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**Wolfgang Sachs**

## **Development**

### **The Rise and Decline of an Ideal**

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# 1 History

The rise of epochs often go unnoticed, but the dawning of the development age occurred at a precise date and time. On 20 January 1949, President Harry S. Truman, in his Inaugural Address to Congress, dubbed the home of more than half the world's people "underdeveloped areas". This was the first time that the word "underdevelopment" (OED 1989, XVIII, 960), which was later to become a key category ordering global relations, was used by a prominent political figure. Truman, after drawing a sharp line between democracy and communism in the first part of his speech, directed the attention of his audience to the Southern hemisphere with the following words:

"Fourth, we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas. For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of these people." (Truman 1950)

With these high-flying words of the "Point Four Program", the development age, the particular period in world history following the colonial era, was opened (to be superseded some forty years later by the globalization age). In this period, the relationship between Europe/America and the rest of the world was being shaped by specific assumptions about time, geographical space, and relevant social actors. These assumptions came to frame the development discourse; they stand in continuity and contrast with the assumptions of both the earlier colonial and the later globalization periods.

## 1.1 Linear global time and the rule of GNP

In the light of the concept "development" all peoples on the globe appear to move along one single road. The lead-runners show the way; they are at the forefront of social evolution, indicating a common destination even for countries which had highly diverse trajectories in the past. Many different histories merge into one 'master history', many different time scales merge into one master time scale. The imagined time is linear, only allowing for progressing or regressing; and it is

global, drawing all communities worldwide into its purview. In contrast to cultures which may embrace a cyclical view of time or those which live out stories enshrined in myths, the linear view of time privileges the future over the present, and the present over the past. As the concept of linear global time spreads, indigenous peoples like the Rajasthani in India or the Aymara in Peru, for instance, are compelled to put aside their particular chronographies. They are inevitably pulled into the perspective of progress.

Of course, the belief in progress predates the development age by almost two hundred years. The European Enlightenment was already able to interpret the multiplicity of cultures in space as a succession of stages in time, viewing history as a never-ending process of improvement. Taken from biology, the metaphor “development” constructed history as a process of maturation — society is likened to, say, a flower which develops according to inner laws, in a continuous and irreversible fashion, towards a final stage of bloom. However, since about 1800, “development” has only been used as an intransitive concept (Wieland 1979); authors such as Hegel, Marx, and Schumpeter conceived it as a process spun out by the cunning of history, but not yet as a project to be carried out under the direction of human will and reason (Lummis 1996). This changed with the advent of the development age. “Development” took on an active meaning; it turned into a project of planners and engineers who set out to systematically remodel societies to accelerate maturation — a project to be completed within several decades, if not years.

Such an optimism was facilitated by the fact that economic performance had become the all-encompassing measure of a country’s excellence only after 1945. Sir Frederick Lugard, the inspirer of British colonial theory in the 1920’s, still conceived the task of a colonial power as a dual mandate; as both the economic development of colonial territories for the benefit of industrial countries and as moral concern for the native populations (Lugard 1922). Economic progress and the welfare of the natives had been considered two distinct duties, as the “civilizing mission” had comprised both developing resources such as land, minerals and timber, and elevating the natives to a higher level of civilization. It was only at the time of Truman that the double mandate collapsed into one — development. The former distinction between an economic and a moral realm vanished, a sign of a conceptual shift. From now on, not only resources figured into the development formula, but people as well. Inversely, the moral concern for people was eclipsed by the economic concern for growth. This shift indicated that a new worldview had come to the fore: the degree of civilization in a country can be measured by its economic performance level.

As it happened, this measure of excellence has been available only since 1939, when Colin Clark for the first time compiled national income figures for a series of countries, revealing the gulf in living standards between rich and poor countries

(Arndt 1987, 35). GNP/capita provided a ready-made indicator for assessing the position of countries moving along the road of development. Informed by an economic worldview and aided by a statistical toolkit, experts for decades to come defined development as growth in output and income per head. “A developing country is one with real per capita income that is low relative to that in advanced countries like the United States, Japan, and those in Western Europe” (Samuelson-Nordhaus 1985, 812).

## **1.2 Hierarchic global space and the imperative of catching-up**

As already indicated, the chrono-politics of development was — and is — accompanied by a particular geo-politics (De Meglio 1997). Through the prism of development, the confusing diversity of nations across the globe appears as a clear ranking order shaping the orientation of both the powerful and the less powerful. After all, the very metaphor of development implies predominance. Just as the immature fruit can be only recognized by comparing it to the mature fruit, the stages of underdevelopment can only be recognized by displaying particular societies as examples of maturity. Development without predominance is therefore like a race without direction; assigning the positions of leaders and followers is part and parcel of an developmentalist construction of history.

While inequality between nations in colonial times was understood within an authoritarian framework, which can be likened to a father-child relationship; in the development age it was seen in an economic framework, which can be likened to a race between differently endowed runners. Indeed, staying with that image, it can be said that development policy basically had two objectives: first, bringing countries onto the racetrack, i.e. into the orbit of the world market; and secondly, turning them into competent runners, i.e. putting them on a path of sustained growth. However, it was only after the diversity of living conditions had been reduced to a hierarchy of aggregate national income figures that the enormous distance separating “rich” and “poor” countries leaped into view. No matter what ways of life the Kikuyus in East Africa or the Gujaratis in India cherished, no matter what ideals they aspired to, in the development mindset their diversity is crammed into one single category — they are underdeveloped. Thus, entire peoples found themselves locked into being deficient, defined not according to what they are and want to be, but according to what they lack and are expected to become.

