The sociology of development and underdevelopment

Faculty of Sociology
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Module Convener: Dr. Ruben Flores

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Office hours: 3 Kochnovskiy Proezd., Office 308A. By appointment.

Time: Monday (15.10-16.30), and Thursday (16:40-19:30h).

Venue: 3 Kochnovskiy Proezd. Aud 432. (Monday), and Aud. 322 (Thursday).

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


Level: Final year BA course.

Prerequisites:
Иностранный язык (английский) - Foreign language (English).
Социальная история Нового времени - Social History of Modernity
Социологическая теория - Sociological Theory
Введение в экономическую социологию: Introduction to Economic Sociology

I. General course description

This course offers an introduction to the sociology of development and underdevelopment. At the same time, it gives you an opportunity to practise, and improve, your social research skills.

Although the particular context where these terms gained wide currency – the aftermath of World War II – is now history, the issues that the idea of 'development' set out to address (e.g. social inequality, economic growth) go well beyond this particular context, and remain pressing questions today. Why is the world so unequal on so many levels? How did the gap between the world haves and the have-nots come about? Can this gap be closed or at least reduced? Can underdeveloped countries develop? Questions related to development resonate with key concerns of the modern world, such as the idea of progress and the possibilities of building more humane societies through deliberate, collective efforts.

Throughout the course 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.

The course seeks to get you thinking about questions such as the following: What is meant by development? How did come to see the world as divided in developed and
developing/underdeveloped countries? What is distinctive about the sociology of development? What brings about development? Is development the same as modernization? Is there development without underdevelopment? What are the main factors, and who 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?

The working language of this course will be English.

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. Thematic plan of the course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Total hours in theme</th>
<th>Hours in classroom</th>
<th>Independent work</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lectures</td>
<td>Seminars</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>What is development and why does it matter?</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Can everyone catch up? Modernisation theory.</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Is development premised on underdevelopment? Dependency theory.</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>How did Japan got rich? The East Asian experience.</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>‘Why is Sub-Saharan Africa poor?’ Institutional approaches</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>The capabilities approach</td>
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<td>Globalization and sustainable development</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>Development after the 2008 crisis</td>
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III. Learning outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Critically assess in writing development theories from a sociological perspective.
Link sociological debates about development with contemporary world affairs.

Be able to reflect about development issues taking a broad historical perspective.

During the course, students will have the opportunity to practice how to:

- Provide constructive criticism to the work of fellow colleagues.
- Constructively deal with criticisms to their own work, and incorporate such criticisms in revising the latter.

**IV. Course Assessment**

You 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 three (Friday, 23 November 2012), and the second version towards the end of the term. The second essay is expected to incorporate the convener's feedback and be a significantly improved version of the first essay; it will be assessed accordingly. The idea is that you have the opportunity to work and revise a single piece of work, which you can turn into a larger research project at some later point if they so wish.

You are required to submit both an electronic and a hard copy of your papers.

There will be a final written examination at the end of the term—the essay questions at the end of this module should give you a general idea of the questions you are likely to find in the final exam.

The final grade is calculated as follows:
Weekly reports (please see below) = 15%
Seminar participation and presentations = 25%
Essay’s first draft = 15%
Essay’s second draft = 25%
Final exam = 20%

**Seminar participation.** I will mark seminar participation using a four point scale:

Unjustified absence: minus one point.
Justified absence: zero points.
Attendance: one point.
Attendance and active participation: 2 points.
Attendance and active participation which demonstrates a critical engagement with the texts under discussion: 3 points.

**Attendance**

Attendance to the seminars is mandatory. Students with more than two unjustified absences will lose the right to receive a mark for the course.

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.
2 I thank Rafael Mrowczynski for this idea.
**Weekly reports**

Each week, students are expected to prepare a brief summary of at least one of the papers under discussion. This summary should be between 150 and 300 words in length, and focus on the paper’s argument, which students are encouraged to reflect upon/criticize. Summaries are not meant to be polished pieces of work, but only a springboard for seminar discussion and a tool for essay writing. The only requirement is that the student uses her/his own words to summarize (and if possible analyse) the text under consideration. Reports will not be marked, but their production will count towards the final mark.

**How to do well on this course?**

Read as widely as possible, and be ready to discuss the texts under review during seminar time. Do ask questions. Cultivate doubt, and an inquisitive attitude towards the social world. 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 be reported to the dean and lead to a zero mark for the whole course. The module convener reserves the right to refuse to give a mark for the course to any student committing plagiarism. So, please make sure to familiarise yourself with what counts as plagiarism and make sure to 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](http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml)

- “How to avoid plagiarism” (The writer's center @ The University of Wisconsin – Madison).

**V. Seminars**

The course will be mostly seminar-based, with one lecture and 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.

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

[Copies available upon request]

VI. Course outline

Week 1. What is development and why does it matter?

We shall begin this course by asking the following questions: what is the development all about? How to think about it? And why does it matter? Seeking to answer these questions, we shall discuss some of the many definitions of development. We shall discuss what is distinctive about sociological approaches to development, whether it is desirable to approach development from a multi-disciplinary perspective, and what the current state of development studies is.
Required reading:


Further reading:


Extra assignments: One of your tasks during this first week is to visit my office so that I can have a chance to hear about you and your research interests, and you get a chance to know how office hours work. If you feel intimidated by this exercise, feel free to come in pairs or groups.

