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The Socio-Economic Dimension of the Development Concept: Towards a New Conception in the Face of Contemporary Challenges

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Abstract. This article analyzes the theoretical renewal of the development concept following the failure of the economic models of the 1960s and 1970s. Drawing on the conceptual frameworks of Gilbert Rist (2007) regarding the deconstruction of development paradigms and Amartya Sen (1999) concerning human capabilities, we demonstrate how the integration of environmental sustainability and humanism addresses contemporary challenges. Our approach combines the historical analysis of economic crises with the study of the emergence of a new North American economic sociology (Granovetter, 1985; Zelizer, 2011), which reintegrates social variables into development models. The results indicate that this conceptual renewal makes it possible to move beyond purely quantitative approaches to growth, proposing instead a multidimensional framework anchored in human well-being and ecological resilience.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of development, which emerged in economic and political discourse in the aftermath of World War II, has undergone significant evolution, both in its definition and its uses. Initially associated with economic growth and the modernization of societies, it has gradually acquired a multidisciplinary dimension, integrating social, cultural, political, and environmental aspects. Development was first regarded as a linear and inevitable process, grounded in technological advances and the diffusion of Western models (Rist, 1996). However, the failures of the policies of the 1960s and 1970s, the persistence of global inequalities, and the recognition of ecological limits have led to a conceptual renewal that now incorporates sustainability, humanism, and governance (Sen, 1999; Brundtland Commission, 1987).

This renewal takes place against a historical backdrop marked by decolonization, the Cold War, and the rise of non-aligned movements, which questioned the dominant development models. Furthermore, theoretical debates between liberal and socialist approaches structured thinking about the causes of underdevelopment and possible ways to overcome it (Sauvy, 1952; Frank, 1967; Smith, 1776/2007). Today, governance is conceived as a paradigm capable of articulating economic efficiency, social justice, and environmental sustainability, thus opening a new era for the concept of development.

The notion of development occupies a central place in the social sciences, both in its conceptualization and in the diversity of its uses and appropriations by actors with varied interests and contexts. While some authors have observed, at certain periods, a relative marginalization of this concept within research (Latouche, 1986; Rist, 1996), it appears that, far from being absent, development is the subject of intense debate and multiple reformulations. This study aims to contribute to a better understanding of these dynamics by offering a historical and comparative analysis of the modes of appropriation, transformation, and use of the development concept by various institutional, political, and social actors.

We consider development here as an object of representations and discourse, following an approach inspired by the articulation of textual analysis, intellectual history, and the sociology of ideas (Escobar, 1995; Cowen & Shenton, 1996). Specifically, our aim is to elucidate the conditions of formation of these discursive processes, their effects, their transformations, and their scope, in a perspective that connects local contexts with the global diffusion of development references.

In this context, it is pertinent to clarify the plurality of rationalities, meanings, and uses of the concept of development. The methodological approach we adopt is based on an in-depth documentary review combined with qualitative source analysis, allowing us to examine both the socio-economic and semantic dimensions of the concept. The goal is thus to produce a critical synthesis that, in light of historical developments and contemporary debates, contributes to clarifying the uses of the concept.

In line with Amartya Sen's "capability approach" (Sen, 1999), development's success beyond conceptual or doctrinal constructs must ultimately be assessed by its tangible effects on improving the living conditions of populations. Contemporary debates and empirical discussions, fueled by key works (Sachs, 2015; Pieterse, 2010), have helped to better capture the complexity of issues underlying the concept of development.

The objective of this study is therefore to provide researchers and students with a cross-disciplinary and critical understanding of the essential knowledge in the humanities and social sciences related to development, by highlighting the main themes addressed in academic programs, socio-economic research, and relevant conferences. By "academic programs and socio-economic research," we refer to the entirety of academic training and scholarly output dealing with the realities and challenges of development and underdevelopment on both global and local scales.

