

'Development means making a better life for everyone' (Peet and Hartwick, 2009). Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this definition by using a particular context, issue or case.

Introduction:

This article aims to connect Enlightenment philosophies to post-developmental critiques of development. As case studies, we will explore trajectories of major indicators for happiness (Gross National Happiness, Bhutan) and situate this within 'beyond GDP' discourse. To help us in our discussion, we will use Peet and Hartwick's (2009) definition where 'development means making a better life for everyone'.

Literature Review

Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution and history of GDP

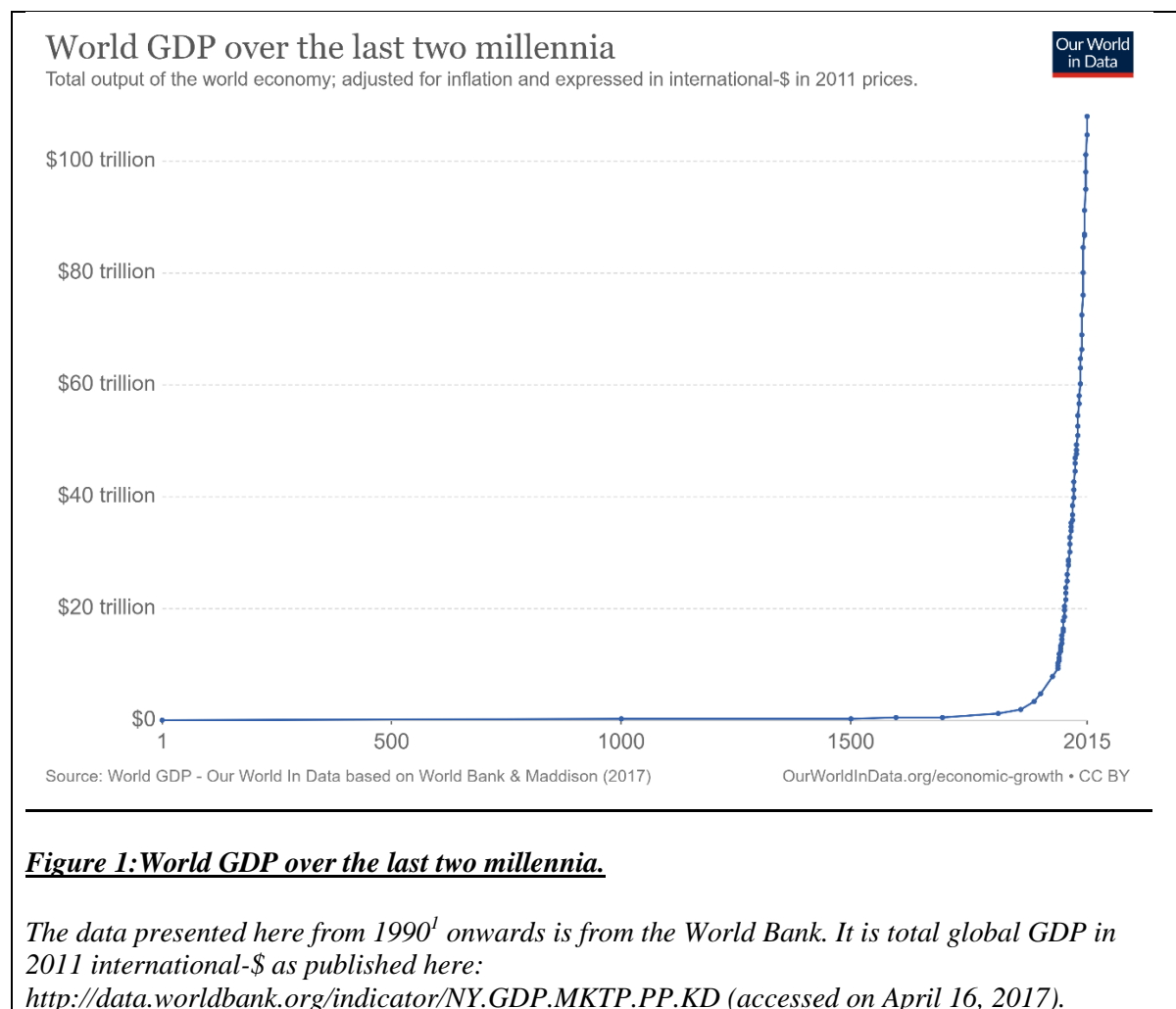
The current ideas about development has its modus operandi following world war two (WW2). Due to the need for rapid growth following the war, there was an almost exclusive emphasis of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), at the expense of other possible indicators (Reid-Henry, 2012b).

