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Documento de Trabajo del IPES
Aportes Conceptuales

Development: Social

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IPES

Universidad Católica
DAMASO A. LARRAÑAGA • URUGUAY

EMBAJADA DE ESPAÑA EN URUGUAY
COOPERACIÓN ESPAÑOLA

CDD 300
ISSN: 1510-5628

Serie Documentos de Trabajo del IPES / Colección Aportes Conceptuales Nº 10
El IPES nace como una institución de investigación cuya meta es impulsar estudios innovadores sobre los problemas de pobreza, desigualdad y exclusión social. Esta serie busca contribuir a la difusión y crecimiento de un paradigma emergente anclado en las nociones de Activos Sociales, Vulnerabilidad y Estructura de Oportunidades (AVEO). En este sentido, la serie recoge aportes conceptuales y dispositivos heurísticos que permitan incrementar las capacidades descriptivas y explicativas de la comunidad académica en torno a las temáticas de pobreza y exclusión social. Contribuir a forjar debates intra e interparadigmáticos y a la construcción de más y mejores abordajes para el estudio del desarrollo social es el objetivo central de esta serie.

Programa IPES
Facultad de Ciencias Humanas
Universidad Católica del Uruguay
Dep. Legal 326.861

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DEVELOPMENT: SOCIAL

Definición en International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

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Latin American Studies: Society

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Development: Social

If it is true that concepts lack meaning in and of themselves, but rather acquire significance in thecontext of a set of concepts articulated in what iscommonly understood as a theory or a paradigm, then at least as it has been used in the literature the concept of social development is somewhat of an exception.This is true when one compares social developmentwith the notion of economic development, about which there has existed a clear consensus both around a set of powerful theoretical referents (Keynesianism, the neo-classical school, or Marxist radicalism) and around how practical objectives are to be achieved. If the comparison is extended further to encompass political development, the absence of such consensus is mitigated somewhat by the clarity of the goals and objectives to which the concept refers: the construction of the nation state and of democracy. Yet neither of these referents, theoretical nor normative, has played a similar role in the use of the concept of social development.

Social development thus has been a concept with multiple meanings, encompassing at least three connotations developed extensively in the literature pertaining to the social sphere. At its most basic level, social development simply suggests improvement in the conditions and quality of life of the population. Greater levels of wealth, technological advancement, and public policies permit people to live better, to consume more, to feed themselves better, and to get sick less frequently. This idea of social development is inextricably linked to the idea of economic and material advance of human society. A second approach emerges from considering social development in terms of the distribution of the wealth that societies generate. Here, the economic dimension still constitutes a powerful factor in determining social development, but the latter occupies a space of its own, in the distributive sphere. Finally, a less normative or economistic perspective on social development identifies the latter with the processes of social differentiation and social complexity associated with the capitalist and industrial transformations that gave rise to the modern world.

1. Sketching a Genealogy

In the aftermath of the World War II, and at the height of the period of worldwide decolonization, an important body of literature was produced as a result of concern with economic growth, equity, the establishment of democratic regimes, and the achievement of social order and national autonomy. The basic objective of this literature was to discover appropriate paths through which new nations could advance toward these goals. The term social development originates during this period, and is anchored in an international context characterized by profound transformations of the world order and system of nations.

The notion of social development is as recent as the notion of development itself, and thus stands in contrast to the historical tradition of studies of economic growth and social change carried out primarily in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the past, attempts to characterize the principal traits of capitalism of that era employed a discourse that relied on different terms. The international system of nations was conceptualized -depending on preferences or discipline- in terms of various binary categorizations: rich and poor countries; industrial or agrarian societies; traditional and modern societies; classic capitalism and late capitalism; or colony and metropolis. Only since the middle of the last century did there emerge an increasing perception that the world was divided in terms of concepts of relative development: of development and underdevelopment. With that shift came the introduction of notions of developing countries. It was during this period as well that researchers elaborated distinctions between center and periphery to understand the insertion of countries into the world economy. This approach was developed subsequently in significant directions by the writings of the Economic Commission on Latin America (ECLA), and contributed to the development of dependency theories (Pinto 1979, Cardoso 1977). Because the concept of social development has its origins above all in the literature produced in, or concerned with, the development of new nations, much of that literature was published in Latin America or in academic and political circles animated by the problems of the great transformation brought about by the economic and political reorganization of the international system of nations. Beginning in the late 1940s, the thinking of ECLA played a notable role in this process. Especially influential were its founding ideas, developed by Raul Prebisch following publication of his classic 1949 article `Estudio Economico de America Latina.' (See also CEPAL 1989, Gurrieri 1979.)

