appearance of specific alternative development concepts, some of those that have gained room in the global agenda have included: local development (Pecqueur, 1989; European Commission, 2010; The Countryside Agency - UK, 2013), participatory development (World Bank, 1992), human development (UNDP, 1990), development with gender perspective (World Bank, 2013), territorial development (OECD, 1993), sustainable development (IISD, 1992; World Bank, 1997). The involvement of global decision-maker institutions in spreading such concepts, like the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and others at regional or national level (like the European Commission or the British Countryside Agency, among others), should be particularly noted.

A review of the diversity of alternative development proposals makes it evident that they are characterised by several elements: in general terms, they have ended up related to a whole array of human society issues that go beyond economics, but, in particular, most of them have put their emphasis in one domain of the infinite political, social, cultural, environmental or ethical issues related to human welfare. This emphasis is expressed using an adjective + the noun 'development' (e.g. bottom-up development, urban development, endogenous development, social development, political development, and so on). With no distinction, whatsoever, under the same label of alternative development proposals, this emphasis can be focused on a particular type of objectives (e.g. a new global ethic), on specific methods to reach better levels of development (e.g. participatory approaches), on particular populations (e.g. with gender perspective), and on the promotion of particular values (e.g. equity, sustainability). Most of them shift between either incomplete and/or inaccurate proposals to comprehensive and therefore, highly complex ones, which become non-viable when put into practice. And despite their inaccuracy or lack of viability, most of them have been promoted as a universal pattern to follow, offering a new model instead of the economic one.

Although the aforementioned premises could give support to the concerns about their disparity of objectives, agents, methodologies and values, and their loose profile, which leaves many areas open, to the extent that it can hardly be considered a counter-paradigm to economic development (Healey, 2003; Korten, 1990; Nederveen, 2004), it is claimed that the alternative development current of thought did have enough elements to consolidate a paradigm shift. As stated by Kuhn (1962) the constitution of a new paradigm requires reevaluation, revision, and reconstruction of prior theories, instruments, values and assumptions, in such a way that: "[r]ather than being an interpreter, the scientist who embraces a new

paradigm is like the man wearing inverting lenses. Confronting the same constellation of objects as before and knowing that he does so, he nevertheless finds them transformed” (Kuhn 1962, 111).

There are good examples of judicious alternative development proposals funded on inverting lenses to confront the same constellation of objects, implying new values, commitments, and assumptions that entailed a different explanatory framework when it came to the development paradigm. Among them, for example, are Human Scale Development (Max-Neef, 1986), based on the statement that the human needs are finite, well-defined and unchanging over the time; Real-Life Economy, based on a different understanding of the nature of human work, its value and economic autonomy (Ekins, 1992); the Three Chamber-System, advocating for distinct relations between the governmental, private and citizen domains (Nerfin, 1985); and a new ethic based on commonality values (Sheth, 1887).

A review of the consolidation of the alternative development currents of thought shows that they correspond to a first moment in which alternative development proposals, like those already mentioned, shifted from being moderately to openly contradictory of the key features of the development paradigm of economic growth, and clearly differentiated themselves from it. In addition, alternative proposals share basic interwoven elements that could have been logically united under the same paradigm: for example, (i) the participation of all sectors of the population, hence the inclusion of the point of view of women, the elderly, young people, different ethnicities, and so on, and which includes (ii) the respect and recognition of other types of knowledge and perceptions (local, indigenous, traditional, among others) being, therefore, equitable in accepting and valuing epistemic differences; and (iii) the need for different values at the core of the development paradigm, such as solidarity (instead of economic growth) which entails new ethical commitments and goals.

Why, then, did this variety of alternative development proposals fail to consolidate itself as a paradigm and a set of practices to be brought into human societies in order to replace the universal goal of the economic growth? The next section puts forth a plausible answer to this question.

A co-optation process

If the main principles of alternative proposals failed to reveal themselves as a consolidated paradigm and a proper set of practices it was due to the co-optation of their concepts, discourses and practices, in accordance with this argument some features of this process are now briefly described.