As so often, the definition of the problem already implied the solution. When low income is considered the salient problem, raising incomes is the key solution. Any desire for change in Southern countries was thus reinterpreted as demand for economic development, casting aside other possible interpretations: for example, that oppression or dependency might be the problem which would call for

liberation or autonomy as a solution. Nor was there a notion that cultures might in the first place aim for non-economic ideals, be it the integrity of the clan or the celebration of religious rituals. On the contrary, the race in the economic world arena, like any race, was seen to be dominated by the imperative of catching up. Indeed, the chronopolitics and geopolitics particular to the development idea engendered a monumental historical promise — the promise that, at the end of the day, all societies would be capable of bridging the gap to the rich and sharing in the fruits of industrial civilization. It may be in this promise that the foundation of the development creed in Christian thought becomes most palpable (Rist 1997). Development can be understood as a secular salvation story, constituting an ecumenical community, which places its trust in the good works of providence and faithfully follows the path of predestination (Tenbruck 1989).

### **1.3 Rising nation-states and the social contract**

After World War II it was incumbent upon the United States to project a new world order. Germany and Japan had been defeated, France and Britain seriously wounded. As the colonial powers lost their grip on the world, independence movements sprang up in the South and claimed the right to nation states. A power vacuum opened which threatened to be filled either by violence or communist takeovers. In this situation, the US launched — following its own self-image — self-determination, free trade, democracy, and international cooperation as the core values of a future order. A world was presented which is held together by economic interdependence and not any longer by political dominion. Economic strength had taken the place of military power. As colonialism had occupied overseas territories, the doors to political freedom would be thrust open — provided, at least, that trade could flow freely. The US, having itself emerged as a nation from an anti-colonial struggle, readily backed the process of decolonization, proclaiming at the same time economic development as an overarching goal. Development was thus a conceptual vehicle for American dominance with a liberal face; it allowed for heralding national independence while expanding predominance. A new model of power appeared on the horizon — anti-colonial imperialism.

Decolonization implied the building of numerous nation-states in Asia and Africa. As in 19<sup>th</sup> century Latin America, the nationalist leaders aspired to that model of political organization which had been forged into a European norm through centuries-long struggles against the Pope, local lords, and foreign intruders. The nation, after all, is an imagined community, residing within the confines of a particular territory and governed by a sovereign state (Anderson 1983). Establishing the nation as the relevant community — as opposed to family clans or religious affiliations —, carving out governable territorial units, and imposing the authority of a bureaucratic state, was an arduous task which called for a



mobilizing narrative. The development idea provided legitimation; it has been the *raison d'être* for the emerging states. The new governments largely internalized the image thrust upon them by the countries perceived as advanced; they saw in the “fight against underdevelopment” the mission of their nations. In a certain sense, the right to self-determination had thus been acquired in exchange for the right to self-definition (Rist 1997, 79).

Moreover, the perspective in which one would eventually catch up with the rich countries restored self-respect and pride to countries which had been humiliated by colonialism. Such a perspective promised the new countries an equal standing among nations; the demand for development expressed the desire for recognition and justice. What fuelled the determination to catch up was a double asymmetry in power between the South and the North. Culturally, the West had become the “intimate enemy” (Nandy 1983) of the indigenous elites, giving shape to their imagination of success; and politically, the might of the North had become so formidable that pure survival instinct forced the South to seek similar economic and technological means. As this asymmetry even widened during the decades which followed, the demand for development grew stronger and more desperate up to the point of codifying a “right to development” in the UN General Assembly of 1986. Then and before, the emerging countries reinterpreted the power gap as a development gap. Apart from some exceptions, they saw no other choice than to join the race.

However, the rich nations also had a stake in making development a global project, in whose name a social contract of cooperation could be forged between North and South. After the horrors of war, it was common belief among the United Nations that peace could only be preserved by launching economic development world-wide. Virtually all countries rejected at that time the supremacy of the market and believed in the active management and planning of the economy by the state (Hobsbawm 1994). In particular the US, attributing the outbreak of war in Europe to economic disorder, remembered their own successful management of the crisis during the New Deal, when J.M. Keynes had recommended state action to counter unemployment and underproduction. “Freedom from fear and want” was already held out by President Roosevelt in the Atlantic Charter of 1941; it is from this point that development became a cornerstone of the mission of the UN. For the sake of stability and peace, the need for economic growth — steered along through public intervention — was projected upon the world. In this sense, development can be seen as an exercise in global Keynesianism to keep disorder at bay. Both the hegemonial needs of the North and the emancipatory needs of the South converged upon the prospect of development.

## 1.4 The poor as target and the dethronement of GNP

The situation was rather straightforward in the two post war decades. Despite differences in approach, development had been identified with economic growth, if not plainly with industrialization. No matter if shortage of physical capital or shortage of human capital was seen as the major deficit, both answers — capital formation or schooling — had aimed at increasing the flow of goods and services. However, the concept of development began to be contested in the 1970's when attention shifted to the poor, exposing the failure of growth to benefit the large majority of people. Robert McNamara, incoming President of the World Bank, put a finger into the wound:

“Growth is not equitably reaching the poor ... Rapid growth has been accompanied by greater maldistribution of income in many developing countries ... We should strive to eradicate absolute poverty by the end of the century. That means in practice the elimination of malnutrition and illiteracy, the reduction of infant mortality and the rising of life expectancy standards to those of the developed nations.” (McNamara 1973)

Merely watching the rate of income growth was not enough anymore, the social content of development now mattered. For whose benefit? This emerged as the benchmark question. As a consequence, the scope of attention expanded, not only the middle classes boosting market output, but also the populations left out by growth, and even the victims of growth, all became targets for specifically designed interventions. Development was thus redefined as something transcending growth, as economic growth plus redistribution, plus participation, or plus human development. In this vein, throughout the years that followed in quick succession, areas like employment, equality, poverty eradication, basic needs, informal sector, and women were established as fields of development action, each of them bringing a new set of tools and a new tribe of experts to the fore.