2. Social De.elopment and De.elopmentalism

As noted at the outset, it is useful to distinguish social development as a body of concepts and theory as used in academic circles from its prescriptive or normative meaning directed toward action or policy (`planning,' to use the terms of the era). Strictly speaking, there is no theory of social development or similar body of conceptual thinking. The notion of social development formed part of the more general and prevailing idea that economic development was normatively charged. Indeed, this concept of social development originates amid a climate of failure of the assumptions of classical economics regarding social and economic change in late capitalist countries. In particular, it reflected a response to the findings of studies of international trade by such authors as R. Nurkse, R. E. Baldwin, and the Manchester School, or the notion of the `big push,' rooted in the ideas of H. Ellis (Rosestein-Rodan 1954, Ellis 1961). At the same time, in addition to being a body of concepts articulated in the form of a paradigm, economic and social development was constituted in an ideology known at the time as developmentalism (Hodara 1975). Transforming the objective of development into ideology served to offer a complex system of beliefs that explained social and political arrangements in the world and in society. It thus legitimized and rationalized behaviors and social relations, at the same time that it served as a base for solidaristic and collaborative forms of action motivating individuals to undertake certain kinds of actions. The power of the ideology reflected its capacity to provide meaning to the relationship between circumstances experienced by individuals and
those affecting the nation as a whole. Prospects for the eventual improvement of the status of individuals in society could not be separated from the situation and status of the country in the international system.

But if social development had no single meaning from an academic point of view, the elaborations on the concept represent conceptual tributaries of a long tradition of studies and elaborations on social change or social progress. These ideas were central to the thinkers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and later would foster formulations of social modernization theory in its structural functionalist versions or in *dependentista* currents.

To a greater extent than the great evolutionary interpretations of Comte, Morgan, or Spencer, or the visions of progress advanced by Condorcet or Saint-Simon, the intellectual currents that situated social change in the context of development were more specific and revived the legacy of a more recent sociological tradition (Nisbet 1966). Especially important was Durkheim's basic concern with the effects of labor and social differentiation on moral density. That relationship was expressed in the tensions of passage from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity, in the polar structures of community and society of *Gemeinschaft*±*Gesellschaft*, and in the transformation of small, primitive, traditional, homogenous societies and primary social relations toward their social opposite, as formulated by F. To$ nnies, or in the economic sociology of MaxWeber on the evolution of

the capitalist spirit and the inevitable progress of rationalization and bureaucratization of Western societies; in the process of transformation of authority and autonomization and objectification of the status described by Simmel; or in the sociology rooted in the Marxist tradition and the theorists of conflict. Yet it was Modernization theory, anchored in the work of Parsons, and later in developmentalism, that proved of greatest influence in the analysis of social development in Latin America. Indeed, this is true to the extent that is frequently difficult to distinguish the concept of social development from that of social modernization (see Germani 1963, Moore 1969). In turn, dependency paradigms, particularly in the versions put forth by G. Frank and T. Dos Santos, were centered more in the economic and political spheres than in the realm of social processes.

In its initial formulation, the objective of social development formed part of an optimistic vision of the future of the new nations. Consistent with acceptance of that vision were the two other great goals to be achieved, one at the level of economic development and the other at the level of politics. The perception was that in one way or another, albeit with disjunctures or frictions and with transitory tensions produced by the unequal advance of different dimensions of development, new nations -poor, unequal, repressive, violent, and dependent- would move gradually toward societies characterized by welfare, equity, order, democracy, and autonomy. This evolution was believed likely to follow a path not very different from that of Western societies in Europe and the United States. The literature of the 1960s on social and political modernization was impressive and engaged the talents of diverse students of sociology and political science who shared a common interest in revealing the paths that would permit `peripheral' societies to overcome their pasts and incorporate themselves into the core (e.g., Almond and Coleman 1960, Lipset 1981, Pye 1962, Deutsch 1963, Almond and Powell 1966). Nevertheless, not all were entirely optimistic, as noted by Huntington (1996). During an initial phase there predominated the view that the objectives of social, political, and economic development were inherently compatible; in a second phase, emphasis was placed on the intrinsically conflictive nature of the three goals; and a third phase was marked by arguments concerning the imperative of generating policies capable of reconciling the goals.

3. Stages in Latin America

It is not difficult to distinguish a first phase of the Latin American literature, in which social development was presented as a non-specific set of ideas subordinate to economic development. In the initial writings of ECLA, the terminology `economic and social development' refers to a single thing. In practice, however, the basic assessment of ECLA stemmed from critical analysis of economic questions and of international trade during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The criticism of the passive role that classical international trade theory assigned to countries of the periphery was that this effectively denied them a capacity for dynamism and autonomy over the long term (Nurske 1963, Perroux 1958, Baldwin 1956, Barré1958). Central to this interpretation was the concept of deteriorating terms of trade, which were understood as systematically unfavorable to the periphery. This was seen as the cause of the vulnerability of the productive systems of underdeveloped countries and of the power that traditional groups linked to primary sector exports acquired in those countries. The resulting call for inward-oriented development, based on a push for import-substituting industrialization, productive diversification, and the
formation of a modern national entrepreneurial class, was expected to augment national decision-making capacity vis-a' -vis the international system. As a natural consequence of these transformations, achievement of several other development goals would be possible: political democratization, cultural independence, and social integration. During this initial
phase, social development was understood essentially as improvement in the conditions of life and as a passive dimension of the development process. It is no surprise, then, that the titles of works of the era made reference to `the social consequences of economic development' or `social aspects of economic development' rather than to social development *per se*.