A particular development paradigm must be able to express its corresponding definition of reality; for instance, in the particular context of the aftermath of World War II, a complex set of international institutions were created and actively

promoted a particular world view in order to put this definition of reality into action: “the industrial mode of production, which was no more than one, among many, forms of social life, became the definition of the terminal stage of a unilinear way of social evolution” (Esteva 1996, 56). Derived from industrialisation, a virtuous and infinite cycle of production, employment, income, consumption, and again production would be generated, offering the opportunity for continuous economic growth to all layers of human societies –through the trickle-down effect–, leaving behind the undignified state of underdevelopment and reaching instead higher levels of development. Postcolonial analyses note that thereafter the North-South relations, long understood in light of the colonizers-colonized relationship, were read under a new light: development-underdevelopment. It was also identified that: “Under the hegemony of development, apparatuses of knowledge production (for example, the World Bank, planning and development agencies, etc.) established a new economy of truth different from that of the colonial era” (Peet and Hartwick 2009, 223).

This particular world-view was rapidly embraced, not only by governments of a wide variety of political currents throughout the world, but also reinforced by a number of international and national institutions, and even by different types of civil society organisations. Such wide-ranged support proved fundamental in turning the industrial production and economic growth-based paradigm into a hegemonic way of thinking that remains until the present day as a universal goal. Hegemonic, indeed, given the success of a dominant group in having their definition of the world as it should be is accepted by the remaining groups as common sense and: “[the] practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its rule but manages to win the active consent of the governed” (Gramsci 1968, 182). Precisely, on this latter issue, the exercise of hegemony and co-optation are closely intertwined.

To co-opt is defined as: “to lure an opponent into becoming a supporter (...) the *outsider* thinks he is convincing or changing the *insiders*” (Safire 2008, 151). Hence, the establishment is hegemonic because a particular definition of reality through a development paradigm becomes universally accepted. To further cement the domination of the ruling group over the others, in winning the active consent of the majority the imposition of such paradigm is thus also achieved through co-optation. It is exercised in such a way that those on whom it is imposed end up being convinced this it is their own proposal, their own model, and the *outsiders* think they are convincing or changing the *insiders*. Graffiti at the Colombian National University clearly summarizes these ideas: “The problem is not what the adversary thinks; the problem is that they think about it in our own heads.”

Before long, some of the concerns and concepts originating within the alternative proposals appeared to be integrated into mainstream discourses. This fact was initially read as a success. That is, that apparently some of the alternative principles and narratives of the outsiders were replacing economic growth as the core of the development paradigm for insiders.

One example is offered by the series of the World Development Reports of the World Bank. The first of these reports (1978) stated:

The past quarter century has seen great progress in developing countries. In virtually all of them, income has risen faster than population, with a consequent rise in income per person. Economic growth has been accompanied by (...) structural changes, including a growing industrial base and greater urbanization. Progress on such a wide front and the steadily growing capacity of developing countries to manage their economies effectively are impressive achievements (World Bank 1978, 12).

Only two years later, the third report of the same series asserted: “One of its central themes is the importance of people in development (...) Human development alone cannot overcome absolute poverty; but it is an essential complement to other steps to raise the productivity and incomes of the poor” (World Bank 1980, 12). One year after the release of the Sustainable Development concept (e.g. the known as Brundtland Report), the foreword of the 1988 report was devoted to sustainable fiscal deficits, sustainable level of debt, sustainable policies, and finally, to sustainable reform. In the follow-on in the 1990s, it was written: “During the past three decades the developing world has made enormous economic progress. This can be seen most clearly in the rising trend for incomes and consumption: between 1965 and 1985 consumption per capita in the developing world went up by almost 70 percent. Broader measures of *well-being* confirm this picture” (World Bank 1990, 1).

Since then, a substantial number of the concepts offered by alternative ways of thinking have become part of the mainstream development narratives, and the international and national institutions which promote it. However, and despite the image of the progressive alternative discourses, the core practices related to seeking unrelenting economic growth did not change, but were instead reinforced. Soon, the clear frontiers between conventional economic development and alternative proposals blurred into what was mockingly named Mainstream Alternative Development (MAD).

