The question of Alternatives: Alternative Development or Alternatives to Development?

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Alternative Development vs. Alternatives to Development

• What is Development?
• What kind of alternatives are sought? Alternatives to what, why and by whom should they be prompted?
• What are spaces or spheres in which Alternatives can be sought?
What is Development?

• Development comes “to be defined in a multiplicity of ways because there are a multitude of developers.” (Cowen/Shenton 1996)
• Development can be defined as a long term, intrinsic process of societal transformation, which can neither be induced nor imposed externally. (Edwards 1994)
• On the other hand Development is often framed as a measurable objective of growth, heavily drawing on economic indicators.
• From a post-modern perspective the process of Development is 1) a teleological narrative of history and progress (Biccum 2010), 2) a paradigm that positions Europe in the centre of all processes, 3) a paradigm of binary contradictions.
Big D and little d

• Differentiating between Big D and little d (Hart 2001; Bebbington/Hickey/Mitlin 2007)
  – Big D Development as the process of the Eurocentric Post-WWII-Development project, intervention-specific
  – Little d development as “excercises [...] to transform society and enhance human fulfillment.”
    (Bebbington/Hickey/Mitlin 2007), structure-changing and systemic
• Linking Big D/little d with Alternative Development versus Alternatives to Development
  – “the former seen as exercises in reform having little effect on the underlying role of development in ordering and governing society, the latter as exercises more likely to transform society and enhance human fulfilment. The distinction, then, is between a partial [...] intervention-specific alternative, and a structure changing, radical, systemic alternative.” (Escobar 1995)
Alternative Development

- **Goal:** formulation of new paradigm beyond predominately technocratic thought of modernization, putting people back at centre stage
  - Shift of focus to small, local projects and community-based Development programmes
  - Emphasis on basic needs and social capital
  - Central pillars: concepts of participation and empowerment
  - Aims: strengthening local capacities, create the basis for a more cooperative, social and sustainable Development (Brohman 1997)
Envisioning Alternatives to

- Post-Development demands to:
  - question dominant discourses, representations and power/knowledge relations in aid and Development cooperation.
  - abandon the model of Development as exogenous concept, based on the industrialised world (Escobar 1992), turn to endogenous discourses.
  - let Southern movements and organisations be fully in charge of their own development as only they can achieve meaningful improvement.
  - search for Alternatives to Development, rather than refine Alternative Development approaches. Alternative Development is not sufficient as it identifies problems as merely being of methodological nature.
  - employ a political rather than a technical lens.
• The notion of Alternatives to Development thus implies the need to search for an “emancipatory politics through creating spaces where people can reclaim their autonomy with regards to articulating and pursuing goals of social transformation that correspond to their ideas of a good life.” (Kippler 2006)

• Talking about Alternatives to therefore means to 1) abandon Big D assumptions, 2) specify actors that can legitimately pursue Alternatives to, 3) identify paths of little d
• Thinking about the spheres of agents, methods, objectives.
  – Actors: Endogenous/Exogenous
    • Are social movements really exterior to the state (Escobar 1995)?
    • Is there legitimate involvement of external actors, i.e. from the West, possible at all?
  – Objectives: emancipation and resistance
    • Emancipation from what? Resistance to whom?
Thoughts

• From a post-structuralist perspective, it is fundamentally problematic to replace one paradigm with another.

• The objective in searching for Alternatives to Development cannot be to construct another set of assumptions to provide all-applicable solutions. → A foundation in universality undermines the “project of emancipation” (Kippler 2006)
• Locating Alternatives to Development within terms of hegemony: “rethink[ing] development [...] through the idea of hegemonic struggle highlights that development itself and the actions [...] are part of a political process. [...] Rather than seeing development as a universal good, and something that can be brought into being, it can be reframed as a field for social struggle and a zone of political engagement.” (McKinnon 2007)

• Hegemony as “never-ending process of political struggle that occurs not just in the domain of formal politics [...] but as part of relationships of power across all social relations.” (McKinnon 2007)

• Three steps are possible: 1) dismantling the physical and discursive hegemony of development; 2) local actors need to be in charge; 3) dissolution of binaries.