Within ECLA itself, the work of J. Medina Echevarria (1955, 1963), of unequivocally Weberian roots, opened important spaces for the consideration of the social as a cause and not merely as a consequence of economic development, particularly with regard to the study of social, cultural, and political prerequisites for economic development and for its emphasis on linking sociological variables to economic theory. Nevertheless, his ideas developed in parallel to those of the mainstream, and were never incorporated into
the core of ECLA thinking.

During a second phase, coinciding roughly with the end of the 1960s and through the 1970s, with the advance of studies in comparative politics and society, doubts began to emerge about the possibility that countries in the periphery would manage to move simultaneously along a path of social, economic, and political development. The notion of compatibility or harmony among these development goals was increasingly questioned. During this phase, research produced in core countries and in other regions of the world had a greater impact on the elaboration of Latin American thought at the same time that ECLA lost its leadership role in thinking about development.

The redefinition of the concept of social development, and above all reconsideration of its role in the general process of development, was influenced by disenchantment with the failure to fulfill expectations. Especially troubling were low levels of economic growth, persistent political instability, the presence of authoritarian regimes, and high levels of indigence and poverty derived from the incapacity to reduce indices of social inequality. The apparent incompatibility of objectives was articulated in the questioning of much of the conventional wisdom about development, in particular with regard to such topics as the relationships between growth and equity (in contrast to the classic thesis of Kuznets; in the controversy over the relationship between democracy and growth (an idea deeply rooted in liberal thought); or about the role of poverty, indigence, and inequality as limits on economic development. The literature on the topic adopted a vision that, if not more pessimistic, advanced at least a more complex and cautious view about the ease of transformation (see Furtado 1996, Olson 1963, Flanigan and Fogelman 1971, Berger 1976, Hewlett 1980, Huntington 1996). At ECLA publication of *El Cambio Social y la Politica de Desarrollo Social en American Latina* (United Nations 1969) reflected renewed attention to the social question, which would become the core of subsequent activities developed by that institution's Division of Social Development.

During a third phase, the temporal boundaries of which are less precise, the term `social development' became detached from any single current of ideas. In part this was because developmentalist ideology had lost its influence and in part because the confidence deposited in technocratic actions had given way to consideration of alternative logics of an economic, social, and political nature. At least four factors account for these changes. One is the exhaustion of the import-substitution or inward-oriented development model, which proved incapable of sustaining economic growth in the region and inducing the promised social and economic development. Another is the renewed strength of liberal economic orientations that portray the market as the locomotive of history, and that curtail the basic functions of the state expressed in the developmentalist ideology. A third reason is of a different nature, and concerns the sources of discourses about growth. Multilateral financial organizations, and particularly the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank, became two of the most important institutions for generating ideas and proposals about the development of peripheral countries, and followed a line consistent with the Washington Consensus and with neo-liberal orientations. Meanwhile, from the United Nations, and in particular from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), there emerged alternative proposals and the notion of social development. A fourth reason is the competition to which the idea of social development was subjected by a growing array of new themes, concepts, and approaches which broadened and legitimized the inclusion of social goals in development. This competition was reflected in the introduction and increasingly widespread use of such notions as `sustainable development' and `human
development.'

With regard to the social, there was a contradictory movement of differentiation and fusion. On the one hand, the notion of social development fragmented into multiple sub goals and in the application of middle-range theories

around newly legitimate issues and demands (women, environment, youth, ethnicity, culture, human rights, etc.). On the other hand, the concept of social development -replaced by human development in the UNDP version- implies a return to an integrated vision of the economic and the social. Debates had come full circle, as traditional sets of indicators designed to characterize the evolution of countries once again included economic variables (for example, GDP per capita) alongside social variables (for example, life expectancy at birth). This took place following differentiation between the systems of social indicators and the systems of economic indicators, a distinction that emerged with the `Scandinavian movement' of the 1960s, and that would be adopted later on by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) and ECLA.

***See also*:** Dependency Theory; Development, Economics of; Development: Social anthropological Aspects; Development: Socioeconomic Aspects; Durkheim, Emile (1858±1917); Inequality: Comparative Aspects; Modernization, Political: Alternate Paths; Modernization, Political: Development of the Concept; Modernization, Sociological Theories of; Parsons, Talcott (1902±79)

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