The focus of GDP is based on the implicit idea that economic development benefits everyone and underpins much of the ideas around 'trickle down economics'; when economies grow, capital flows from the rich to the poor (Dollar and Kraay, 2002).

The age of Enlightenment (or reason) was an intellectual and philosophical movement across Europe in the 17th – 19th centuries. Key ideas included John Lock's 'social contract theory' and Thomas Hobbes (Leviathan) natural rights of individuals, expanded by proposals for democratic sovereignty with the 'state' as the guardian of individual liberties. Other ideas articulated sources of knowledge alongside the rise of the scientific method (Outram, 2006).

Within the economic spheres, Adam Smith and other leading economists provided theoretical bases for greater freedoms of the middle-class against the feudal aristocratic rule. Collectively, these are 'class-committed' ideas benefitting entrepreneurs and capitalists, at the expense of the poorest and most marginalised in society whose value is derived from the cost of production vs the profits and rents for capitalists and landlords, respectively, (Peet and Hartwick, 2009).

Enlightenment period, 1760-1840, coincides with the First Industrial Revolution in Europe and USA (Landes, 2003). This was a period of rapid British technological innovation, where Britain controlled a vast global empire of colonies. Thus, fundamental way of living changed dramatically across the globe; average income and population grew exponentially. Prior to this, GDP remained quite stable the last two millennia - see *Figure 1: World GDP over the last two millennia*.



Modernism

Enlightenment ideas combined with the recent history of global warfare (WW2) and the backdrop of industrial revolutions emerged the principles of modernisation and a roadmap to development. A key influence during this period is Rostow's Economic Growth theory (1971) – he provided the metaphor of countries in 'take-off' - given sufficient capital and resources, countries will thrive and develop rapidly. The title of his book 'The stages of economic growth: A non-communist manifesto' indicates that development/growth is inherently a political endeavour.

The other dominant ideas of development discourse are the culmination of the Washington Consensus model (Williamson, 1990): a list of around 10 'free-market' economic policy measures supported by major global financial institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United States Treasury, recommending structural reforms to increase efficiency of 'market-forces', ranging from property rights to adoption of free-trade policies. Williamson later clarifies that he merely sought to categorise the dominant views in 'Washington' rather than propose them (Williamson, 2004, p.33). The key point here is to note some sort of 'mono-economics' which works for all people, for all of time, this chimes in with Rostow's single roadmap to development, both rooted in capitalistic market-driven global systems (Peet and Hartwick, 2009).

¹ Data earlier than 1990 is backwards extended from the World Bank observation for 1990 based on the growth rates implied by Maddison data. The Maddison data is published here:
<http://www.ggdc.net/maddison/oriindex.htm>

Post-development: era of endings (postmodernism, post structuralism, postcolonialism...)

We now come to the crux of current development discourse, and the need to widen out both the means and ends of development. Recent scholars have asked basic questions about development: who is it for? What are the objectives? Are economic indicators sufficient? Who is asking for these 'developments'? Are there inherent epistemological biases?

Foucault's insights about knowledge processes (epistemological biases), through his discussion on 'subjectivity', indicates that we cannot find our true selves through rejection of the constructs imposed by society, rather he advocates the practice of 'critique', whereby, debating how things came to be and why things are the way they are, leads to insights into biases of the constitutions of knowledge processes, and thereafter, its retrieval of it (Hofmann and Taylor, 2011).