With these extensions, a conceptual inflation set in. Soon, development meant everything and nothing, the concept ceased to denote anything in particular, it just connoted good intentions. It had no content, but retained a function: it justified any action in the name of some higher evolutionary goal. However, what the concept lost in semantic precision, it gained in political versatility. Opposing camps both claimed to promote development; the struggle over meaning reflected from now on the struggle over policy. In particular, the controversies turned again and again on the role of economic growth, with a focus on GNP growth lined up against a focus on social or — later — environmental quality. While the first focus cherished the positivism of growth, the latter centred on non-economic wealth. While the first pushed output; the latter cured the consequences. It thus follows that development can be both the injury as well as the therapy.

At any rate, this dichotomy continued to shape the development debate for subsequent decades (Nederveen Pieterse 1998). A straight line runs from the ILO's world employment strategy in 1970 to the "basic needs approach" and finally the Human Development Reports of UNDP in the 1990's. Similarly, a line can be drawn from the export promotion of the Asian Development Bank in the 1970's to structural adjustment in the 80's and finally the bailing-out policies of the IMF in the 90's. Some growth sceptics have subsequently redefined development as enlarging people's choices and capabilities, a formula which provided the foundation for the Human Development concept with its emphasis on literacy, health and participation. Its essence is to place development at the service of people's well-being rather than people at the service of development (Banuri et al. 1994, 16). Even this view, however — along with more recent creations like the social capital approach —, cannot escape the shadow of the development creed; the Human Development Index is, much like the GNP, a deficit index; it ranks countries hierarchically, assuming that there is only one best way of social evolution.

### **1.5 A new international order and the rise of Third-Worldism**

It was not for long that the states which had emerged out of the crumbling colonial empires stayed without a voice in international affairs. After the Nonaligned Movement had formed at Bandung in 1955 so as to put some clout behind the decolonization process, the G 77, set up in 1963 on the eve of the first UNCTAD Conference, aimed at articulating collective bargaining power in the world economic arena. Development ceased to be seen as an objective to be achieved in individual countries, but was thought to require a less hostile international economic structure. Obstacles to development are not just to be found in domestic habits and institutions, as suggested by the modernization discourse; they now present themselves as well in the detrimental terms of international trade. This framing of the development problem was intellectually prepared and further elaborated by the so-called "dependency theory", which identified structures of unequal exchange and in general the gradient of economic power as the source of continuing underdevelopment. Responding to their structurally peripheral position, Southern countries, perceiving themselves as sharing the same destiny, formed a coalition demanding a new international economic order. The South opposed itself to the North, a constellation which reached its highpoint in the 70's as the oil-exporting countries successfully displayed their collective market power with regard to the affluent economies.

Although the demand for redefined rules in the world economy weakened as the oil cartel collapsed and the debt crisis exploded in the 80's, the G 77 continued to be a major actor in United Nations politics, in particular after the rise of East-Asian countries as serious competitors. In 1991 the South Commission restated

the call for a fair world order (South Commission 1991). More specifically, the moment the North began to call upon the South for obtaining cooperation in environmental matters, the Southern coalition, all internal differences notwithstanding, renewed their grievances about the asymmetry of power. Since then, in environmental negotiations, the claims to greater economic space are bargained against demands for a wiser use of the biosphere. Until today, however, this quest for equal power and recognition remains focussed on relations between states, leaving the question of inequality within countries in the dark. Just as the Declaration on the New International Economic Order of 1974 had failed to mention domestic inequality even once, the calls for greater justice still sounded hollow in the nineties because the ongoing marginalization of social majorities remained hidden behind the veil of national sovereignty.

## **1.6 Disrupted nature and the conservation of development in time**

In the 1980's, the promise of development received a second blow. While a decade earlier the persistence of poverty had begun to undermine the concept's social viability, now the emerging natural limits to growth cast doubts on its long-term viability. Combustion based on fossil energy, the core of industrial metabolism, threatened to overburden the atmosphere, and the growing world economy's voracity for living resources threatened to destabilize forests, waters and soils across the globe. Against the backdrop of emerging bio-physical limits to economic growth, the development idea underwent yet another round of conceptual inflation. Following the logic of turning victims into clients, development had to be reworked to allow for both infinite growth and preservation of nature. Again, a qualifier was attached, defining sustainable development as development "that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"(WCED 1987, 8). The formula pointed to the future, but to a bleak future of scarcities rather than a bright future of progress. It called for development choices that would not drastically restrict the environmental space available for future generations.

However, highlighting justice in time the canonical formula underemphasized justice in social space. Constraints imposed by the present generation on future generations were given prominence over constraints imposed by powerful groups on less powerful groups within one generation. "Needs" and "generations", after all, are socially neutral terms; they do not allow for vertical distinctions. Yet such distinctions are crucial when it comes to intra-generational equity. Whose needs and what needs are supposed to be met? Is sustainable development supposed to meet the needs for water, land and economic security or the needs for air travel and bank deposits? Is it concerned with survival needs or with luxury needs?

Leaving these questions up in the air, the acceptance of “sustainable development” in circles of privilege and power was facilitated, obfuscating the point that there may be no sustainability without restraint on wealth.

Furthermore, by linking ‘sustainable’ to ‘development’, a terrain of semantic ambivalence was created. The new concept subtly shifted the locus of sustainability from nature to development; while ‘sustainable’ previously had referred to renewable resources, it now referred to development. With that shift, the perceptual paradigm changed; the meaning of sustainability slid from conservation of nature to conservation of development. Given that development had conceptually become an empty shell which may cover anything from the rate of capital accumulation to the number of latrines, exactly what should be kept sustainable was ever unclear and contentious. Hence all sorts of political actors, even fervent protagonists of economic growth, have in subsequent years been able to couch their intentions in terms of sustainable development. The term had soon become self-referential, as a definition offered by the World Bank neatly confirms: “What is sustainable? Sustainable development is development that lasts.” (World Bank 1992: 34)

