



Unity in Diversity? Reflections on Development Studies in the Mid-2020s

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Abstract

Development Studies (DS) demonstrates maturity as a field of inquiry marked by the half-century anniversaries of journals, institutes, and scholarly associations of DS. There is vitality in terms of the volume of research and the buoyant numbers of students engaging with the subject, though DS continues to fragment. The central argument of this paper is that contemporary DS has four broad ‘schools of thought’ which differ significantly in terms of positions taken on the framing of, and universality of development. A typology of DS is proposed which illustrates this. The paper posits that DS would be healthier intellectually if the divides were the subject of greater dialogue. Potential avenues for initiating this discussion are suggested.

Keywords Development studies · Cross-disciplinarity · Knowledge · Ontology · Epistemology

Résumé

Les études de développement (ED) démontrent leur maturité en tant que domaine d’enquête marqué par les cinquantenaires des revues à ce sujet, et des d’instituts et d’associations érudites d’ED. Il y a une vitalité en termes de volume de recherche et du nombre croissant d’étudiants s’engageant avec le sujet, bien que les ED continuent de se fragmenter. L’argument central de cet article est que les ED contemporaines ont quatre grandes « écoles de pensée » qui diffèrent significativement en termes de positions prises sur le cadrage de, et l’universalité du développement. Une typologie des ED est proposée qui illustre cela. L’article postule que les ED seraient plus sains intellectuellement si les divisions faisaient l’objet d’un dialogue plus important. Des voies potentielles pour initier cette discussion sont suggérées.

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Resumen

Los Estudios de Desarrollo (ED) demuestran madurez como campo de investigación, marcado por los aniversarios de medio siglo de revistas, institutos y asociaciones académicas de ED. Hay vitalidad en términos del volumen de investigación y el número creciente de estudiantes que se involucran con el tema, aunque los ED continúan fragmentándose. El argumento central de este artículo es que los ED contemporáneos tienen cuatro 'escuelas de pensamiento' principales, que difieren significativamente en términos de las posiciones tomadas sobre el enmarcado y la universalidad del desarrollo. Se propone una tipología ilustrativa de ED. El artículo plantea que los ED serían más saludables intelectualmente si las divisiones fueran objeto de un mayor diálogo. Se sugieren posibles vías para iniciar esta discusión.

Introduction

Development Studies (DS) stands as a well-established and mature field of scholarly inquiry in the sense that the foundational journals of DS such as the *Journal of Development Studies*, *Development and Change*, *World Development*, and *Third World Quarterly* were all established around a half century ago (respectively in 1964, 1970, 1973, and 1978). Even relatively 'new' journals like the *European Journal of Development Research* (established in 1989) have been in existence for over thirty years. The inception of DS teaching can also be traced back to the 1970s or earlier, illustrated, for example, by the initiation of the MPhil programme at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex, UK in 1973. Further, many highly ranked (in QS 2023) research and teaching centres have also surpassed the fifty-year mark: The International Institute of Social Studies, the Netherlands, was established in 1952; the German Institute of Development and Sustainability was established in 1964 and IDS, UK in 1966.¹ Moreover, the largest cross-country association of DS, the European Association of Development Research and Training (EADI), celebrates its fiftieth anniversary in 2024/25, while some national DS associations also date to approximately fifty years (e.g. the UK Development Studies Association was established in 1978).

As is evident, DS has a history in Europe, with numerous departments and institutes based in European countries. Nevertheless, the QS (2023) Development Studies ranking noted above also encompasses universities in Brazil, China, Colombia, Ghana, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, South Africa, South Korea, Thailand, and Uganda indicating there is some shift away from exclusive representation by European (and some US) universities in research and teaching DS. DS's prominent presence in Europe is generally attributed to the colonial history (see discussion of the history of DS in edited volume of Kothari et al., 2005 and Sumner and Tribe 2008). That said, DS emerged in the 1950s/60s inspired by an anti-imperialist agenda and the formal decolonisation process, emphasising emancipation and national development. This is a vision that came out of the Global South and is closely associated with the 1955 Bandung conference for example and