Structuring this reflection requires a reasoned selection of knowledge, concepts, and theories. More specifically, it entails prioritizing, within a vast and abundant literature, the most foundational contributions for understanding the debates: major doctrines, critical perspectives, as well as historical and contemporary controversies (Fridenson, 2014; Meuleau, 2022).
From both a didactic and pragmatic standpoint, the article proposes two approaches for appropriation:

- The first consists of a progressive study of the main themes of development and underdevelopment as they are covered

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in higher education, such as North–South relations, development doctrines, postcolonial critiques, etc.with a view to deeper future examination.
- The second approach relies on the targeted use of the text, equipping readers to selectively mobilize knowledge according to their own research or action priorities.

The article's overall structure is organized into four main sections:
1. A conceptual clarification of development and underdevelopment;
2. An overview of the primary schools of thought that have shaped the history of these concepts;
3. A reflection on how underdevelopment can be conceived as a product of development itself, based on representations and debates in socio-economics;
4. Finally, a synthesis of the major current themes fueling the socio-economics of development, with particular emphasis on the strategies of countries in the Global South.
Each section presents, in a concise manner, the essential knowledge to retain, navigating among doctrinal contributions, critical perspectives, and contemporary issues. A selective bibliography of essential works and studies accompanies the discussion, offering readers the keys to deepen their own research endeavors.

1.1. Problem Statement

The term "development" is ubiquitous in contemporary political, economic, and social discourse; yet its meaning remains frequently ambiguous and subject to controversy. Some view it as a persistently resonant notion a leitmotif that directs public and international policy towards a universal ideal of progress. Others regard it as a quasi-messianic promise a salvific path purportedly capable of resolving inequalities and alleviating human suffering on a global scale. However, a third perspective critically frames the term as little more than a rhetorical device an imprecise word employed by decision-makers to mask the lack of concrete solutions and to legitimize interventions that are often questionable (Rist, 1996; Munck, 2015).

This diversity of interpretations raises a fundamental question: What does development actually mean, and how does it relate to society in its broadest sense? More specifically, have development strategies targeting the so-called Third World represented merely one option among many requiring careful consideration of their respective advantages and disadvantages or have they been construed as an imperative necessity dictated by economic and geopolitical imperatives? (Conte, 2018; Veltmeyer et al., 2015).

The central issue addressed in this investigation is therefore twofold: first, to clarify the rationalities and manifold meanings underpinning the concept of development, thereby moving beyond unidimensional approaches focused solely on economic growth; and second, to analyze the social, cultural, and institutional effects of development policies, with explicit consideration of historical controversies and contemporary critiques highlighting ethnocentrism, cultural imperialism, and ecological limits (Wikipedia, 2006; HyperGeo, 2023).

To articulate this inquiry, our approach is based on qualitative documentary analysis, intersecting economic, sociological, and historical perspectives. We examine the different dimensions, representations, and uses of development, as well as the critical debates that have shaped its conceptual renewal. This approach is designed to foster a more nuanced understanding of the present challenges of socio-economic development, particularly in Southern countries, and to assess the relevance of the strategies adopted in the face of contemporary global challenge

1.2. Towards a New Paradigm: Conceptual Synthesis

The evolution of development thinking rooted in a critical reassessment of its historical foundations and empirical failures invites us to consider a new, multidimensional paradigm for development. The contemporary context, marked by the growing recognition of global interdependencies, mounting environmental risks, and persistent social inequalities, has rendered obsolete the overly economistic, one-size-fits-all models of the postwar period (Sen, 1999; Rist, 2007).

1.2.1. Integrative Paradigm: Pluralism and Inter-Disciplinarity

The convergence of critiques from various scholarly traditions historical (Rist), economic (Sen), and sociological (Granovetter; Zelizer) points towards an integrative paradigm that is:
- Pluralistic. Recognizing the possibility and legitimacy of multiple development paths grounded in diverse cultural, historical, and institutional contexts (Rist, 2007, p. 218).
- Interdisciplinary. Bridging economics, sociology, political science, and environmental studies to produce a more comprehensive understanding of development processes.

This new paradigm is characterized by a rejection of universalist prescriptions in favor of context-sensitive strategies that account for both agency and structure, as well as local and global realities.