## 2 Legacy

For fifty years, development has been much more than just a socio-economic endeavour; it has been a perception which models reality, a myth which comforts societies, and a fantasy which unleashes passions. However, perceptions, myths, and fantasies rise and fall independent of empirical results and rational conclusions. They rise when they are pregnant with promises, and they fade when they turn into sterile commonplaces. “Achievements” — such as the average rise of per capita GNP in Southern countries from 1960 to 1997 at a rate of 2.1 percent per year, the success story of a number of East-Asian economies, or the declining rates of infant mortality even in the group of low-income countries — are not indicative enough to fortify the faith in development. In the same way, the enumeration of “failures” — such as the rising absolute number of poor people (living on less than \$1 per day) worldwide, and their slowly increasing relative number in Sub-Saharan Africa as well as in Latin America — is not necessarily forceful enough to undo that faith. Instead, a world-view, like “development”, loses appeal when the implicit promises cease to command credibility. This is what has happened in the last 10-15 years; the three founding promises — that economic development will spread across global space, improve human destiny, and continue for ever in time — have turned stale.

### 2.1 Social polarization

After fifty years of development, the promise of greater justice in the world has largely evaporated. In the international arena, the notorious gap in income between North and South has not been bridged; on the contrary it has widened to an extent that it is now unimaginable it could ever be closed. In 1996, the 20 percent of the world population living in affluent countries had an income at their disposal 82 times higher than the poorest 20 percent of the world population; in 1960, it was just 30 times higher (HDR 1998, 29). Upon closer inspection, to be sure, the picture is far from homogeneous, because these relative figures hide, for instance, that per capita income in oil-exporting or in East Asian countries has sharply risen during the last 20 years. But absolute impoverishment proceeds at the same time; per capita income in more than 80 countries is today lower than it was 10 or more years ago (HDR 1999, 3). Social polarization among countries advances, while the size and the composition of the poles may change. The world might have developed, indeed — but in two opposite directions. Looking at the

over-all picture, it is probably not exaggerated to say that the aspiration of catching up with the rich has ended in a blunder of planetary proportions.

This is even more true if one considers the destiny of large majorities of people within most countries; the polarization between nations — often, but notably not in India and a number of East Asian countries — repeats itself within each country. In Brazil, for example, the share of the poorest 50 percent of the population in national income amounted to 18 percent in 1960, while it fell to 11.6 percent by 1995 (HDR 1998, 29). Economic growth, it turns out, has often failed to reach its most heroic objective — to alleviate the burden of the poor. Investments in ports and roads, steel mills and fertilizer plants might have fuelled national income, but they have rarely trickled down to the poor. In fact, it has taken decades of misplaced development assistance to discover that there is only a loose relationship between levels of economic growth and levels of poverty. Growth, it turns out, is certainly not sufficient for mitigating poverty; land rights, community coherence, and self-organization have been shown to be at least as important. Yet, precisely these conditions of livelihood have often been undermined in the pursuit of growth. Dams displace people, machines substitute for rural workers, cash crops replace subsistence crops, urban migration follows the loss of self-affirmation. More often than not, the natural and social base of livelihood economies have thus been exploited for building the base of a market economy. Against this backdrop, it is not astonishing that the spread of misery has often accompanied economic growth.

The development perception, having for a long time seen poverty as simply a lack in income, failed to appreciate life-enhancing, non-market resources for the poor, such as rights, social capital, and natural resources. As a consequence, the application of growth recipes had a polarizing effect; it turned frugality into misery, making a minority better off in the process. Moreover, in staying true to its bias that only income growth matters, the development perception remained blind to the effect of unequal power relations. However, as access to money- and non-money resources is determined by power, growth without redistribution of power enabled the urban middle classes, manufacturers, and big farmers to corner the gains of prosperity, shifting the cost to small farmers, indigenous people, and the urban proletariat. And still today, a totally disproportionate share of economic gains in Southern countries goes to the rich and politically well-connected (Ayres 1998, 126). Furthermore, through development countless people have been drawn into the money economy, a transition which modernized both poverty and wealth (Illich 1971). Where the gradient of power and prestige is calibrated according to purchasing power, expectations tend to explode, while opportunities remain limited. Given that satisfaction is relative to expectations, fuller integration into the money economy may therefore even increase the feeling of poverty. Television sets in shacks have become symbols for the unbridgeable gulf between means and expectations.

## 2.2 Unsettling of Cultures

The most dramatic and far-reaching social change of the second half of the 20th century, the one which separates the modern world for ever from the past, is the death of the peasantry (Hobsbawm 1994, 289). This marked the end of several thousand years of cultural evolution when the overwhelming majority of the human race lived by agriculture, raising livestock or harvesting the sea as fishers. After the peasants of rural Europe and Japan had more or less stopped tilling the land by the 1960's, Latin America, large tracts of Asia, and North Africa followed suit in the last decades of this century. Only three regions of the globe remained essentially dominated by their villages and fields: sub-Saharan Africa, South and continental South-east Asia, and China. However, while in the Northern countries the population of the shrinking agrarian world was largely absorbed by the expanding industrial world, in the Southern countries only a minority in this transition found a dignified living in towns and cities. Nevertheless, urbanization has continued to change the human condition on an ever more massive scale. Just during the last 25 years the share of the world population which is living in urban areas went from slightly more than one third to one half, a figure which is expected to rise to two thirds by 2025 (World Bank 2000, 46). Development policy, indeed, had set out to propel agrarian societies into the urban-industrial age. It sought to replace traditional man by modern man, an endeavour which, however, ended in fatal success; while traditional man has vanished, modern man has by no means arrived. Living in a no-man's land, exiled from tradition and excluded from modernity, has since become the destiny of most of the world's people.

Nothing less than turning entire societies upside down has been the intent of development planners right from the start. For example, the 14-person mission to Colombia, the first of its kind sent out by the Bank for Reconstruction and Development (later the World Bank) in 1949 arrived at the following conclusion; "Piecemeal and sporadic efforts are apt to make little impression on the general picture. Only through a generalized attack throughout the whole economy on education, health, housing, food, and productivity can the vicious circle of poverty...be decisively broken. But once the break is made, the process of economic development can become self-generating." (cit. in Escobar 1995, 24).