¹ SOAS, University of London is one notable exception which was established in 1916.



political struggles for independence (Bernstein 2005; EADI 2017; Harriss 2005; Hulme and Toye 2006; Loxley 2004; Molteberg and Bergström, 2000a, 2000b; Mönks et al. 2019).²

In sum, DS has achieved a certain level of intellectual maturity and at one level—in terms of the longevity of journals, institutes, and associations as well as buoyant student numbers—appears to be in good health. Amid the numerous anniversaries, this paper is a reflection on the current state of DS.³ The central argument of this paper is that contemporary DS has four broad ‘schools of thought’ which differ in terms of positions taken on the framing of, and universality of development. A typology of DS is proposed which illustrates this. The paper posits that DS would be healthier intellectually if the divides were subject of greater dialogue. Potential avenues for initiating this discussion are suggested. At the outset I should note that of course, some lack of consensus is inherent to all fields of enquiry. I am arguing that in DS the extent of the differences is about two quite fundamental questions. I’m not saying it is a major problem or a weakness per se. I’m saying it is very visible at conferences that there are a very different scholars at some sessions and a completely different set of participants at other sessions. This would imply there is limited cross—DS dialogue though that is not saying there is none. Some scholars work at the overlaps and move between schools over time: (the author here included).

This paper is structured as follows: Section "A Proposed Typology of Development Studies" proposes a typology of contemporary DS and discusses the fault lines between different schools of thought. Section "Discussion" then discusses the implications and advocates for the exploration of new conceptual thinking and vocabulary to prompt dialogue and more exchanges. The paper is exploratory in nature, aiming to test if the typology resonates with the reader. The author’s perspective is inevitably partial and influenced by their (privileged) position as a full professor of DS at a UK university (and a current president of an academic association. Namely, EADI)

A Proposed Typology of Development Studies

In DS, there are a set of distinct ‘schools of thought’, each presenting a specific worldview on development. Such worldviews are akin to Kuhn’s (1962, p. 175) concept of a paradigm in terms of defining characteristics: ‘the entire constellation of beliefs, values, and techniques shared by the members of a given community’. Further, different schools of thought compete over the ‘disciplinary matrix’ (or the

² Much of the ‘early’ DS was inspired by intellectuals from the Global South, particularly scholars in UNCEPAL (established in 1948) contributing to Structuralism as well critical voices at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, established in 1964) and Latin American adaptations of neo-Marxian theory to the Global South (e.g. Cardoso and Faletto 1969). Part of the inspiration was also the political ferment of the 1950s/60s (the 1968 protests as well as the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements), but so too were proclamations of ‘African Socialism’ in newly independent countries (e.g. see Nkrumah. 1965; Nyerere 1966; 1968), the black liberation movements challenging Apartheid in South Africa, Nehru’s role in founding the Non-Aligned Movement, and anti-colonial campaigns predating the 1950s/60s.

³ An earlier version of this paper was published as a working paper.



cross-disciplinary matrix in the case of DS)—a set of procedures, theoretical beliefs, values, instruments, techniques, and ontological and epistemological assumptions that collectively form a worldview. Consequently, diverse schools of thought perceive different aspects of the same phenomenon through distinct lenses. Drawing on Kuhn's analogy of Galileo and Aristotle, practitioners of competing paradigms operate in different worlds, seeing different things when observing the same point, perhaps even from the same direction (Kuhn 1962/1970, p. 150).