Foucault's 'theory of knowledge', as an opportunity to rediscover knowledge of the past and renew our understanding of current reality, is further elaborated by Escobar as a means to critiquing development theories and practices as 'cultural imperialism that poor countries had little means of declining politely' (1995). Escobar makes explicit the ideological and political export of Rostow's manifesto and the Washington Consensus, and he calls for 'local agency' to assert itself and encourage local communities and traditions to thrive. This becomes the basis of his 'pluriverse' concept, 'a world within worlds', that is to say, reality is constituted by many different kinds of worlds. Thus, challenging scientific rational hegemony to include other dimensions of reality and knowledge processes such as spirituality, and the natural world, in doing so, highlighting the need for plural societies to coexist (Escobar, 2018).

Escobar's insights arises from the Latin American experience, whereas Said (1978) exposes the deep cultural epistemological biases in the creation the 'European identity' by 'othering' the Orient as primitive, irrational and violent, thus, creating an inferior Oriental cultural tradition. Cultural (mis)representation is used as means of control and domination (Said, 2001, p.12) by creating a sense of the 'other' culture (Said, 1978, pp.65–67). Like Escobar, Said's main point is to be critical of biases in knowledge processes which are deployed as part of power processes, and his main recommendation for engagement is 'participatory and collaborative, non-coercive, rather than imposed' (Said, 1978).

In summary, critiques of modernity and mono-economic growth, neo-colonialism through ethnocentric development policies and debates around the nature of development culminates either in the rejection of development (Pieterse, 2000) or re-imagining alternative models of bottom-up, broader development processes (Sachs, 2010). This is where Sen's (2001) work on broadening up the definition of development comes into play, he argues for the expansion of freedoms as central to development, through the removal of 'unfreedoms'. This capabilities-based approach to freedoms is the basis of discourse 'beyond GDP', (Reid-Henry, 2012a). This will form the basis of our subsequent case studies and discussion.

Discussion

Our discussion will follow the ideas synthesised in the literature review. By adopting Peet and Hartwick's (2009) definition of development as a framing device, we explore the advantages and disadvantages of this simplified definition with respect to the discourses in 'beyond GDP' leading to Gross National Happiness (GNH) in Bhutan and the adoption of beyond GDP policies in Europe.

Case Study 1: Gross National Happiness (GNH), Bhutan

Gross National Happiness (GNH) is an index which measures collective happiness and well-being within a population (Ura et al., 2012), it is intended as an alternative to measure a country beyond GDP, effectively, part of the 'beyond GDP' discourse. The only country to fully adopt this as an official benchmark is Bhutan in 2008, a country of 741,700 people (*The Constitution of The Kingdom of Bhutan*, 2008, Section 2, Article 9 Principles of State Policy). The concept of GNH or equivalent 'happiness indexes' rose to popularity across the world, as evidence by the UN General Assembly Resolution which passed the motion of 'happiness – towards a holistic approach to development' as a 'fundamental human goal' (UN. General Assembly (65th sess.: 2010-2011), 2011).

The GNH, as a happiness index, is based on Alkire-Foster Method (a way of measuring multidimensional poverty) with the help of 33 sub-indexes, 72 indicators and 151 variables categorized under nine domains (Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative, 2020). This leads to identification of broad measures at societal levels.

In 2010, the GNH survey revealed that (Ura et al., 2012):

- 10.4% of its population in Bhutan were considered 'unhappy',
- 47.8% as 'narrowly happy',
- 32.5% as 'extensively happy', and
- 8.3% as 'deeply happy'.

To be considered 'happy, two tests need to be passed, the first, a 'sufficiency threshold', a set of minimum standards required to remove the 'unfreedoms' proposed by Sen (2001). Secondly, 'happiness thresholds', are indicators (above and beyond sufficiency threshold) which specify increases in 'happiness' or well-being (Centre for Bhutan & GNH Studies, 2010).