Those alternative unconventional proposals that could be absorbed into the mainstream economic paradigm not only became assimilated into the complex set of development theory, but also ended up renovating the discourses and some practices of the very same paradigm they were attempting to resist. At the same time, the economic development paradigm has kept its essence untouched and unchallenged. Furthermore, as a trap of deceit and manipulation, in practical terms the co-optation of alternative and progressive proposals has meant (and still means) significant obstacles for development practitioners and for a number of communities throughout the world in their efforts to improve their lives: “[In] the conversations with practitioners and with participants (...) tales were told of participatory processes undertaken ritualistically, which had turned out to be manipulative, or which had in fact harmed those who were supposed to be empowered” (Cooke and Kothari 2001, 1).

There is no shortage of examples illustrating the co-optation processes of alternative development principles, backed by international development institutions. Some of the most notable cases are Sustainable Development, the Participatory approach to Development, or Development with Gender Perspective, among others. The case of Sustainable Development is particularly interesting because, although it is now part of the mainstream development narratives and is used by all parties to green-wash their ever-present agendas of implacable economic growth, the concept in fact emerged as an unorthodox proposal that questioned economic growth, promoting instead the urgently required balance between human production, consumption, waste and nature. As it originally argued: “sustainability emerged as a critical discourse synonymous with the idea of a *steady-state* economy, endorsing a shift from continuous and increasing economic growth to lower growth or even decreasing economic growth of societies” (Kidd 1992, 15). Proposals like this were presented in 1972 in Stockholm at the Conference on the Human Environment. As Paton (2008) comments, however: “[u]nsurprisingly, in the context of accumulation crises and growing influence of neoliberalism, the emergent trend in developed economies was toward *enabling*, rather than *constraining*, the forces of capital” (Paton 2008, 98 - Emphasis in the original). Similarly, the so-called Critical Management Studies “explains how managerialism (the culture and profession of donor-imposed management tools such as the logical framework) came to dominate the running of development to the point of redefining the logic of development in the neo-liberal context” (Pereira 2009, 813). In keeping with the priority placed on economic concerns, the required change of the relationship between human societies and nature was sacrificed: “ironically, the opportunity provided by such a context ultimately proved to be a double-edged sword for the environmental movement as neoliberal ideas penetrated that vacuum and began to hold sway over policy-makers looking for solutions to economic stagnation” (Paton 2008, 96).

Despite this, as different as sustainable development is nowadays when compared with its original principles, it has been nevertheless able to continue escalating to the top of the global agenda. In the face of the evident failure of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are currently and actively being promoted by the United Nations Development Program to replace them.¹

Another example is the case of the challenge to unequal power relationships through the strength of civil society organisations that has been institutionalised as Participatory Development:

Participatory approaches to development are about the identification, collection, interpretation, analysis and (re)presentation of particular forms of (local) knowledge. However, it is now widely acknowledged that the production and representation of knowledge is inseparable from the exercise of power. Thus, as Mosse writes [P]ublic participatory research methods are

¹ At the UN Conference on Sustainable Development Rio+20, it was agreed to establish an intergovernmental process to develop a set of new goals, namely the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). United Nations Organization (2014) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

unlikely to prove good instruments for the analysis of local power relationships since they are shaped by the very relations which are being investigated. (1995: 29) (Kothari 2001, 143 and see also Cleaver 2001 and Lavigne *et al.*, 2003).

Other example corresponds to the advocacy for gender equality that tackles the unequal gender relations and roles at the basis of women's exclusion and gender subordination, nowadays regarded as Development with a Gender Perspective:

Many economists believed that women's productivity was being *wasted* because it mostly flowed through informal channels, unaccounted for and unexploited by the world market (...) For the World Bank, women's productivity exists only in relation to its market value. Its version of integrating women into development is a means to channel women's labour and produce through national and international business (Simmons 1997, 245 - See also Chant and Sweetman, 2012 and Bradshaw, 2013).