A similar argument is made in what follows for contemporary DS. Different schools of thought within DS observe different characteristics of 'development' when looking at the same point in the same direction. These schools differ substantially in their approaches to the nature of social reality and inquiry, often aligning with specific disciplines dominating a cross-disciplinary school of thought.⁴

This paper asserts that the fault lines between schools of thought within DS revolve around two issues. First, between those who argue for the desirability/plausibility of 'development' as societal transformation and those who argue 'development' should have a more modest vision of a better status quo. Second, between those who argue for the universality of development in all countries versus those who argue for a focus on the Global South. Regarding the former, the fault line concerns whether development, especially in the pursuit of modernity, is desirable and plausible. Alternatively, some argue for a less ambitious approach, advocating a better status quo or even no development as ethically superior. The universality fault line pertains to whether there is universality in development or if it is a 'special case', to use Seer's (1963) term, of some countries vis-à-vis others. The foundational binary in DS has been between 'developing'/Global South versus 'developed'/Global North. In essence, the focus of enquiry in DS is questioned—is DS the study of the Global South or all countries worldwide?

Before introducing the proposed typology, it is essential to note that any typology is indicative rather than absolute. The labels are contestable and inherently crude yet necessary for the purpose of outlining the aspects of each school of thought. These stylised characterisations should be seen as tendencies or 'broad-brush' characterisations, viewed as ideal types in the Weberian sense. While researchers may shift between schools or develop hybrids, the typology is intended for application at the level of research paper or book—as the unit of analysis.

The methodology behind this typology is inductive, an exploratory work based on the author's 25 years of teaching and research in DS and engagement with academic DS associations. For those seeking an empirical 'test', future work intends to survey a set of representative DS journals to consider empirical trends and survey

⁴ Development Studies is not—or rarely—taken to be an academic discipline but rather a cross-disciplinary area of enquiry, a field, or a 'knowledge community', meaning 'a network of knowledge-based experts who share an interest in a subset of knowledge issues, and who accept common procedural protocols as criteria to judge the success of their knowledge creation activities' (Hulme and Toye 2006, pp. 1094–1095). This means DS is fundamentally different to Development Economics, Development Sociology, or Development Geography, each of which may be partially cross-disciplinary in practice but is first and foremost defined, as any discipline is, by the core concepts of the discipline.



the contents of taught courses in DS. This, however, exceeds the scope of an opinion paper.⁵

The proposed typology is presented as a 2×2 analytical framing. The axes are the definition of desirable development and the universality of 'development'. The axis depicting desirable development ranges from a better status quo to transformatory development.⁶ The universality axis spans from DS focussed on the Global South to DS focussed on all countries. This results in four—broad—schools of thought in DS: A 'Classical' Development Studies, a 'Post-development' Development Studies, an 'Aid-Fragility-Conflict' Development Studies, and a 'Global' Development Studies.

Figure 1 illustrates the placement of Classical Development Studies in the top left quadrant and Aid-Fragility-Conflict Development Studies in the bottom left quadrant. The common theme in these two schools of thought is the general focus on the Global South rather than all countries. In contrast, on the right, in the top quadrant sits Post-development Development Studies and in the bottom quadrant is Global Development Studies. The common theme in these two schools of thought is the universality of development or a focus that may include all countries, not just those of the Global South. The shared theme across the top quadrants containing Classical and Post-development Development Studies is that desirable development is transformatory at a societal level. The shared theme across the bottom quadrants of Aid-Fragility-Conflict and Global Development Studies is that desirable development represents an improved status quo.

A further observation can be made regarding dominant disciplines. The schools of thought on the left-hand side of the figure—Classical and Aid-Fragility-Conflict Development Studies—tend to follow more the disciplines of economics and politics. Further, politics and power are more likely to be framed as material political economy or institutions. In contrast, in the schools of thought on the right-hand side—Post-development and Global Development Studies—the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, and geography are more prominent and thus politics is more likely to be framed by discourse and epistemic notions of power.

Table 1 further compares the four schools of thought by contrasting their differing 'knowledge foundations', drawing on Bevan (2007) who detailed an analytical framework based on a set of domains that can be grouped into three areas for the sake of ease. The first area examines the focus, domain, or problematic of study by asking: What exactly is the research interested in? Additionally, this area investigates the values, standpoints, or ideology: Who is interested and why? The second area deals with ontology and epistemology: What is the world assumed

⁵ Furthermore, in some countries, teaching and research programmes related to DS may not be explicitly labelled as such but integrated into other areas, making them less visible and their analysis a substantial undertaking, again beyond an opinion paper though planned for future work.