1.2.2. Core Variables of the New Paradigm

- Human Capabilities and Basic Rights. Inspired by Sen (1999), the focus moves from aggregate growth indicators (GDP) to the expansion of individuals' real freedoms and capabilities. Policies must ensure access to basic health, education, and political participation.
- Social Embeddedness. Economic behavior is seen as embedded in social relations (Granovetter, 1985), meaning that policy effectiveness requires addressing social capital, networks, and informal institutions.
- Cultural Values and Identity: Zelizer's (2011) work highlights the importance of cultural norms and meaning in shaping economic preferences and outcomes. Development must not erase local identities but support pluralism.
- Ecological Sustainability. Integrating planetary boundaries and intergenerational justice (Brundtland Commission, 1987) is now central a "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising future generations."
- Governance and Participation. The modern paradigm views governance not just as efficient administration, but as a system for broad-based participation, transparency, and accountability—essential for both legitimacy and effectiveness.
- 3. Implications and Directions

- This conceptual synthesis calls for a reorientation of development strategies, particularly for the Global South, towards:
- Locally-Negotiated Solutions. Policies must be co-designed with communities, leveraging endogenous resources, knowledges, and values.
- Measuring Well-being Beyond Growth. New statistical tools (e.g., Human Development Index, Multidimensional Poverty Index) reflect this multidimensional understanding.
- Policy Interconnectedness. Social, economic, environmental, and institutional policies are co-dependent and must be planned together.
- Addressing Global Challenges Collectively. Issues like climate change, global pandemics, and migration require cooperative governance approaches.

The renewal of the development concept is not merely semantic, but marks a profound theoretical and normative shift. Drawing from the critiques of Rist, the capability approach of Sen, and the advances in economic sociology (Granovetter, Zelizer), development must henceforth be understood as a multidimensional process encompassing rights, capabilities, social and cultural embeddedness, and ecological balance. This paradigm does not merely advocate new indicators, but a profound change in the way we think about, plan, and implement policies for human advancement prioritizing pluralism, sustainability, and participatory governance as the core of future development age

1.3. From the Old to the New Paradigm: Comparative Overview and Transition Mechanisms

The table below summarizes the profound shift in development thinking over recent decades:

Old Paradigm (1960s–70s)	New Paradigm
Quantitative growth	Qualitative development
Technocratic optimism	Precautionary principle
Universalist models	Contextualized approaches
Economic indicators	Multidimensional indices (HDI, MPI, etc.)

1.4. Mechanisms of Transition

1. Institutional: Creation of hybrid organizations, such as UN-Environment and inter-agency frameworks, which transcend traditional sectoral divisions and address cross-cutting issues.

2. Epistemological: Convergence of economics, sociology, and ecology moving beyond disciplinary silos towards integrative research agendas.

3. Political: The operationalization of sustainability and inclusion through the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), marking a global commitment to multidimensional progress.

The failure of traditional development models has catalyzed the emergence of a renewed conceptual framework, now structured around:

- Critical perspectives from Rist. on the decolonization and pluralization of knowledge systems;
- Sen's human-centered approach, emphasizing capabilities and substantive freedoms;
- Integration of sociological analysis within development economics, reconnecting material and symbolic dimensions, as highlighted by Granovetter and Zelizer.

This triple theoretical foundation responds to contemporary challenges by replacing narrow quantitative growth with a vision of development that articulates social justice, ecological viability, and economic efficiency.

1.5. Development as a Multidisciplinary Notion.

To grasp the full scope of the notion of development, it is essential first to recognize the diversity of representations and definitions attributed to it by scholars from multiple disciplines, as well as by international organizations engaged in the field. Indeed, development cannot be reduced to a single definition: it is conceived as both a global and national process, potentially encompassing economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions and, more broadly, the idea of "human development" as promoted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Faced with this plurality, we have sought to map the range of representations of development a panorama emerging from different disciplinary approaches (economics, sociology, anthropology, political science, etc.) and from the conceptions articulated by major institutional actors (World Bank, IMF, UNESCO, among others). As a result, development stands out fundamentally as a multidisciplinary concept, shaped and enriched by diverse theoretical and practical perspectives (Rist, 1996; Sen, 1999).