In this engineering spirit, experts set out to remake societies from a host of locally-based subsistence communities into nationally integrated economies. They aimed at reorganizing social ties in functional terms, as called for by the ambition to set up a machinery geared towards producing growing amounts of material wealth. Under the expert's gaze, time-honoured ways of living and knowing faded into oblivion, reduced to "obstacles to development". Instead, decontextualized production models, depicting people and nature as abstract objects to be changed, were projected upon infinitely diverse human realities. People rarely figured as agents in the framework of rationalist planning (Hobart 1993); their interests,



passions, and knowledge hardly mattered against the backdrop of grand schemes for resource mobilization. Small wonder that development strategies based on such models failed time and again; they were too much in dissonance with the dynamics of a given community. It is for this reason that development has always produced both order and chaos.

At any rate, development has often failed to grasp the rich complexity of non-economized societies. It could not appreciate, for instance, that such settings can be regarded as symbolic sites (Zaoual in Rahnema 1997; Apffel-Marglin 1998) where communities live out narratives that link them to their divinities or where social energy is first of all invested in the upkeep of a network of friends, relatives or clan members. Indeed, it appears that for non-Western actors the rational is nothing but the relational. In such circumstances, any “modernization” will run quickly into communitarian constraints, as relations to divinities or to fellow citizens are likely to collide with the requirements of functional performance. To put it in more general terms, development has aimed at achieving that decisive shift which distinguishes modern civilization from all others: primacy is not given any longer to the relations between persons and persons, but to the relations between persons and things (Dumont 1977). In the first case, events are evaluated in the light of their significance with regard to neighbours, relatives, ancestors, and gods; whereas in the second, they are judged according to what they contribute to the acquisition and ownership of things. This impersonality postulate (Banuri in Apffel-Marglin 1990) according to which impersonal relations are inherently superior to personal relations can well be regarded as specifically Western; to make it prevail is what development as modernization was all about.

It is probably safe to say that this shift has been a mixed blessing for large majorities of the world’s people. On the one hand, it moved many regions and classes into the modern world with its liberties and conveniences; on the other, it disembedded countless persons from their cultures, sending them to join the global majority of underconsumers. As long as cultures — large and small ones — are confined to themselves, people everywhere have tended to view the corner of the world they inhabit as particularly favoured and their own ways of life as good — that is, quintessentially human (Tuan 1986, 1). However, as all cultures are drawn into the maelstrom of global interaction and assimilation, reinforced by the transborder flow of images, this self-confidence can hardly be maintained. As borders limited the space of comparison, they facilitated limited, but attainable satisfaction, while a borderless world, making the space of comparison explode, offers unlimited, but often unattainable satisfaction. This goes a long way in explaining why both excitement and dissatisfaction grow along with globalization.

## 2.3 Nature's Predicament

After the Second World War, the US, along with other industrialized nations, could still feel it was at the forefront of social evolution. After 50 years this premise of superiority has been fully shaken — if not shattered — by the ecological predicament. Using the racetrack metaphor, development may have been a race which has been conducted unfairly and which has driven the majority of runners into exhaustion, but its demise is imminent before the tribunal of history because the entire racetrack appears to be leading into the wrong direction. From the local to the global level, many experiences have shown that the sources (water, timber, oil, minerals etc.), sites (land for mines, settlements, infrastructure), and sinks (soils, oceans, atmosphere) for the natural inputs of economic growth have become scarce or have been thrown into turbulence. As a consequence, the promise that development will continue for ever in time has collapsed. For instance, if all countries followed the industrial example of emitting per capita on average 11.4 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> annually, the emissions of six billion people would amount to roughly 68.4 billion tonnes — more than five times the 13 billion tonnes the earth is capable of absorbing. In other words, to bring all countries up to the present standard of living in affluent countries, five planets would be needed to serve as source for the inputs and sinks of economic progress. Against this backdrop, development has moved into an impasse. With biophysical limits to economic expansion — hard to pin down and ever contestable, but nevertheless real — emerging in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the North cannot be held up as a model any longer; the trail-blazers are without a compass. The recognition of the finiteness of the earth has been a fatal blow to the idea of development as envisaged by Truman.

In fact, ecological constraints represent only half the story; they are compounded by the fact that approximately 20% of the world population consume 80% of the world's resources. The majority of the global consumer class — roughly those who own a bank account, have some career prospects, and have access to a car — can be found in the North, but has its outlets — small or large — in all countries. It is those 20% who eat 45% of all meat and fish, consume 68% of all electricity, 84% of all paper, and own 87% of all cars (UNDP 1998, 2). They can be called the “omnivores” (Gadgil-Guha 1995), namely those who are capable of cornering environmental resources to their benefit at the cost of other groups. In the global context, the industrialized countries tap into the patrimony of nature to an excessive extent; they draw on the environment far beyond their national boundaries. The “ecological footprint” (Wackernagel-Rees 1996) that they produce is larger — and in some cases much larger — than their own territories; a great deal of the resources and sinks they utilize are not available for other countries anymore. In fact, the OECD countries surpass the (in terms of ecology and equity) admissible average size of such a footprint by a magnitude of about 75-85%; as matters stand today, the wealthy 25% of humanity occupy a footprint as large as the entire biologically productive surface area of the earth. In a closed

environmental space, the question of how much is tolerable therefore becomes intermingled with the question who is getting how much.