There are four pillars of GNH (Gross National Happiness Commission (Bhutan), 2009):

1. sustainable and equitable socio-economic development;
2. environmental conservation;
3. preservation and promotion of culture; and
4. good governance

The four pillars cover nine domains (Ura, 2008):

1. psychological well-being,
2. health,
3. time use,
4. education,
5. cultural diversity and resilience,
6. good governance,
7. community vitality,
8. ecological diversity and resilience, and
9. living standards

A. Development means...

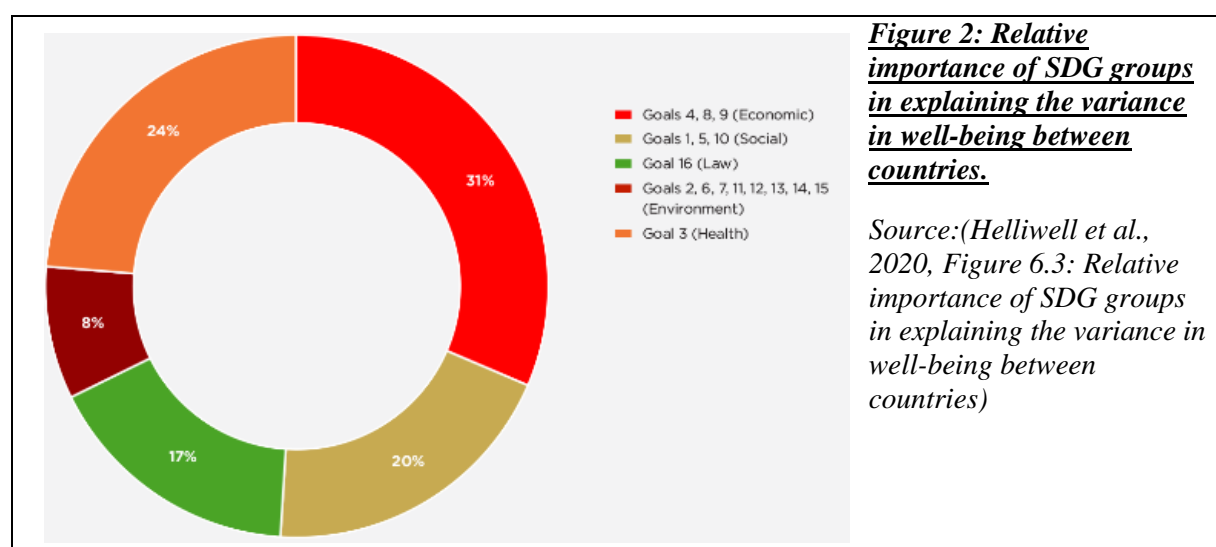
Peet and Hartwick (2009) begin with a simple definition of development, that ‘development means’ making a better life. Our key discussion enquires on the nature of development, if there exists a connection between the means and ends of development? Are there agendas for narrowing the definition of development or expanding world views?

Thus, at a glance, the definition is devilishly simple in that it cuts through the idea that development is aspiration towards the ‘good life’ (OECD, 2013), essentially the business of making promises (Pieterse, 2000). This definition appeals to the masses and communicates the fundamental Enlightenment thinking about progress of humanity without the complex discourses and contentions around development (Sachs, 2010).

However, upon closer introspection, we find that the definition does not make explicit references to the values-laden aspects of this definition situated within a historical context, specifically, a European socio-historical perspective (Westernisation) (Said, 1978).

We discussed in the Literature Review, whether economic indicators simulate notions of ‘happiness’ and well-being. Although, we concluded that it does not, and that more needs to be done to capture non-economic indicators. It is interesting to note that across common indicators of ‘happiness’, the World Happiness Report 2020 concludes that economic indicators (e.g. positive GDP growth) can correlate with current international benchmarks for ‘happiness’. Sachs (at the Centre of Sustainable Development, Columbia University) and De Neve (at the Wellbeing Research Centre, University of Oxford) tested correlation of subjective well-being (SWB) with common indicators for SDG Index, HDI, IEF, GPI, GCI, EPI and GDP per capita². The correlation analysis concludes that HDI Index positively correlated most significantly with wellbeing. The regression analysis suggest that although GDP per capita correlates positively with wellbeing, it is one of the weakest indicators (alongside measures of Economic Freedom) compared to the other indices analysed (Helliwell et al., 2020). This underscores the point that economic indicators alone are weak determinants of wellbeing (and happiness) and that other ‘domains’ must be considered.