⁶ This is not the same as Hart's (2001) 'Big D' versus 'Little D' development (the deliberate, post-World War II, large scale 'project' of modernisation versus broader social change) which resonated in the period when most developing countries were aid dependent (see detailed discussion of Lewis 2019) or to Cowen and Shenton's (1998, p. 50) immanent (unintentional or underlying processes of) development such as the development of capitalism versus intentional or 'willed' development. Instead, the demarcation is about the aspiration (or not) for a major societal transformation of some kind.



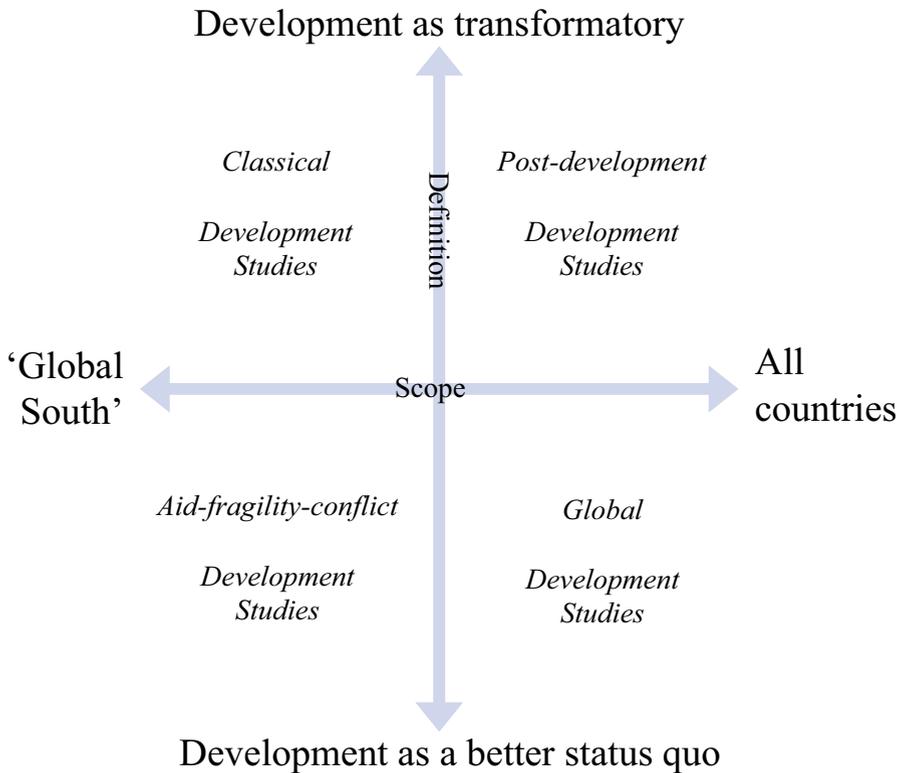


Fig. 1 Schools of thought in Development Studies: a typology. Source: Author’s elaboration

to be like? What are the theories, conceptual frameworks, and models, i.e. how does research explain and understand? The third area looks at research strategies and instruments, methodologies, modes of analysis, and empirical conclusions: How does research establish what is ‘really’ happening? It also investigates how the rhetoric and praxis are related: How is the knowledge generated used and by whom for what end?