But also within countries, in particular Southern nations, the consumer classes often succeed in sequestering themselves against environmental burdens, leaving the noise, the dirt, and the ugliness of the industrial hinterland in front of the doorsteps of less advantaged groups. In 1994 13 percent of the Southern urban citizens lacked even access to clean drinking water, and almost twice as many did not even have the simplest latrines available (World Bank 2000, 140). Contrary to the *fata morgana* of development, health conditions for the poor in cities are today worse than in rural areas. Moreover, just as the citizens of the industrial world, the Southern middle classes through many channels live off the resource base which supports the “ecosystem people” (Gadgil-Guha 1995), that third of the world population (UNDP 1998, 80) which derives their livelihood directly from free access to land, water, and forests. Building large dams and extracting ore, drilling groundwater wells and capitalizing agriculture for the benefit of the urban classes often degrade the ecosystems they live from. As the appropriation of resources can often only proceed after the rights of inhabitants have been denied, human rights violations frequently go hand in hand with resource conflicts (Johnstone 1994). Such kinds of pressures, adding to others like unequal landholdings or a growing population, may turn ecosystem people into landless and rootless squatters who have no other choice than exhausting fragile lands and woods. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that development in these cases deprives the poor of their resources for allowing the rich to live beyond their means.

In sum, environmental degradation arises from two contradictory settings — one of success and domination, the other of marginality and powerlessness. In the first instance, corporations and consumers of the affluent world dispose of the economic power to mobilize, if necessary over long distances, huge amounts of resources, producing pollution, devastation, and turbulence in the process. In the second instance, poor people without purchasing power degrade their habitats, after having lost their traditional rights or any other kind of entitlement to secure sufficient sources of livelihood. Both the degradation by the affluent and the degradation by the poor can be largely considered the outcome of one and the same process of economic development. Resource voracity on the part of the powerful and resource scarcity on the part of the powerless combine in pushing the planet to the brink.

### 3 Transition

It is not just its own fading promises, but also shifts in the world economy that have contributed to the decline of the development age. Since the mid-1980's the accelerated rise of globalized markets along with the arrival of an information-based economy profoundly changed the post-war international order, a transformation which played itself out fully the moment the East-West division of the world collapsed in 1990. In essence, development thought had concentrated on the transition of nation states from agrarian to industrial societies. With globalization the coordinates of modernization have changed; the agenda is now dominated by the shift of power from nation states to transnational markets and from industrial structures to informational structures. Deterritorialization and dematerialization have emerged as powerful trends which escape the categories of development, without, however, cancelling the aspirations behind it. For the hopes which nourished the development creed are still more alive than ever; the hope of the poor for a life in dignity as well as the hope on the part of Southern elites to be finally on an equal footing with the affluent North.

#### 3.1 Globalization instead of development

In the course of globalization, what can be called "the Westphalian constellation" (Menzel 1998) is reaching its end. For it was after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, which established the principle of territorially bounded sovereignty, that a particular form of polity, the European nation-state, came into existence. In its idealized version, the nation-state circumscribed a territory upon which a polity, an economy, a nation, and a culture rose. Like a container, it was supposed to hold society in all its layers within a demarcated space, creating a self-enclosed entity which in turn engaged with other such entities on the inter-national level (Beck 1997). Though reality never conformed to this conception entirely, these containers finally burst open with globalization. Goods, money, information, images, people flow across borders, giving rise to a transnational social space where interactions occur over long distances, sometimes even in real time. As a consequence, the former (though always partial) integration of economy, polity, and culture within a territory breaks apart, turning states into just one actor amidst transnational networks of exchanges in many spheres of life.

Against the background of these changes, development loses both its object and its agent. As a matter of course, the development discourse had focussed on the

transformation of territorially bounded societies; they were thought to be the units by which social evolution proceeds. States were thus the privileged sites of development. However, as societies are perforated by transborder flows — be it through foreign capital, satellite television or migrants — the object of development planning begins to dissolve. Attention no longer focusses on developing national economies, but either on inserting certain players successfully into the world market or on securing livelihoods for local communities. Likewise, the agents of development change. While previously the state was expected to be the engine of development, several new agents, all of them moving largely irrespective of borders, now diminish the role of the state. In this vein, private foreign investment has overtaken public assistance, television imagery has superseded national narratives, and NGO's have shouldered many development projects. With the state moving out of focus, the development concept looks strangely out of place in the era of globalization.

Furthermore, the development creed had been embedded in a conception of linear worldwide progress which fails to resonate with a globalist mindset. During the heyday of industrial modernity, history had been conceived as a movement with a direction, a universal process whose pointer was called rationalization or liberation (Bauman 1992). This predominance of time over space in ordering worldviews, however, has been turned around by the shift in consciousness which is connected with globalization. For what captures the attention of the postmodern mind is not a clear, universal sequence of social change, but the simultaneous presence of a plurality of differences across the geographical or virtual space. In perception, space gradually gains the upper hand over time; it is not the sequence of things that matters, but their possible combinations. The present change in guiding metaphors can be taken as an illustration; the “road of progress” is being replaced by the “connectivity of networks”. While the former sees societies as progressing along a time scale, the latter sees shifting patterns of flows between non-contiguous locations. In the transnational and digital world where success depends on being inserted into relevant, ever shifting circuits and not primarily on the position of one's country on the racetrack, the development idea ceases to express the excitements of the day.

### **3.2 The new divide**

Among other things, globalization tends to undercut social solidarity, both nationally and internationally. As societies are less and less contained within nation states, the reciprocal links between social classes which constitute a polity become weakened. After all, the nation state, in particular as long as social Keynesianism had been on the agenda, was capable of rebalancing the relations between the rich and the poor, be it as welfare state in the North or as developmentalist state in the South. However, under the pull of the transnational

economy the social contract which lay at the core of the redistributive state has begun to unravel. As the elites aspire to catch up with the vanguards of the international consumer class, their old-style sense of responsibility for the disadvantaged sections of their own society withers away, because they themselves, instead of feeling superior with respect to their countrymen, feel now to be inferior with respect to their global reference groups. Following this drift, governments are inclined to ally themselves with the globalizing forces and increasingly show disregard for the majority of their citizens who live outside the global circuit (Kothari 1993). Committed to promoting the insertion of their industries and middle classes into global markets, they consider the non-competitive social majority a liability rather than a boon. As a result, in many societies a split opens up between the globally oriented middle class on the one side and — in terms of the world market — superfluous populations on the other. While globalization removes barriers between nations, it thus erects new barriers within nations.