As in the case of initial Sustainable Development proposals, the Participatory approach to Development, the Development with Gender Perspectives, or those already mentioned by Max-Neef (1991, 1986) Ekins (1992a, 1992b), Nerfin (1978, 1985) and Sheth (n.d., 1887), unconventional development proposals not only highlighted issues that were actively omitted in economic development, but in doing so, they also claimed for structural changes and major transformations which would imply a shock to the foundations of conventional approaches. However, the useful pieces of these proposals –names, concepts, narratives, arguments or practices– ended up being distorted by conventional economic development and co-opted within their own discourses and practices. In consequence, the structural changes that constituted the very foundations of those alternative proposals were undermined, while at the same time granting a progressive appearance to the economic development approach. Non-negotiable prospective transformations, pertaining to the structural changes that these unconventional proposals involved, were put aside, with only those pieces of alternative development discourses and practices that might invigorate the economic development rhetoric being assimilated and reflected in the aforementioned explosion of development with adjectives.

These cases provide evidence in terms of the rhetoric, and how certain arguments of some Alternative Development proposals have found their way into the mainstream of international institutional development discourses and practices. Any portrayal of economic development as having shifted from its core towards other crucial dimensions of human societies is merely a pretence. Rather, economic growth has been squarely retained as the central theme with: “Northern-defined affluent consumption as its aspirational goal” (Guttal 2012, 3). In doing so, the critical rationale and main arguments on which the concerns of some unconventional development perspectives were based on were intentionally and actively dismissed.

In the end, as an outcome of this successful hegemonic co-optation strategy and despite visible achievements, the very idea of *alternative* becomes questionable. In

fact, instead of breaking away from economic development, these proposals stepped into its logic, falling into a co-optation process that has no reverse. Consequently, the expected structural transformation of how things work in the world, which was intended to be originated on alternative development points of view, did not take place.

Getting away from the Development Box

At this point, the challenge to be considered is to move from *Alternative Development* to *Alternatives to Development*. This challenge is about the epistemological foundations of the knowledge that is considered valid, and hence on the power of this knowledge in the definition of valid reality. On these grounds, new options are being imagined and designed outside of the *development box* which seem to have overcome the narrowness of the linear economic development concept and the vulnerability of the alternative development proposals.

Initially offered up for debate in the early 1990s, post-development is a relatively recent current of thought (Sachs, 1992). Its provocative statements have stimulated further discussions on the issue of development and its formal studies (Summer, 2011), rapidly attracting notable conceptual, epistemological and practical contributions: (see e.g. Escobar, 1995, 2006, 2010, 2012; Rist, 1997; Rahnama and Bawtree, 1997; Parfitt, 2002; Saunders, 2005; Ziai, 2007; Dar and Cooke, 2008; Burbano, 2009; and Bueckert, 2013, among others).

This current of thought is characterized for being a radical critical analysis, not only of the concept of development itself –which has been actively deconstructed–, but also of the orthodox assumptions about the development narratives and practices that have been disseminated and implemented since World War II. It answers to the need for, and requirements of, new standpoints (Escobar, 1995; Sylvester and Gordon, 2004; Mkandawire, 2008; Cornwall and Eade, 2010; Buch-Hansen, 2012). This deconstruction drives to decouple economic growth –and with it, the economic dynamics of mainstream development based on capital accumulation– as the essential engine of progress and human welfare. In displacing economic growth from the core, a crucial step has been given, which has several implications:

In taking this option, human societies will recover the opportunity to open themselves up to a wide diversity of possibilities in terms of their goals, beyond economic growth. These can be related to many views on the understanding and practices that –relying partially (or not) on economic growth– look to achieve proper well-being, high standards of living, life satisfaction, and/or happiness:

... development, which is always presented as a solution, is itself actually the problem (as well as creating problems). To make a comparison: today's developers are like the alchemists of old who vainly tried to transmute lead into gold (...) When we will realize that well-being does not come from growth?" (Rist 1997, 46 - Emphasis in the original).

As has also been stated elsewhere, there is no statistical evidence that a higher growth rate increases the rate of improvement, neither in life satisfaction for rich countries nor for poor or transitional ones (Blanchflower and Oswald, 2008; Deaton, 2008; Easterlin, 2010, 2013).