Classical Development Studies represents a school of thought that has resonance with the ‘early’ Development Studies of the 1960s and 1970s that evolved from development economics as political economy was added (see discussions by Gore 2000; Fischer 2019). However, as Economics shifted in the 1970s and 1980s and there was the neoclassical resurgence accompanied by the rise of neo-liberalism and structural adjustment programmes, anti-orthodox Economics sentiments rose in DS. For many, DS defined itself in opposition to the orthodox economic approach and its associated policies (see discussion in Fine 2002; Kanbur 2002). That said, Classical Development Studies has always drawn from heterodox Economics and heterodox Political Economy. One contemporary difference is a stronger emphasis on ‘post-aid’ countries in the Global South (as the study of aid-dependent countries has morphed in an ‘Aid-Fragility-Conflict DS—see



below), meaning countries where traditional aid no longer matters, reflecting a significant shift in the world economy since the end of the Cold War. Specifically, this is a bifurcation of the Global South into a group of 40 to 50 highly aid-dependent countries with a population of approximately 1 billion people and another group of 50–60 countries with approximately 6 billion people (with almost half living in India and China), where aid is largely irrelevant due to the growth of domestic resources (data from World Bank 2023).

The Classical DS school of thought emphasises structural disadvantage, relational hierarchy, and the importance of history in the study of 'late development'. Incorporating aspects of 'neo-developmentalism' (Ban 2013; Bresser-Pereira 2011; Chang 1994a, 1994b, 2002; Wade 1990). The primary focus is on national economic development—structural transformation, not just economic growth—within the historic and contemporary global economy. National income distribution is sometimes, though not always, part of the inquiry. The emphasis in Classical DS is typically on Latin America and East Asia, though there is some focus on Africa when and where structural transformation is evident. 'Late industrialisation' or structural transformation is generally viewed as desirable, although not easy and becoming harder as more middle-income countries compete over similar entry points to global value chains, making industrialisation harder to achieve. In fact, many middle-income countries are experiencing stalled industrialisation or are deindustrialising (see Palma 2005, 2008; Rodrik 2015).

Aid-Fragility-Conflict Development Studies emerged in the 1990s as some countries in the Global South became highly aid-dependent (see the bifurcation noted above). This school of thought places considerable emphasis on the role of aid in development and has morphed into a study of aid-dependent, conflict-affected countries or 'fragile states' meaning weak state capacities.⁷ The focus lies on a subset of the countries of the Global South—namely, the remaining low-income countries with internal or external conflicts, typically in sub-Saharan Africa. In short, this school of thought manifests as a study of very poor countries that are highly aid-dependent, often with a focus on aid delivery and/or projects in conflict and post-conflict contexts. In general, little attention is given to Latin America and East Asia, except for questions related to very poor countries emulating East Asia's or China's development and the role of middle-income countries as new donors in low-income countries. Development is seen as reducing or ending conflict, building peace, initiating the economic growth process, and reducing poverty through donor-funded social protection and other measures. Development is thus viewed as a movement from conflict and extreme poverty towards less conflict, peace, economic growth, and less extreme poverty. Development is seen as difficult but, in principle, possible for the set of countries under consideration. Aid is viewed as important though not without some scepticism on its effectiveness, and to a considerable extent, the 'local' or ground-level scale is often emphasised in this school of thought.

Post-development Development Studies became prominent too in the 1990s. The original post-development thinking (e.g. Escobar 1992; Esteva 1985, 1992;

⁷ See Beswick and Jackson (2013), Bizhan (2023), MacGinty and Williams (2016), and Carment and Samy (eds.) (2023).