It is important to emphasize that actions undertaken in the development domain are often the outcome of specific economic, social, and cultural representations. As demonstrated by the sociology of representations (Moscovici, 1961), public or collective action is rooted in visions of development that vary according to context, intellectual heritage, and political priorities: such representations shape not only the policies implemented but also the instruments mobilized.

Accordingly, our study's initial section has developed and, depending on structure, will continue to develop an analysis of the concepts of development and underdevelopment as defined in various disciplines and by leading international development organizations. This analysis allows us to interrogate the origins of these concepts, their transformations over time, and, crucially, their empirical relevance particularly when applied to specific contexts such as the Arab world, and more precisely, the countries of the Maghreb.

Ultimately, scrutiny of the concept of development reveals its undeniable polysemy: the term refers to complex realities, both theoretically and ideologically, and is subject to competing definitions and appropriations depending on context. It is therefore necessary to explicate the diversity of approaches and the essentially multidisciplinary character of the concept, which is positioned at the intersection of contemporary debates on models of social, economic, and cultural transformation.

1.6. Development as Belief: Critical Perspectives

This critical posture echoes and intersects with postcolonial and decolonial literature, which similarly questions the universalist and "neutral" claims of development discourse. For scholars like Arturo Escobar (1995), development functions not merely as a

set of policies or economic practices, but as a powerful apparatus of representation a "machine for making 'the Third World'" that produces hierarchies between societies through its very language and its criteria. Escobar demonstrates how, in Latin America and elsewhere, local actors have been both subjects and objects of these representations, sometimes resisting, hybridizing, or appropriating the development lexicon for their own purposes.

Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2010) also argues that development is less a coherent doctrine than an ongoing "traveling idea," constantly reinvented and reinterpreted as it circulates among contexts. He notes that in many societies of the South, the adoption of "development talk" has not always been synonymous with passive assimilation of Western norms; rather, it has sometimes served as a resource for local actors to negotiate recognition, resources, or legitimacy illustrating the dynamic and contested nature of the concept.

Moreover, Wolfgang Sachs (2010) brings to the fore the "development dictionary," showing that terms such as "growth," "poverty," and "progress" are themselves loaded with Western assumptions. Sachs and contributors to his edited volume argue that the rhetoric of development is as much about shaping desires and aspirations as about material transformation, and that its promise of a universal model of well-being often obfuscates structural inequalities and environmental limits.

Critiques from the Global South have thus challenged not only the content of development policy, but its epistemological foundation the way it frames problems, defines solutions, and assigns value. In this reading, development discourse can perpetuate forms of dependence or marginalization through its categories, even as it offers instruments for resistance or redefinition.

1.7. Analytical Reflections

- The value of Rist's (1996) contribution lies in drawing scholarly attention to the constructed and contested nature of development de-naturalizing a notion too often taken for granted.
- However, if one accepts this critique in an absolute sense, the risk arises of overlooking the practical agency of populations in the South, who have made selective use of development concepts for their own advancement and mobilization (Pieterse, 2010; Escobar, 1995).
- The challenge, then, is to balance a critical analysis of the ideological underpinnings with an empirical sensitivity to local reinterpretations, hybridizations, and the potential for new meaning-making within development processes.
- Ultimately, the notion of development as "belief" reminds us that social change cannot be divorced from discourse, imagination, and power relations but also that it should not be reduced to these alone.

These debates call for a pluralistic, reflexive approach to development studies one that interrogates the universality of Western models, recognizes a diversity of paths and aspirations, and remains critical of both the ideological and the practical dimensions of development interventions.

1.8. Development Beyond the Concept of Growth

The notion of development as both an essential and inevitable process emerged forcefully in the postwar era, particularly through the inaugural address of U.S. President Harry S. Truman in January 1949. This speech marked a decisive turning point: Truman proposed "a bold new program... to make the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas" (Truman, 1949, as cited in Rist, 1996, p. 107). This moment was foundational, instituting "underdevelopment" as a political category and legitimating the diffusion of a development model inspired by Western economic growth. According to Rist (1996), the rhetoric of development promoted by the American administration imposed a linear, hierarchical vision of social trajectories, dominated by references to material progress and economic expansion (pp. 107–110).

