The sociology of development and underdevelopment

Faculty of Sociology
National Research University, Higher School of Economics, Moscow.

Module Convener: Dr. Ruben Flores
Email: rflores@hse.ru, Tel: +7(499)1520741.

Office hours: 3 Kochnovskiy Proezd., Office 308A. Time and day TBC

Venue and time: TBC

Credits: 3 credits (8 credits for students from the 434 group and international students).

Teaching period: 2nd Module, 2011.

Level: Final year BA course.

I. Introduction

This course seeks to offer an introduction to the sociology of development and underdevelopment, two terms which are central for our understanding of modern history, and which were at the centre of 20th century social science.

We will examine the arguments advanced by some of the key development theories – and think sociologically about them. Among other things, this involves contextualising such theories, as well as examining their premises and underlying assumptions.

In so doing, the course seeks to get you thinking about questions such as the following: What is meant by development? What is distinctive about the sociology of development? What brings about development? Is development the same as modernization? Is there development without underdevelopment? Who are the main actors involved in the development process? What is the role of state in the development process? What is the role of culture and institutions? Do geography and climate play a role in the development process? Can we conceive of development without economic growth? Does development amount to Westernisation?

This outline is designed to give you a general idea about the contents of this course. Do get in touch with me if you questions about the course or this outline.

II. Course Assessment

Students are expected to write one essay during this module (2,000-2,500 words). Two versions of the essay are required. The first version of the essay is due by the end of week four, and the second version towards the end of the term. The second essay is expected to incorporate the marker’s feedback and be a significantly improved version of the first essay; it will be marked accordingly.\(^1\) The idea is that students have the opportunity to work and revise a single piece of work, which they

---

1 This is in keeping with a proposal by Peter Barry. See his “A passion for teaching – Margins aren't meant to be written in.” The Times Higher Education, 2 October 2008.
can turn into a larger research project at some later point if they so wish.

When collecting their marked essays (or shortly thereafter), students are encouraged to attend a ten minute chat session with the module convener, who will provide them with personalised feedback about their work.

Students are required to submit both an electronic and a hard copy of their essays.

Students are expected to produce a brief report each seminar (please see the section on seminars below), and to make a short (group) presentation during seminar time about the topic of their essays. There will be a final written examination at the end of the term.

The final grade is calculated as follows:

Weekly reports (please see below) = 10%
Group seminar presentation = 10%
Essay's first draft = 20%
Essay's second draft = 30%
Final exam = 30%

How to do well on this course?

Read as widely as possible, and be ready to interrogate and criticise the texts under review. Start working early on your assignments!

How to do badly in this course? (A note on plagiarism)

One of the best ways to do badly in this course is through committing plagiarism – a plagiarised work will be marked zero and required to be resubmitted; recurrent plagiarism will lead to a zero mark for the whole course. So, please familiarise yourself with what counts as plagiarism and avoid this practice. The following are some useful websites in this regard:

“Plagiarism: What It is and How to Recognize and Avoid It” (Indiana University)
http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml

“How to avoid plagiarism” (The writer's center @ The University of Wisconsin – Madison).
http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QPA_plagiarism.html

III. Seminars

The course will be seminar-based, with two seminars each week.

At the beginning of each seminar, the module convener will introduce the nominated topic. After this, we will work in groups to discuss a particular piece of scholarly work – normally one or more journal article(s) or book chapter(s).
Sometimes, the first seminar will be devoted to examining a synthesis of the topic at hand, while the second seminar will be devoted to analysing such topic. At other times, the first seminar will offer a theoretical review of the nominated topic, while the second seminar will focus on analysing a particular case study related to the topic under review.

For each seminar (except for the first week of the course), students are to prepare a brief analysis of the paper to be discussed (or one of the papers, if more than one paper is on the agenda). This means that students are to write two brief reports per week. This analysis, of between 150 and 300 words, should focus on the paper's argument. This report is not meant to be a polished piece of work, but a springboard for seminar discussion and a tool for essay writing. The only requirement is that the student uses her/his own words to analyse the text under consideration. Reports will not be marked, but their production will count towards the final mark.

Questions to bear in mind during seminar time include the following:

What is the argument of the text under review?
What are its premises, and what its conclusion(s)?
What (theoretical, epistemological, normative, etc.) presuppositions underlie the text's argument?
How does it relate to our past readings?
Who are the actors involved in this story?

Some useful general references


And, if you read Spanish:

[ Copies available upon request]

IV. Course outline

1. What is development and why does it matter?
Seminar a: What is development and why does it matter?


Seminar b: What is distinctive about the sociology of development and where is the sociology of development standing today?


Further reading:


2. Modernisation theory

Seminar a:


Seminar b:


Further reading:


3. Dependency Theory and Theories of Underdevelopment

Seminar a:

Seminar b:

Further reading:


4. The State vs. the Market: The East Asian Experience

Seminar a:

Seminar b:

Further reading:


5. Institutional approaches

Seminar a:


Seminar b:


Further reading:


6. The capabilities approach

Seminar a:


Seminar b: Population health and development

**Further reading:**


7. **Social capital and sustainable development**

**Seminar a: Social capital**


**Further reading:**


**Seminar b: Sustainable development**


8. **Neo-classical economic approaches and their critics**

**Seminar a: Neo-classical economic theory and development**

**Required reading:**


**Seminar b: Critiques to neo-classical approaches**

Further reading


V. Essay themes/questions:

What is development? Does it matter in today’s world? Is development something that should concern Russian society?

Critically assess the similarities and differences between modernization and dependency theory.

What is the role of culture in the development process? Compare the views of modernization and dependency theory on this question, and reflect on the relationship between culture and institutions.

Outline and assess the main arguments of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach, and discuss whether this approach could be relevant for the study of Russian society.

Why do “institutions rule” according to Rodrik, Subramanian and Trebbi? Discuss how the institutional approach would analyse Russian society vis-a-vis the idea of development.

Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the idea of sustainable development.

What is social capital and why is it relevant, if at all, for development?

What should be the role of the state in the development process? Discuss Krueger and Chang’s views on this question in light of the East Asian experience.

Has development come to an end? Was development just a Cold War discourse or does it have any relevance in the early 21st century?
Acknowledgements

I thank Isaac Enriquez Perez and Tiina Eilola for their helpful comments and feedback.