Table 1 Schools of thought in Development Studies

<p>School of thought (<i>Dominant disciplines and examples of theory</i>)</p>	<p>'Knowledge foundations'</p>	<p>Bevan's 'problematic of study' and 'values/standpoints /ideology'</p>	<p>Bevan's 'ontology and epistemology' and 'theories/conceptual frameworks and models'</p>	<p>Bevan's 'research strategies and instruments, methodologies, modes of analysis, and empirical conclusions' and 'rhetoric and praxis'</p>
<p><i>What is desirable development? What is undesirable? Who decides?</i></p>		<p><i>Is desirable development possible? If yes, under what conditions or via what mechanisms? If not, why not?</i></p>		<p><i>What is the scope emphasised? Which societies tend to be the focus of study? How is the North situated in the analysis? What scale(s) tend to be emphasised? What kind of methodologies tend to dominate? Who uses the knowledge generated and for what purpose?</i></p>
<p>'Classical' Development Studies <i>Dominant disciplines: Economics, Politics</i> <i>Examples of theory: (Neo-) Structuralist/Post-Keynesian theory</i></p>	<p>National economic development (i.e. economic transformation) with/without attention to domestic income distribution questions Tendency of dominance of perspectives of national governments in the South</p>	<p>Historically yes, though getting much harder over time; economic policy autonomy within the global economy is an essential pre-requisite Positivist-leaning epistemology</p>		<p>Focus: Generally, middle-income countries (MICs) in Latin America and Asia. Especially so Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (the BRICS) and the wider set of 'emerging economies' or MICs, and potentially some poorer high-growth countries The North is directly incorporated as home to transnational corporations orchestrating global value chains, as home to global banks/finance, and as control centre of global governance</p>
				<p>Scales: National with interactions with global Methodologies: Tendency towards a range of methodologies, often quantitative led Praxis: Knowledge generated used by national governments and civil society advocates in the South</p>



Table 1 (continued)

School of thought (<i>Dominant disciplines and examples of theory</i>)	'Knowledge foundations'	Bevan's 'problematic of study' and 'values/standpoints/ideology'	Bevan's 'ontology and epistemology' and 'theories/conceptual frameworks and models'	Bevan's 'research strategies and instruments, methodologies, modes of analysis, and empirical conclusions' and 'rhetoric and praxis'
	<i>What is desirable development? What is undesirable? Who decides?</i>	<i>Is desirable development possible? If yes, under what conditions or via what mechanisms? If not, why not?</i>	<i>What is the scope emphasised? Which societies tend to be the focus of study? How is the North situated in the analysis? What scale(s) tend to be emphasised? What kind of methodologies tend to dominate? Who uses the knowledge generated and for what purpose?</i>	
Aid-Fragility-Conflict Development Studies <i>Dominant disciplines: Economics, Politics</i> <i>Examples of theory: State formation theory</i>	Reduction of conflict, initiation of economic growth, externally financed poverty reduction Tendency of dominance of aid donors' perspectives	Yes, but not easy; aid is an essential pre-requisite Positivist-leaning epistemology	Focus: Low-income, aid-dependent countries, typically in sub-Saharan Africa but not exclusively The North is not explicitly incorporated unless relevant to the issue (e.g. aid or conflict). Tendency to assume that North to South transfers of finance, technology, and institutions can engender development Scales: Sub-national/national; emphasis on aid and to some extent on projects Methodologies: Tendency of dominance of quantitative learning methodologies including econometrics and randomised controlled trials though not exclusively and with qualitative aspects Praxis: Knowledge generated used by aid donors and national governments in the South	

Table 1 (continued)

<p>School of thought (<i>Dominant disciplines and examples of theory</i>)</p>	<p>'Knowledge foundations'</p>	<p>Bevan's 'problematic of study' and 'values/standpoints /ideology'</p>	<p>Bevan's 'ontology and epistemology' and 'theories/conceptual frameworks and models'</p>	<p>Bevan's 'research strategies and instruments, methodologies, modes of analysis, and empirical conclusions' and 'rhetoric and praxis'</p>
<p><i>What is desirable development? What is undesirable? Who decides?</i></p>	<p><i>What is desirable development? What is undesirable? Who decides?</i></p>	<p><i>Is desirable development possible? If yes, under what conditions or via what mechanisms? If not, why not?</i></p>	<p><i>What is the scope emphasised? Which societies tend to be the focus of study? How is the North situated in the analysis? What scale(s) tend to be emphasised? What kind of methodologies tend to dominate? Who uses the knowledge generated and for what purpose?</i></p>	
<p>Post-development Studies <i>Dominant disciplines: Anthropology, Sociology</i> <i>Examples of theory: Post-colonial theory</i></p>	<p>A search for forms of development or alternatives to development based on decoloniality, equity, and environmental concerns; a critique of existing development modes; allied to new approaches, e.g. degrowth, 'Pluriverse', 'Buen Vivir', etc. Tendency of dominance of ideas from civil society, the Subaltern, those 'Othered' in the South (and North)</p>	<p>Not as currently construed in the mainstream as capitalist modernity, the dismantling of capitalism is an essential pre-requisite for many Non-positivist leaning epistemology</p>	<p>Focus: All societies The North is directly incorporated in colonial and neo-colonial discourse and other mechanisms of control and power Scales: Sub-national, local initiatives, different forms of 'resistance' and protest (can also be global) Methodologies: Tendency towards qualitative and ethnographic methodologies though not exclusively Praxis: Knowledge generated used by civil society actors and non-governmental organisations in particular</p>	