Indeed, the World Happiness Report 2020 highlights that Economic indicators from the SDG’s contribute to less than a third of ‘wellbeing’ outcomes (dominance analysis), whereas social, legal (governance), environmental and health contributed to the rest.



² SDG = Sustainable Development Goals, HDI = Human Development Indicators, IEF = Index of Economic Freedom, GPI = Global Peace Index, GCI = Global Competitiveness Index, EPI = Environmental Protection Index, GDP = Gross Domestic Product

Given the sophistication of data analysis to map wellbeing indicators across various quality of life indicators. One must ask whether wellbeing indicators are a good approximation to the so called 'good life', one devoid of 'unfreedoms' with the capabilities to carry out the full potential of life (Sen, 2001), or as Foucault would have stated, to be able to discover oneself (Hofmann and Taylor, 2011). We now look towards the OECDs'³ Better Life Index, launched in 2011 covering eleven 'dimensions' of well-being from housing, income and jobs to work-life balance. Although this Index has been critiqued for being too similar with other indexes, the background research is interesting. According to research commissioned by OECD, two third of respondents across Europe agreed with key domains of well-being e.g. health, income and governance etc. (OECD, 2013). This is rather worrying, as it indicates that a third of respondents attribute other indicators not listed as measures of well-being.

To summarise this discussion, development is the promise of a 'better life', which is more comprehensive than GDP figures alone, and majority of surveyed people would agree that current international indices on well-being and happiness approximate to what they are trying to measure. However, we should caution that our discussion thus far has only touched upon the surface of indicators and some aspects of definition of the 'better life' in a technocratic manner. It does not respond to the Foucauldian challenge of re-imaging reality through self-discovery and processes of critique. In the next sections we focus on processes which surface inherent biases.

³ OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

A. Making a better life...

We now discuss the process of development and its inherent biases. Again, Peet and Hartwick's (2009) observation is correct in that the verb 'making' implies that development is an active and intentional process. There is a notion of agency connecting to a 'better life'. Here we will critique the planners of development, the role of state interventions vs the markets and narratives of development, bringing Foucault's ideas about knowledge processes connected to Power through the stories we tell about ourselves and others.

Case Study 2: beyond GDP, European Union

In the 1930s, Simon Kuznet and Colin Clarke debated whether Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is still a useful measure, or whether we need broader measures that measure economic activity as well as societal welfare based on notions of 'wellbeing' (OECD, 2014). GDP was born during post-WW2 and the Great Depression due to the need for planning war production and calculating consumer sacrifice (OECD, 2013). However, there was a growing concern that development (in its broadest sense) was too restricted to GDP measures, and needed to consider factors beyond economic indicators, along the 'capabilities' trajectory proposed by Sen (2001). However, there was no real consensus around indicators for prosperity and wellbeing, although generally most metrics include components such as climate change, poverty, resource depletion, health and quality of life (European Commission, 2019).

The European Commission's Directorate on Environment organised the 'Beyond GDP Conference' (2007) with over 650 participants from more than 50 countries to discuss possible policy changes relating to beyond GDP discourse. Following this conference in 2007, a motion was put forward to the European Parliament whether to adopt a further indicator 'beyond GDP', however, the motion itself was severely diluted such that what was presented were 'enhanced' GDP measures focussed on the continuation of status quo – the motion was accepted (and adopted in 2010) by 35 MEPs, rejected by 2 with 1 abstention (European Parliament, Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, 2011).

