L3 Rethinking Development

Development as Discourse

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this week, you should be able to:

- Articulate some of the concerns academics have had about development as an *industry*

- Articulate some of the concerns academics have had about development as a *discourse*

- Enumerate some of the other economic practices in life that development discourses overlook

- Explain why development requires a 'practice of politics'

Discourse - definition

- Simple definition:

  Discourse = conversation or speech

- Foucault's definition:

  – Pays attention to power in knowledge production

  – Discourse = not just what is *said*, but the wider framing of what is *meaningful* and *permitted*, and how particular topics "should" be approached.

  (Williams, Meth, & Willis, 2014)

'The discursive turn'

- A shift in the late 20th century, where researchers suggested that *how* we talk/write about something is as important as *what* the thing is.

- Researchers started studying *how* things were talked about, or 'how knowledge is produced'

- Related to 'post-modern' shift in thinking – if what is understood as 'true' is partly culturally constructed, then *how* we constructed it is important.
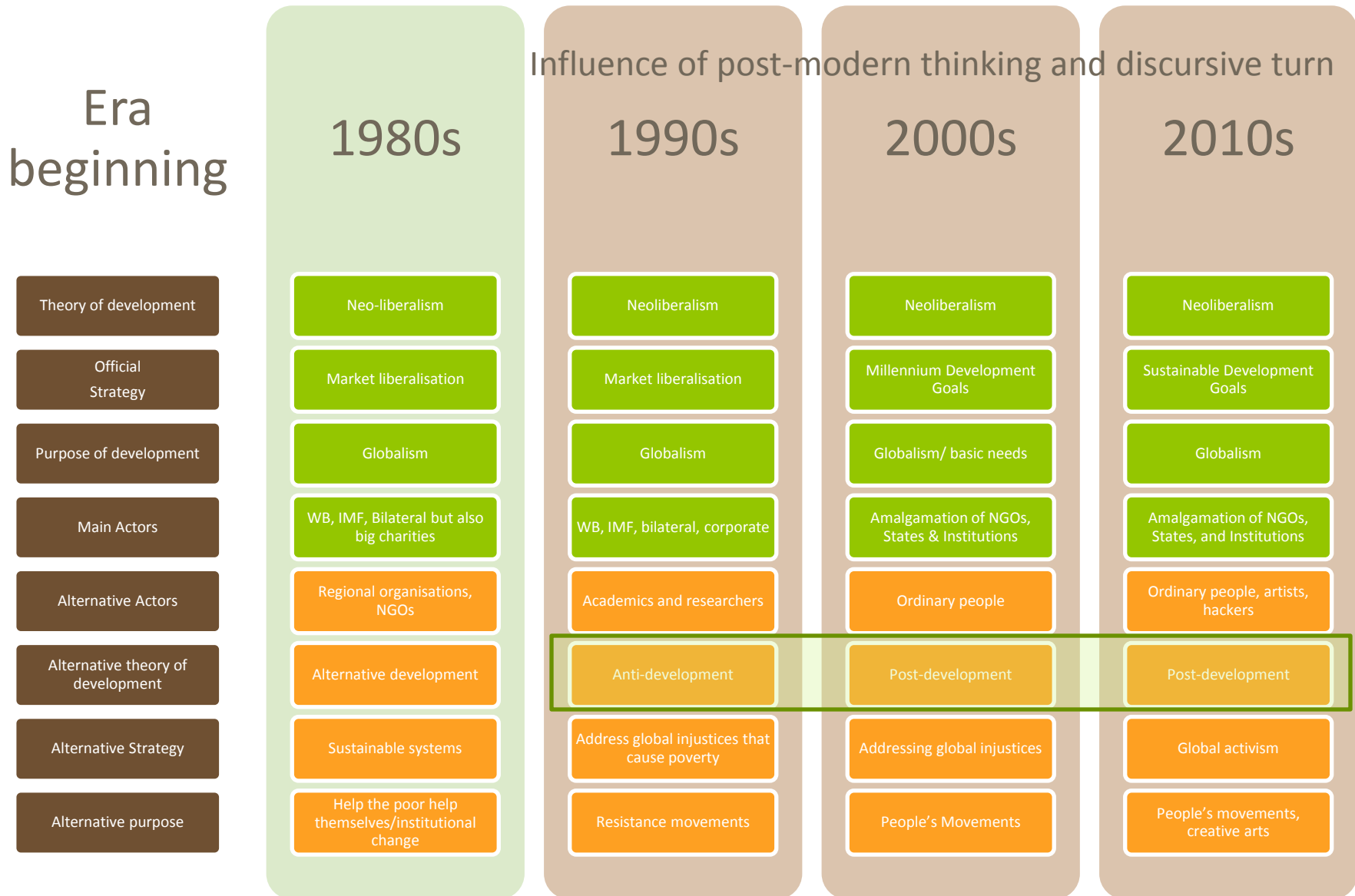
Changing Theories of Development