Equally, the social contract between rich and poor nations which, all counterforces notwithstanding, had laid the base for international development policy after the Second World War, did not survive the onslaught of transnational competition. Neither within nor between states is there much concern for redistribution left. Already in the 1980's the politics of structural adjustment largely replaced the development consensus, giving priority to macroeconomic stability in favour of an unhampered transborder mobility of capital. Deregulation and liberalization were supposed to bring indebted countries up to the standard of a free-trade player — yet in many cases just bringing the less advantaged sections to their knees. Disregarding social and environmental costs, currency stability, as the entrance ticket to the circuit of transnational capital flows, became the overriding objective of the IMF and World Bank. This implied a shift of focus; the concern of dominating development agencies was now creating a stable playing field for transnational corporations and not any longer improving the welfare of a political community. However, the process by which development institutions could become agents of the world market rather than agents of societal welfare was facilitated by the success of about ten “emerging markets” in export-led growth. Along with the former rise of oil-producing economies and the dissolution of the Eastern bloc, this success finally disintegrated the “Third World” as a somewhat homogenous group of nations. South Korea, for example, which in 1960 had still been on a par with Bangladesh, produced in 1996 as much output as the entire sub-Saharan Africa. Globalization, in other words, made a number of Southern economies — or regions therein — into players on the world market, at the price, however, of driving a deeper wedge between them and the large majority of countries in the South.

The more that shifting transnational space encompasses not entire countries, but only larger or smaller sections of a country, the more obsolete the North-South

division becomes. Indeed, the dividing line, if there is any, in the world of globalization does not primarily run between Northern and Southern countries, but the line separates the global middle class on the one side and the excluded social majority on the other. The global middle class is made up of the majority in the North and smaller or larger elites in the South; its size equals roughly that 20% of the world population which has access to an automobile. Globalization accelerates and intensifies the integration of this class into the world-wide circuit of goods, communication and travel. But an invisible border separates in all nations, in the North as well as in the South, the rich from the poor. Entire categories of people in the North, like the unemployed, the elderly and the competitively weak, just as entire regions in the South, like rural areas, tribal zones and urban settlements find themselves excluded from the circuits of the world economy. Even information-based capitalism, by linking up valuable players and places in a non-contiguous pattern, turns people and territories across countries into “black holes of informationalism”. (Castells 1998, 161). At any rate, the major rift today appears to be between the globalized rich and the localized poor; the North-South divide, instead of separating nations, runs through each society, albeit in different configurations.

### **3.3 Security instead of development**

As the development consensus faded away, two themes have emerged in its wake. The first is “globalization” and is concerned with the stability of the transnational economy. Its story-line is the expansion of global markets leading to greater welfare. The so-called Washington Consensus of 1986, which declared structural adjustment to be the highest form of development, can be considered its take-off point, and the International Monetary Fund its guardian. The second theme cherishes “security” and is concerned with protection against risks. Its story-line is the need for prevention in the face of threats to human survival and dignity. UNDP’s “Human Development Report”, which annually explores the state of human security, may exemplify this current, although the debate on “environmental security” (Mathews 1989) is part of this mode of thought as well. To some extent, the two themes are merely a re-incarnation of the 1970’s conflict between top-down, pro-growth on the one side, and bottom-up, pro-poor approaches on the other.

The concern for security crystallized in the 1990’s after the promises of development had lost credibility. With the high-flying optimism that once powered development withering away, the perceptions changed; the South ceased to be seen as “young” and “full of potential”, as in the time of Truman, but as the breeding ground of social and environmental turbulence. In particular, no one still clung to the ideal of a radiant future for the social majority, which has become superfluous in terms of the global economy. The best that could be achieved is

survival in decency. Moreover, as globalization not only provides comforts, but many woes as well, the North felt increasingly threatened by immigration, civil wars, and environmental competition. As a consequence, the South is no longer considered with hope, but with suspicion; developing countries turn into risk zones, and their less advantaged citizens are primarily perceived as risk factors. Development policy shed its skin again. It has now largely adopted a security agenda where prevention replaces progress as the objective of development. Catching up is out of the question, assistance now aims at preventing the worst scenario from happening. Securing people's livelihood is the noble concern, projects for clean water, market access, woodless stoves or community organization are typical examples — a far cry indeed from reaching a modern paradise. But also the notion of security is a contested terrain; the question looms large: whose security? The security of vulnerable people or the security of the OECD-dominated economy? While, for instance, many NGO's work to enable the less advantaged to protect themselves, on the diplomatic level the stakes are often different. International negotiations — in particular environmental negotiations — in a "world risk society" deal implicitly with the defence of the stronger against the risk presented by the weaker. The redistribution of risks, and not any longer the redistribution of economic opportunities is their hidden agenda. For both grassroots movements and governments, security has thus become a key concern because this is left of the development idea after the belief in progress has vanished.



## 4 Prospects

The development age might have withered away, but its core agenda is still unfinished. For decades development had provided language for voicing the desire for justice. Yet justice in both its basic forms, as redistribution of opportunities and as recognition of otherness, fails to have made much progress, at least beyond the confines of the global middle class. However, the agenda is not only unfinished; it also faces new constraints. For the meaning of justice is bound to change in an era of bio-physical limits. As long as limits were not on the horizon, justice could be identified with growth. The famous metaphor of the growing cake which eventually offers larger pieces for everyone without imposing smaller pieces on anybody illustrates how the idea of open-ended growth could nicely sidestep hard questions on equity. But in a closed environmental space, the claim for justice cannot be reconciled any longer with the promise of material-intensive growth, at least not for the world's majority. For this reason, the quest for justice will need to be decoupled from the pursuit of development with a capital "D".