If economic growth is not the universal purpose any more, then capital accumulation as the basis of the cycle of production, consumption, disposal –and with them market fundamentalism– also loses its principal place in the dynamics of economy. Instead, new ways for human societies to produce, access, use and distribute goods and services are being envisaged; among them, Steady State Economy (Lewis and Conaty, 2012; Daly, 2015) or movements such as the New Economy (Speth, 2005, 2009, 2013; Klein, 2014), De-growth (Latouche, 2010; Heinberg, 2011; D’Alisa *et al*, 2014), and Post-growth (Paech, 2012; Switalski, 2014; Dobson, 2014). For example, against: “the popular and apparently unassailable ‘I will if you will’ campaign from pro-environmental action, a different social logic is required: ‘I will even if you won’t’. This seems utterly illogical from the point of view of commerce and contract, but it is entirely rational when it comes to the kind of politics that the post-growth world will require” (Dobson 2014, 162).

Another implication of the shift away from economic growth is the prevention of capital concentration in few hands –currently increasing the transnational corporation’s power– at the expense of the majority, which therefore increases social inequality and exclusion (Bakan, 2005; Rugraff *et al.*, 2009):

Although [Foreign Direct Investment] FDI is less volatile than short-term capital flows (Global Development Finance, 1999) FDI may be footloose.

The poor, who are most of the time low-skilled, are generally the first to lose their job when foreign-owned firms decide to re-localise their activity (...) and that the upsurge of merger-and- acquisition-FDI in the late 1980s and in the 1990s mainly had an employment-acquiring impact rather than an employment-creating effect (Rugraff *et al.* 2009, 38).

As capital accumulation and economic growth are unavoidably linked to rising consumption of energy and resources, shifting away from it as the central goal stops the reduction of nature (including human beings) to mere resources that are accessible to be used when required and profitable through their extraction, exploitation, and disposal:

Resource originally implied life. Its root is the Latin verb *surgere*, which (...) like a spring rises again and again (...) With the advent of industrialisation and colonialism, however, a conceptual break occurred. In this view, nature has been clearly stripped of her creative power; she has turned into a container for raw materials waiting to be transformed into inputs for commodity production (Shiva 1992, 206).

These implications, which comprise some post-development principles, require a shift in formal and informal institutions and rules. This includes to support in practice values such as responsible paths of production and consumption,

respectful relations with nature and therefore among us, human beings, communality (understood from its root ‘common-unity’) and solidarity, and also to discourage current development values such as economic growth, productivism, consumerism, individualism, and competition.

One of the most frequent criticisms to post-development has been that, even though it has enough arguments to convincingly deconstruct development, it does not offer a specific way of doing things. This brings about the question: if not development, then what?

In fact, this critique and some others (Andrews and Bawa, 2014; Matthews, 2004; Nustad, 2001) create a strong platform from which to evidence the distinctiveness of post-development from the very beginning, for its significant epistemological and ideological differences with mainstream development. The purpose of post-development cannot be to provide another specific way of doing things, because in doing so, it will fall into the trap of deconstructing *the way* that was, only to provide *the one* that will be, thus merely changing the previous model for a new one.

Not to provide *the* new model should be understood as one of post-development's greatest strengths –and certainly one of its greatest temptations– in at least two senses. This paradigm has permitted a step away from the pervading belief that there is one single model to be followed as a universal path –a belief which undermines diversity–, and that, by presenting human societies as in need of being told the way that things should be done, undermines autonomy. If post-development falls into the trap of claiming knowledge of the new way of doing things, this would see it subscribing to the same logic of the concept of development as a universal path that is known today.

Moreover, it would also risk falling into the logic of becoming hegemonic and needing to be promoted or imposed by a combination of force and persuasion, thereby distorting its own principles. Hence, the goal of post-development is not to substitute the hegemonic development model for a new one, but to be counter-hegemonic: “Revolutionary political transformation, Gramsci said, was not possible without a crisis of ideology hegemony –changes in civil as well as political society (...) had to create counter-hegemony to break ideological and cultural bonds and penetrate the false world of appearances as a prelude to the making of new ideas and values leading to human liberation (Gramsci, 1971 ed.; Boggs, 1976)” (Peet and Hartwick 2009, 176).