What started as an ambitious project, 'beyond GDP' debates in Europe quickly became narrowed down through the policy-making processes. The 'beyond GDP Conference' was a three-day conference held in 2007, the first day consisted of 'experts', this highlights the critique's raised by Escobar (1995), where development ideas are narrowed down by scientific rationalism of experts. The conference itself provided some interesting insights, mainly by remarks made by attendees, for e.g. Clube of Rome indicated that we need 'triple-bottom-line accounting' of people, planet and profit, others made the point that non-GDP data is very untimely e.g. key environmental data are outdated by two or more years. Others still, suggested that indicators for well-being and happiness should mark out the poorest against the 'average' nature of statistics to make them the centre of decision-making processes. A final comment from the floor was striking in its assertion that the concept of progress has **not** been identified democratically, and this needs to be addressed (European Commission Environment, 2007).

The follow-up to the beyond GDP conference was a motion in the European Parliament in 2011. It is quite interesting to note that the rapporteurs presenting the motion (sponsored by the EC⁴'s Environment Directorate) recommended the retention of GDP as the single indicator for development across Europe with 'enhanced' supplementary indicators. Instead of outlining options, it was as if a binary decision had already been made to not recommend alternative measures to GDP, moreover the solutions presented were ones where a regional body/state (such as the EC) could commit to e.g. timely data collection and analyses, without much thought for engagement of civil society. This highlights the institutional lens imposed by 'seeing like a state' (Scott, 1998).

⁴ EC = European Commission

B. For everyone...

The final part of Peet and Hartwick's (2009) definition is the aspiration that development is for everyone. This aspect of the definition is helpful not just in its simple yet lofty ideals of equality, but for its part in not dividing up the world as developing vs developed, or worse still the 'under-developed' world. It compares with SDG's inclusive growth agenda- that development is for everyone, everywhere.

However, there are several aspects missing from the reality of development. It is not as Dollar and Kraay (2002) conclude that 'growth is good for the poor'. Their findings across four decades, in 80 countries, is that GDP growth correlates with income of the poor increasing. However, it misses the point of the unequal share of this growth. Donaldson's (2008) critique of Dollar and Kraay's paper questions for whom growth benefits and focusses on outliers in the data, for instance his finding that 'in 45 cases, income of the poor declined while GDP increased'. Thus, development, when measured against economic indicators, does not benefit everyone equally; 'more than a billion people still live on less than a dollar a day, and annual poverty related death exceed 18 million' (Donaldson, 2008). Moreover, Donaldson (2008) makes explicit the neoliberal agenda's being proposed singularly and instead highlights alternative findings which attribute greater gains for the poor, through exceptional cases for e.g. land reforms in Colombia during the late 1960s. In other cases, resource transfer from the rich to the poor (welfare states) explain rising incomes for the poor when economic growth had been stagnant e.g. in Finland.

Conclusion

I hope this article has been able to connect some of the critical discourses in development, connecting thinking since the start of humanity. Enlightenment period is an important juncture, our way of life changed fundamentally, with the onset of exponential growth in GDP, population and technological innovations through the industrial revolution. Post development discussions enable us to pause, slow things down, and using the Foucauldian method, dissect constituted reality constructed to serve different powers, in order to reimagine our reality.

One thing is for sure; our reality is not the sum of gross domestic product (GDP). It is much broader and more enriching than the materialistic aspects of consumerism. This brought us to 'beyond GDP' discourse and trajectories exploring indicators for happiness and wellbeing, considering the proposal's raised by Sen's 'unfreedoms'. Our discussion was intended to highlight pitfalls within definitions and processes for development. Indeed, some of the criticisms made of Escobar's and Said's work on postcolonialism is that they do not offer alternative models of development (Pieterse, 2000). Although, I think that is the point, to resist the temptation to offer ready-made solutions, to offer narrow dominant pathways that are 'class committed'. Instead, what makes post-development ideas so desirable is the ability to capture our imaginations about our own reality, and the imaginary world of invisible powers, whether this be the 'invisible hands' of the market or great powers of the state in cultural (mis)appropriation in the form of post-colonialism.

I'd like to conclude by offering insights to widen the 'development process' by highlighting the methodologies at the STEPS centre (Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability). The surfacing of contestation issues in the case of water in Ghaziabad, India, demonstrated the opening up of choices, framing of issues and making explicit conflicts rather than overlooking them (STEPS Centre et al., 2010). This should surely be a first step in finding alternative pathways to development.

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