### 4.1 Contraction and Convergence

Under conditions of finitude, there is only a limited part of the global environmental space available for each country. Therefore, the concept of development as a racetrack without a finishing line is historically outdated. In order to envisage sustainability scenarios for this century, in particular in the context of climate change, it is helpful to distinguish two distinct trajectories beginning from two opposite poles and spanning a variety of initial conditions. Northern countries start their trajectory towards a low-risk and equitable level of fossil energy flows from high consumption levels, reducing them over time until they reach levels sustainable in terms of both ecology and equity. This may be called the trajectory of contraction. Southern countries, on the other hand, start from relatively low levels of fossil energy flows, increasing them over time until they approach the trajectory of industrial countries at sustainable levels of resource throughput. This may be called the trajectory of convergence. Both trajectories pose related, but different challenges. For industrial countries the challenge consists in bringing down resource flows without a decline in human well-being and in social justice. For Southern countries, however, the challenge consists in raising levels of resource consumption at a much smaller gradient than

industrial countries did historically; increasing human well-being concurrently with equity.

A similar logic applies to inequalities within countries. Given that the “omnivores” are not confined to the North, retreating from excessively occupied environmental space will be expected from Southern middle classes as well. After all, the elites in countries like Mexico, China, and Brazil rival the population of many OECD countries in size. Therefore, the trajectories of contraction and convergence also apply to the development paths of different social classes.

## **4.2 Towards resource-light economies**

The models of wealth brought about by the spectacular growth in the OECD countries in the last fifty years are structurally oligarchic; they cannot be generalised across the world without putting everyone’s life chances in jeopardy. Chemical agriculture, the automobile society or meat-based nutrition are all cases in point. For this reason, the move towards models of frugal use of wealth among the affluent is a matter of equity not just of ecology. However, conventional development thinking implicitly defines equity as a problem of the poor. But designing strategies for the poor, developmentalists worked towards lifting the bottom — rather than lowering the top (Goodland-Daly 1993). The wealthy and their way of producing and consuming weren’t under scrutiny, and the burden of change was solely heaped upon the poor. In future, however, justice will be much more about changing the lifestyles of the rich than about changing those of the poor.

For moving towards resource-light economies, two broad strategies can be distinguished. The first is the attempt to gradually decouple economic output from resource flows. For instance, enhancing the ecological efficiency of technologies and organisational structures aims at reducing the volume of resource input per unit of economic output. In all likelihood, the efficiency of resource use can be enormously increased; examples for eco-intelligent production and services abound. The second strategy is the attempt to decouple quality of life from economic output. Indeed, quality of life has many sources beyond purchasing power; it derives from non-monetary assets as well, such as access to nature, participation in community, or the wealth in public goods. What is at stake here is not the efficiency, but the sufficiency in resource use. Such an orientation aims at the art of sustaining higher qualities of life out of a given set of material inputs; it ponders how much is needed for attaining welfare, value, beauty, and meaning. In brief, the transition to resource-light economies is likely to require a dual-track strategy: a reinvention of means (efficiency) as well as a prudent moderation of ends (sufficiency). In other words, it is about doing things right and about doing the right things.

### 4.3 Leapfrogging into the post-fossil age

For Southern economies the challenge is to embark upon growth patterns that are both pro-environment and pro-poor, without going through all the stages of industrial evolution as Northern countries did. At the historical moment when the fossil-fuel age is on the decline, economies that once were said to be lagging behind find themselves in a favourable position. Not yet being locked into old-style industrialisation, they have the prospect of leapfrogging into a post-fossil age, skipping the resource-intensive styles of production and consumption of the industrial world. For instance, Southern countries face important decisions about introducing and designing infrastructures such as energy-, transport-, sewage-, and communication systems, the introduction and maintenance of which in industrial countries have caused the earth's resources to dwindle. Today, many Southern countries are still in a position to avoid this unsustainable course, opting without further detours for infrastructures which would allow them to embark upon a low emission and resource-light trajectory. Investment in infrastructure such as efficient rail systems, decentralised energy production, public transport, grey-water sewage, surface irrigation, regionalized food systems, dense urban settlement clusters etc. could set a country on the road towards cleaner, less costly, more equitable, and less emission-intensive development patterns. It goes without saying, however, that such a choice is in the first place not a technical, but a cultural one; it requires envisaging models of wealth different from those in the North.

### 4.4 Democracy and ecology

Environmental resources are valued as a source of livelihood by groups as diverse as the fisherfolk of Kerala, the forest dwellers of the Amazon, the herders of Tanzania, and the peasants of Mexico. Over the centuries many of these communities had developed complex and ingenious systems of institutions and rules regulating ownership and use of natural resources in such a way that an equilibrium between resource extraction and resource preservation could be achieved. However, particularly under the pressure of the resource needs brought forth by the “omnivores”, their basis of livelihood has been undermined, degrading their dignity and sending many of them into misery. In such a context, sustainability in the first place means ensuring the rights of communities both to their resources and to their culture.

Democratic rights and resource productivity are particularly intertwined when it comes to ecosystem people. For their livelihood such communities need to undertake efforts to increase the productivity of all components of the village ecosystem — from grazing and forest lands to croplands, water systems and animals (Agarwal-Narain 1989). After all, they often suffer from a shortage of

biomass rather than from a shortage of cash. However, only conferring a substantial degree of control over their resource base to communities will ensure the degree of power and participation necessary for cultivating forests, fields, and waters according to local rules and customs. Democratic rights and entitlement to resources are thus prerequisites for building a biomass-based, non-carbon economy. Ensuring sustainable livelihoods — the ability of an individual or a family to meet their basic needs in a manner that is dignified, but does not undermine the natural resource base on a large scale — will therefore largely require policies which put democracy, equity, and environmental care before the quixotic pursuit of monetary economic growth.

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