However, reducing development to mere economic growth as measured by gross national product (GNP) was already the subject of substantial critique by the late twentieth century. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen profoundly challenged this reductionist view. For Sen (1999), development cannot be confined to industrialization, income growth, or infrastructure modernization. Instead, he defines development as "a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy," emphasizing "instrumental freedoms" (political rights, economic opportunities, social security) as both means and ends of development (Sen, 1999, pp. 13–17, 36–40). The heart of development, he argues, lies in the capacity of individuals to lead lives they have reason to value; in his words: "Without substantive freedom, no one can be held responsible for actions that are out of his or her reach" (Sen, 1999, p. 19).

Similarly, François Perroux provided a clear distinction between development and growth: "Development is the combination of mental and social changes in a population that make it capable of cumulatively and durably increasing its real aggregate product," whereas "growth refers to sustained increases in an indicator of dimension, for a nation, the aggregate net product in real terms" (Perroux, 1961, p. 307). Perroux underscores the deep qualitative, political, and social transformation that development entails—well beyond mere accumulation of wealth.

Nevertheless, most classic definitions of development long remained focused on rapid growth, often justified by the so-called "trickle-down effect." This theory posits that the benefits of economic growth will eventually accrue to the entire population, including the disadvantaged, through job creation and greater availability of goods (Todaro & Smith, 2015).

This approach has been increasingly challenged in the work of several international commissions. For example, the South Commission, chaired by Julius Nyerere, defined development as "a process that enables people to develop their personalities, gain self-confidence, and lead lives of dignity and fulfillment... a process that frees people from fear, want, and exploitation, and reduces political, economic, and social oppression. A nation's development must rely on its own resources, fully exploited to satisfy its own needs" (South Commission, 1990, pp. 10–11).

Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1991) describes "human development" as the broadening of individual choices: "It is about providing every person with the opportunity to have access to income, employment, education, health, and a clean environment" (UNDP, 1991, p. 9).

The questioning of GDP as a sole measure of progress was crystallized in the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi report (Stiglitz, Sen & Fitoussi, 2009), which stressed: "GDP does not measure the whole of economic performance or social well-being... other dimensions social, human, and environmental must also be taken into account" (p. 12).

Since the 1980s, the concepts of "human development" and "sustainable development" have gained prominence. The human

development approach, championed by Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen, emphasizes the improvement of human capabilities far beyond income increases (Sen, 1999; UNDP, 1991). In parallel, the World Commission on Environment and Development ("Brundtland Commission") enshrined the now-classic definition of sustainable development: “Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, p. 43).

The second United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (“Earth Summit”) solidified the emergence of a paradigm based on balancing economic growth and ecosystem protection. Sustainable development is thus conceptualized around three pillars: economic (poverty reduction, changing production/consumption modes, fair trade), environmental (pollution reduction, biodiversity protection), and social (access to health, education, improved living conditions, civil society strengthening). "Governance" has gradually emerged as a fourth pillar and is addressed in the conclusion of this study.

In conclusion, the concept of development has gradually freed itself from its reduction to economic growth, now integrating human, social, and ecological dimensions at the very heart of major analyses and development policies.

1.9. Critique of the Notion of Underdevelopment.

The concept of "underdevelopment" has been designated, over time, by a variety of terms: underdeveloped countries, developing countries (PVD), Third World, least developed countries (LDCs), among others. The term "Third World," famously introduced by French economist and demographer Alfred Sauvy in 1952, directly references the "Third Estate" of the Ancien Régime: as Sauvy wrote, “this Third World, ignored, exploited, scorned like the Third Estate” (Sauvy, 1952, p. 14). Through this analogy, Sauvy highlighted the systemic marginalization of Southern societies relative to industrial powers.

In the ensuing decades, this Third World sought to organize itself politically, leading to landmark conferences in Bandung (1955) and Belgrade (1961), which gave rise to the Non-Aligned Movement under the leadership of Nehru (India), Nasser (Egypt), Sukarno (Indonesia), and Tito (Yugoslavia) (Rist, 1996, pp. 110–112). The terminology continued to evolve under the impetus of the United Nations, which, during the 1970s, proposed replacing “underdeveloped countries” with “developing countries” (PVD, then PED) in an effort to reduce the stigmatizing connotation of the original term (UNDP, 1991, p. 14).