Table 1 (continued)

School of thought (<i>Dominant disciplines and examples of theory</i>)		'Knowledge foundations'	
	Bevan's 'problematic of study' and 'values/standpoints/ideology'	Bevan's 'ontology and epistemology' and 'theories/conceptual frameworks and models'	Bevan's 'research strategies and instruments, methodologies, modes of analysis, and empirical conclusions' and 'rhetoric and praxis'
	<i>What is desirable development? What is undesirable? Who decides?</i>	<i>Is desirable development possible? If yes, under what conditions or via what mechanisms? If not, why not?</i>	<i>What is the scope emphasised? Which societies tend to be the focus of study? How is the North situated in the analysis? What scale(s) tend to be emphasised? What kind of methodologies tend to dominate? Who uses the knowledge generated and for what purpose?</i>
Global Development Studies	Multidimensional development (e.g. the UN Sustainable Development Goals)	Yes, but global meta-trends represent challenges (e.g. climate change); functioning multilateralism is an essential pre-requisite	Focus: All countries—developed and developing The North is directly incorporated in the analysis for comparison with developing countries, studied, or as part of global issues Scales: Interactions between sub-national, national, and global Methodologies: Tendency towards a range of methodologies
<i>Dominant disciplines: Geography, Sociology</i>	Tendency of dominance of ideas emanating from the United Nations system or 'universalistic multilateralism' perspectives	Non-positivist leaning epistemology	Praxis: Knowledge generated used by multilateral and bilateral agencies and national governments in the South
<i>Examples of theory: Social exclusion theories</i>			

Source Author's elaboration



Rahnema 1997) has been strengthened in recent years by post-colonial/decolonial theorists (for a range of discussion see Bhamrba 2014; Grosfoguel 2007; Kothari et al. 2021; Mignolo 2000; 2021; Quijano 2007; Lugones 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018; 2020; Okoth 2023; Pailey 2020; Patel 2020; Taiwo 2022; Wilson 2012). The Post-development school represents a broad range of intellectual positions. At its core, it challenges or repudiates the entire notion of capitalist modernity and the pursuit of development in its current form. The definition of development in the Post-development school is anti-development or alternatives to development. The pursuit of development as currently undertaken is considered deeply problematic, being motivated by the interests of the North. Development as widescale Western-type modernisation is deemed impossible (and undesirable) for the Global South and a disaster in developed countries for much of the population. Local or ground-level experiences are emphasised in the study of resistance, alternative development, or alternatives to development. Post-development DS is a critique of the 'development industry' including researchers, practitioners, and aid agencies. Some premises of this school of thought draw on Foucault (1966, 1969) and Said (1978, 1993), namely that the North's political and intellectual depictions of the 'Third World' have been essential to subordinating the latter by 'plunder and violence' (Alvares 1992, p. 1). The construction of the Global South as 'inferior' to developed countries is considered to serve as justification for subordination by the North. In short, desirable development would be an alternative mode of development or an alternative to development, which would not be capitalist modernity and manifested in ideas emerging from within the Global South. There is a focus on forms of resistance by subordinate groups within countries, rather than government-led resistance, given the perceived lack of success of government-led resistance (e.g. Chile in 1973 or Angola, Mozambique, and Ethiopia in the 1980s). A contemporary characterisation of Post-development DS needs to incorporate the evolution of post-colonial and decolonial theory with a strong emphasis on theories of decoloniality, social movements, feminism, Indigenous rights, and anti-racism. It is argued that race and the racism inherent in European colonialism continue to influence the production and value of knowledge about development and the issue of race is often simply ignored.⁸