The invitation to think outside the development box implies acknowledging other *knowledges* that might enable one to see other possible realities that do not purport to be a universal recipe. That is, *knowledges* that do not privilege the dichotomy between human being and nature, or promote monetary income and consumerism as the ultimate aim of human welfare. Hence, to keep to its principles, post-development promotes respect for multiple considerations on wellness goals that many diverse cultures have tried to maintain, to restore, or to promote, and also diverse ways to achieve them. The emergence of an ideology

critical of established reality must avoid two opposite dangers: the one of being without vision, and the other of having an excessively rigid and dogmatic vision. This new counter-ideology needs to be inclusive, drawing on elements in different ideologies and making a virtue of doing so (Schwarzmantel, 2005).

Among these *knowledges*, and as specific and practical proposals of the post-development paradigm, the Life Plans is a current practice of some indigenous and peasant communities throughout Latin America (Hermission, 1999; Rojas, 2002). It is also what has been translated as Good Living or Living Well, from their original Andean indigenous languages Kechwa (Ecuador), *Sumak Kawsay*, or Aymara (Bolivia), *Sumak Qamaña* (Acosta, 2010; Fatheuer, 2011; Mejido, 2013); and the *Ubuntu* Values System promoted from the African perspective and expressed in Xhosa, one of the South African languages (Andreasson, 2007; Broodryck, 2006). From a more mixed origin, including European thinkers, there is also current debate on the Global Common Good (Gelardo Rodríguez, 2005; Houtart, 2013). All of them, step by step, are in the process of consolidating themselves as new practical ways to carry on inclusive ways of living based on equality, solidarity and reciprocity.

To the same extent that post-development promotes and puts into practice the respect for diversity, it is not only liberating itself from the requirement of finding *the* single way –becoming, by definition, inclusive– but it also is shielding itself against co-optation, thus overcoming the vulnerability that drove alternative development to lose its momentum.

Conclusions

This revision of the main theories, concepts, narratives and practices around the development currents of thought, looking for differences and similarities among them, has led us to identify three differentiated groups: firstly, economic development, the emphasis of which is strongly biased towards economic output; secondly, alternative development, which comprises those proposals attempting to share or shift the focus to one of the multiple aims neglected by the narrow bias of economic development; and, thirdly, post-development, a more recent paradigm critical of the economic and alternative points of view, which deconstructs the concept of development itself, and encourages the rediscovery of intellectual and practical ways of looking for alternatives *to* development, and not for alternatives *of* development.

The fact that the alternative development category has comprised unorthodox concepts and objectives, as well as methodologies, social actors, and values, all of them mixed with no rhyme or reason, has led this to be considered a wide gathering of alternate ways to economic development, but not a consolidate development paradigm. Even though we agree with this, we also argue that some of the alternative development proposals did offer analyses and arguments strong enough to be a counter-paradigm challenging economic development. However,

based on the understanding that the economic development paradigm is not only a scheme for production, consumption and particular market dynamics, but also and more importantly a lens to perceive and act on a particular view of the world, alternative development proposals ended up being skilfully co-opted by those who are clinging to economic-mainstream theories, narratives, and practices. That is, they reference those pieces of the concepts, narratives and practices that are useful to it, whilst disregarding those that challenge the fundamental precepts of the economic development dynamics. In fact, the co-optation process of some alternative development proposals –such as Participatory approach to Development, Development with Gender Perspective and Sustainable Development, among others– has been so successful that they have reached the top of the current global agendas.

Despite the mainstream development narratives explicitly integrating portions of alternative development discourses, the precepts of economic development have remained in their practical implementation. Either the core of the alternate proposals became lost, or only fragments of them remain. Transformations sought by alternative proposals become merely politically correct discourses, but they did not translate into institutional changes or into practices for improving the life of vulnerable communities, making them a failure, and also a lost opportunity.

The emergence of the post-development paradigm is characterised as being a radical critical analysis of the development concept itself, and consequently, as displacing economic growth and its dynamics as the universal path, with all its implications. The principles upon which it is founded, such as equality, solidarity and reciprocity, and more importantly, inclusion, serve as a solid shield against the risk of co-optation. Consequently, post-development seems to be in the firm path of theoretical and practical consolidation.

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