This week you also need to choose an essay topic.

2. Modernisation theory

In this session we shall discuss the idea of modernisation and modernisation theory. This will entail asking questions about what it takes to be (and to become) ‘modern’, and about whether we can think of development in terms of stages. We will also focus our attention upon some of the psychological and cultural factors that may lead (or not) to bringing about development. In keeping with the overall spirit of the course, we shall analyse the context where modernization theory was produced, as well as its strengths and weaknesses.

Required reading:

Seminar a:

Seminar b:
Further reading:


3. Dependency Theory and Theories of Underdevelopment

In this session will overview the rise and fall of dependency theory, and will ask questions about its continued relevance today. Key issues to be discussed include the key criticisms levelled against modernization theory, as well as the role of social structures and power inequalities in bringing about or hampering development. The role of the state and the different positions of nation-states within the world system will also be discussed.

Seminar a:


Seminar b:


Further reading:
4. The East Asian Experience

There is a long-standing controversy within development studies as to what role markets and states should play in the development process. How much can states/markets do to promote development? Is state action desirable to promote development or should the market call the shots? This session will be devoted to analysing this debate. In order to ground our debate, we shall focus our attention on the development experience of East Asian countries during the second half of the twentieth century. This will take us to consider debates concerning state capabilities, and state formation. As much as time allows, we shall discuss the case of the USSR.

Seminar a:


Seminar b:


Further reading:


5. “Why is Sub-Saharan Africa poor?” Institutional approaches

In “Why is Africa poor?”, Acemoglu and Robinson argue that the answer comes down to institutions. But what are institutions? And how exactly do they intervene in the development process? How do they relate to culture, states, markets, and power inequalities?

Seminar a:


Seminar b:


Further reading:


6. The capabilities approach

This unit we will discuss Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach. We shall overview its philosophical foundations, as well as its differences with other approaches to understanding development. We will also discuss some applications of this approach to concrete social issues, such as population health.
Seminar a:


Seminar b: Population health and development


Further reading:


7. Globalization and sustainable development

In this session, we will examine questions related to sustainable development, a topic which has gained prominence since the 1970s – not least due to the rise of interest in phenomena such as population growth, climate change, biodiversity loss – but which is problematic on a number of grounds. We will also discuss the way in which globalization has impacted our understanding of development.

Seminar a:


Seminar b:


**8. Development after the 2008 crisis**

**Required reading:**

Seminar a:


Seminar b:


**VII. Essay themes/questions:**

Below are some essay questions. Choose one. In writing your essay, remember to draw on relevant theories, scholarly literature, and data.

Compare and contrast the basic postulates of modernization theory, dependency theory, and the world systems perspective vis-a-vis the question of development.

“Should states step in and try to overcome some of the structural barriers that create poverty, or
should they get out of the way and let ingenuity and the market solve the problem?” (Roberts and Bellone Hite 2007: 14)

Critically evaluate the role played by both “internal and external factors” in determining a country's level of development (cf Roberts and Bellone Hite 2007: 4).

“Culture was a key element in the development of Japan.” Critically assess this proposition.

Critically assess the role of the USSR is the development of the development discourse.

Is Russia a developed country?

“Developing countries can catch up with developed countries if they set in place the right institutions”. Critically assess this view.

“Development is impossible without sustained economic growth.” Critically assess this view.

Is industrialization a necessary and sufficient component of development?

Is development possible in the face of the ecological problems we face in the early 21st century?

How has the 2008 crisis impacted our understanding of development?

Nb If you wish to write on another topic which is not included in the following list, please ask me first. I am happy for you to choose your own topic as long as this topic is relevant for the course. The main thing is that you are interested in your essay question. Remember though that sometimes it is out of reading and writing about a topic that we develop an interest in it.

VIII. Self-assessment questions (for the final exam)

Outline the historical context where the idea of “national development” rose and fell.

Why does H. Chang argue that development studies have become like “Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark”?

Briefly compare the basic postulates of modernization and dependency theories.

The state has been portrayed both as the hero and the villain of the development story during the 20th century. Briefly analyse some of the arguments for and against state participation in the process of development.

Why is Sub-Saharan Africa poor, according to Acemoglu and Robinson?
What is meant by sustainable development? What criticisms have been levelled against this view?

Outline and assess the main arguments of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach.
VIII. Some websites that might be useful

Human Development and Capability Association
http://www.capabilityapproach.com/index.php

World Development Reports (World Bank)

The World Bank Data
http://data.worldbank.org/

OECD
http://www.oecd.org/home/0,2987,en_2649_201185_1_1_1_1_1,00.html

Angus Maddison's Historical Statistics
http://www.ggdc.net/maddison/

The Groningen Growth and Development Centre
http://www.ggdc.net/

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I would like to thank Isaac Enriquez Perez, Benjamin Lind, and Tiina Eilola for their helpful comments and feedback.