Era beginning	Up to 1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s
Theory of development	Modernisation	'Liberal' modernisation	Neo-liberalism	Neoliberalism
Official Strategy	Economic growth	Growth with redistribution	Market liberalisation	Market liberalisation
Purpose of development	Developmentalism	Developmentalism	Globalism	Globalism
Main Actors	World Bank, Bilateral Aid, IMF	WB, IMF, Bilateral, States, agricultural research	WB, IMF, Bilateral but also big charities	WB, IMF, bilateral, corporate
Alternative Actors	Charity	States & Socialist groups	Regional organisations, NGOs	Academics and researchers
Alternative theory of development	?	Dependency Theory	Alternative development	Anti-development
Alternative Strategy	Relief and charity	Import substitution industrialisation	Sustainable systems	Address global injustices that cause poverty
Alternative purpose	Relieve the poor	Self-reliance	Help the poor help themselves/institutional change	Resistance movements

Changing Theories of Development

Era beginning	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
Theory of development	Neo-liberalism	Neoliberalism	Neoliberalism	Neoliberalism
Official Strategy	Market liberalisation	Market liberalisation	Millennium Development Goals	Sustainable Development Goals
Purpose of development	Globalism	Globalism	Globalism/ basic needs	Globalism
Main Actors	WB, IMF, Bilateral but also big charities	WB, IMF, bilateral, corporate	Amalgamation of NGOs, States & Institutions	Amalgamation of NGOs, States, and Institutions
Alternative Actors	Regional organisations, NGOs	Academics and researchers	Ordinary people	Ordinary people, artists, hackers
Alternative theory of development	Alternative development	Anti-development	Post-development	Post-development
Alternative Strategy	Sustainable systems	Address global injustices that cause poverty	Addressing global injustices	Global activism
Alternative purpose	Help the poor help themselves/institutional change	Resistance movements	People's Movements	People's movements, creative arts

Changing Theories of Development

Influence of post-modern thinking and discursive turn

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Four Challenges to Development

Blaikie (2000) outlined four postmodern challenges that are relevant to development studies in the new discursive turn:

1. Challenging the right of the author to represent society and people over their right to be heard and represent themselves

2. Challenging all-embracing worldviews along with their underlying assumptions and validity of their claims

3. Challenging the way that 'expert' knowledge is constructed and promoted

4. Challenging understandings of the way reality is constructed – the mind informs the eye rather than the eye informs the mind (Blaikie, 2000).

Provocative statements

- Neo-liberalism is not really a theory of development, but a belief system that informs the way people think about development.

- Participatory development techniques are just 'soundbites' that decorate the neo-liberal agenda.

- 'From the unburied corpse of development, every kind of pest has start to spread.' (Esteva, 1992:6).

- You must be either very dumb or very rich if you fail to notice that development stinks (Esteva, 1987).

- Development is a 'machine' (Crush, 1995), global in reach, that produces the Third World (Escobar, 1995).

Development is Dead

What then?

- Abandon it?
  - Post-development
  - Immanent versus intentional
  - People's movements
- BUT –

  "Is seems ironic that contemporary scholarly debates should clamour for a 'post-development' era, just when the voices from the margins – so celebrated in discourses of difference and alternative culture – are demanding their rights to greater access to a more generous idea of development" (Rangan, cited in Scheyvens, 2002: 7).

Development is Dead

- AND –
  - '…to bury alternative development in the language of cultural relativism and endogeneity (that all development must germinate from within a particular culture) would be to silence all development discourse while giving free rein to the existing hegemonic system, which is fuelled by Western idea and ideals, and is wholly untroubled by questions of cultural relativism' (Friedmann, 1992:12)
- What then?

Development as Politics

- Emerging shift in postdevelopment scholars towards engaging with the politics of development.

- Mckinnon – Thai hilltribes, NGOs and development politics (McKinnon, 2011)

- Gibson-Graham, experimenting with ways to create economic and social change by exploring practices and discourses already embedded within communities (Gibson-Graham, 2005)

Development as Politics

The postdevelopment agenda is not, as we see it, anti-development. The challenge of postdevelopment is not to give up on development, nor to see all development practice – past, present and future, in wealthy and poor countries – as tainted, failed, retrograde; as though there were something necessarily problematic and destructive about deliberate attempts to increase social wellbeing through economic intervention; as though there were a space of purity beyond or outside development that we could access through renunciation.

The challenge is to imagine and practice development differently (Gibson-Graham 2005: 6)

Summary

- Postmodern era has seen a 'turn' towards analysing and thinking about discourse, and its relationship to reality.

- Increasing recognition of the role representation plays in 'performing' reality.

- Led to 'anti-development' and 'post-development' discourses.

- Critiqued for being unhelpful and apolitical.

- Recent shift in 21st century towards experimenting with development again, BUT recognising (and harnessing) the politics of development

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