1.10. A Plural and Paradoxical Reality

The “underdeveloped world”—composed primarily of Africa, Asia, and Latin America today encompasses more than two-thirds of the global population. Yet international recognition of the scale and gravity of the phenomenon of underdevelopment is comparatively recent (Piketty, 2013).

Addressing the issue of underdevelopment means bringing to light a set of structural blockages that hinder economic, social, cultural, and institutional transformation (Todaro & Smith, 2015, pp. 25–27). In summary, underdevelopment designates the situation of countries displaying marked delays in economic growth and human development relative to so-called advanced economies.

Through the deepening of studies on this phenomenon, economic reflection has gradually converged with approaches from sociology and geography; definitions of underdevelopment have multiplied, reflecting its global and multidimensional nature (Sen, 1999; Rist, 1996). Thus, a central challenge lies in identifying the common traits of countries considered underdeveloped: traits that stem from a complex combination of economic, social, cultural, and environmental factors.

1.11. The Complex Characteristics of Underdevelopment.

The principal characteristics of underdevelopment are both socio-cultural and economic in nature. Classical analyses generally distinguish the following:

- Generalized poverty, currently measured by the World Bank using an absolute poverty line set at $1.25 per day (in purchasing power parity): above this threshold, the inability to fulfill basic needs (food, housing, education, health) defines a condition of poverty (World Bank, 2015).
- Internal inequalities, marked by a concentration of resources in the hands of a narrow elite and the marginalization of the majority of the population, thereby exacerbating social divides (Piketty, 2013).
- Structural dualism, the coexistence of a “traditional society” (rural, artisanal, minimally monetized, low productivity) and a “modern society” (urban, industrial), along with a heterogeneous informal sector that, while precarious, is vital for economic and social survival (Todaro & Smith, 2015, pp. 273–275). According to the OECD, over 75% of employment in developing countries was informal in 2009 (OECD, 2009).
- Demographic and health challenges: High population growth, long seen as an aggravating factor, is now slowing due to demographic transition; however, significant food vulnerability and so-called "Third World diseases" (e.g., hepatitis, cholera, etc.) persist. According to the WHO, 20% of inhabitants live in conditions approaching extreme poverty (WHO, 2012).

1.12. Critical Approaches and Debates Surrounding the Concept

The analysis of underdevelopment cannot be reduced to the economic dimension alone. Rist (1996) and Latouche (2006) advance a radical critique: in their view, the notion of development (and, by contrast, underdevelopment) essentially reflects a project of “Westernization of the world via the market” and a drive for cultural homogenization. They caution against an ethnocentric vision, which tends to overlook the uniqueness and richness of non-Western cultures in favor of a universal development model a model regarded as incompatible with, or even destructive for, the traditional societies of the South.

Therefore, the present challenge is not simply to describe the reality of underdevelopment but to interrogate the scope and the limits of the notion itself, as well as the dynamics of domination and resistance inherent in its use. Rather than treating underdevelopment as self-evident, contemporary research questions its ideological underpinnings and explores how it has been both imposed and contested, especially in the context of globalization and the assertion of alternative modernities (Escobar, 1995; Pieterse, 2010).

1.13. Revisiting Development Approaches

1.13.1. Liberal Approaches: Development as a Process of Modernization

From the classical liberal perspective, the understanding of development rests on identifying the conditions that enabled the enrichment of Western societies. Adam Smith, considered one of the founding fathers of modern political economy, famously put forward the “invisible hand” metaphor to illustrate the virtues of economic liberalism (Smith, 1776/1991). He connects this principle with other structuring factors such as the division of labor, market expansion, and international trade elements assumed to stimulate economic growth and technological progress.

Within the later neoclassical framework, differences in development between countries are primarily ascribed to unequal endowments of resources capital, labor, and natural assets as well as to the ability to attract investment and benefit from integration into global markets (Solow, 1956; Krugman & Obstfeld, 2018). Generally, developed countries are seen to benefit from high levels of investment and productivity, while developing countries, to take advantage of free trade, must first strengthen their institutions, cultivate entrepreneurship and innovation, and create the necessary economic and social conditions (Rostow, 1960). Yet, the mere transposition of Western technological or institutional models onto other contexts, without attention to local socio-cultural and economic realities, has often led to failures or even the aggravation of existing imbalances (Todaro & Smith, 2015). Thus, for all its reference to a supposed universal harmony of interests, the liberal doctrine has seldom found practical realization in genuinely equitable international economic relations, where deep structural asymmetries persist (Chang, 2002).

1.14. Socialist Approaches: Development as Control of the Means of Production.

In contrast to the liberal perspective, the socialist approach defines development as the result of a planned transformation of property and production structures. Centered on collective ownership and central planning, these conceptions hold that only social control over the means of production and coordinated state intervention make possible a “rational development,” conducive to social equality and justice (Marx, 1867/1983; Sen, 1999).

Inspired by the thought of Karl Marx, this school counters the neoclassical explanation of underdevelopment. In the eyes of Marxist and dependency theorists (Frank, 1969; Amin, 1976), the lag of the Global South stems essentially from its unequal integration into the world capitalist system. This process of “plunder” operates through the transformation of the periphery into a mere supplier of raw materials and a consumer of manufactured goods, as well as through the deterioration of terms of trade (Prebisch, 1950).

Such economic "disarticulation" characterized by structural marginalization and technological/financial subordination reinforces the development of the center while precipitating the underdevelopment of the periphery (Amin, 1976; Frank, 1969). While socialist experiences, particularly in the USSR and Eastern Bloc, temporarily narrowed the gap with capitalist economies, their progress ultimately encountered enduring obstacles in economic rationality, innovation, and political freedom. These limitations have led many analysts to reassess their long-term successes critically (Kornai, 1992; Sen, 1999).

2. CONCLUSION

The analysis of various approaches to development and underdevelopment throughout this article highlights an intellectual and empirical dynamic that transcends strictly economic conceptions of development. The central question how can development be reconceptualized in light of contemporary challenges and socio-economic shifts? is answered by the progressive broadening of the concept to include not only quantitative but also qualitative factors.

The findings of this reflection confirm that classical approaches, focused on GDP growth, investment, and material accumulation, prove insufficient for grasping the complexity of development in an interconnected and globalized world. Recent studies (Sen, 1999; Stiglitz et al., 2009; UNDP, 1991) show that development dynamics now surpass the economic dimension alone, embracing a plurality of variables: fundamental rights and freedoms, social justice, human and social capital, gender equality, environmental sustainability, institutional capacity, and good governance.

This conceptual renewal has led to the emergence of paradigms such as human development, sustainable development, and above all, governance. Governance, understood as the ensemble of mechanisms, processes, and institutions by which public and private actors make decisions and are held accountable, has become central to rethinking development policies. It mobilizes new political and institutional capacities: inclusion and civic participation, transparency, administrative efficiency, adaptability, and resilience in the face of shocks (Stoker, 1998; Grindle, 2007).

Indeed, the recent literature demonstrates that development effectiveness now depends on societies’ ability to integrate socio-economic innovation, knowledge mobilization, sustainable resource management, and anchoring in legitimate and efficient institutions (Kaufmann et al., 2011). Traditionally "underdeveloped" countries must, therefore, move beyond that status not only through economic growth but also by accumulating institutional capital and adopting governance models adapted to their social, cultural, and historical specificities.

This paradigmatic shift from development viewed as a quantitative goal to one understood as a qualitative process grounded in governance paves the way for integrated strategies where human well-being, skills development, sustainability, and the environment are supreme objectives rather than mere externalities. Governance thus emerges as the foundation of a new model of development: inclusive, participatory, and sustainable, whose success is measured by the capacity to structurally transform societies, empower populations, and promote ecologically and socially responsible gr

In summry, the answer to the initial problematic becomes clearer: it is through the integration of new socio-economic variables and the adoption of innovative governance practices that the concept of development is redefined. More than ever, it becomes a collective project centered on humanity and its capacity to build, in respect of context diversity, more just, resilient, and flourishing societies.

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