At the same time as Post-development DS emerged, there have been attempts in DS to respond to the (new) de/colonisation critique either in terms of 'intellectual decolonisation' (e.g. Taylor and Tremblay 2022) or 'decoloniality' theory (see for example Melber et al. 2023). DS is accused, as it was in the 1980s/1990s by the original post-development critique, of being neo-colonial in mindset, especially so in terms of generating knowledge to justify the pursuit of modernity in the Global South and perpetuating global inequality through racial hierarchies, subjectification,

⁸ Patel (2020) presents an exposition of the 'race and decolonial turn' in DS through a review of articles in major Development Studies journals. Patel finds that just 32 of 9,280 papers surveyed mention the words 'race', 'racial', or 'racism' and only 24 of these 32 engage with race in its own right or in knowledge production and validation. In the other eight studies, race is either a variable in quantitative studies and sits within Development Economics rather than DS, or it is a descriptive container (p. 1471). Just seven papers explore race as a construct that 'does something' and is socially situated in for example the politics of race, racial hierarchy, or racial difference.



and the geopolitics of knowledge production in the North about the South.⁹ Calls to decolonise knowledge are evident not only in DS but in social sciences more broadly. Further, discussions of intellectual decolonisation extend across all schools of thought in DS albeit with differing conceptualisations of power and differences over what is the dominant oppressive mechanism (that of material political economy versus that of epistemic oppression).

Finally, there is Global DS which has garnered particular interest as a cosmopolitan school in the 2010s following Horner and Hulme (2019a, 2019b), Leach et al. (2021), Oldekop et al. (2020), and responses (Alemany et al. 2019; Bangura 2019; Büscher 2019; Fischer 2019; Ghosh 2019; Hope et al. 2021; Onaran 2019; Ziai 2019; Wiegratz et al. 2023). That said, the school's premise has also been discussed by numerous others since the 1970s (see discussion in de Haan and Maxwell 1998; Gaventa 1998; Maxwell 1998; Haddad 2006; Mehta et al. 2006; Saith 2007; Seers et al. 1979). These scholars have investigated the differences between national development problems versus common or cross-border problems or global interdependencies (see discussion in Currie-Alder 2016) and what that means for the study of development.

Examining global meta-trends and their implications for the study of development have been an area of continued reflection (see the range of contributions in the edited volume of Baud et al. 2019). The global development school goes further and seeks to extend the scope beyond the Global South to examine development in both Northern and Southern countries as well as the influence of global meta-trends like climate change. Central to this school of thought is that the defining line between developed/North and developing/South has become so blurred and difficult to discern that it is meaningless. Horner and Hulme (2019a) underline this point, calling for a conceptual shift in DS, replacing the 'international development' of the last three decades, which was based on the developed/developing binary, with 'global development' considering all countries. Rather than investigating poor countries, poor people, and the developing world/South, DS should examine issues related to development in all countries. Development is defined as multidimensional and is sometimes equated with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is considered possible to some degree but not easy. Furthermore, there is a strong emphasis on national and global interactions. It is implied that functioning multilateralism is essential. The scope encompasses all countries and the interconnectedness of development, poverty, wealth, and well-being in the North/West and South/East. Moreover, it posits that all countries are developing in some sense and that there is wealth and poverty in both the North/West and South/East. Many

⁹ Hull (2021) makes a distinction between 'intellectual decolonisation' and 'decoloniality' theory more broadly. The former is a set of ideas to shift teaching and research towards a place where there is not a privileging of the Northern and/or white voice/'gaze', to direct attention to addressing racial hierarchies across teaching and research, and to pursue more equitable international collaborations. The latter is a specific body of scholarly theory that argues western knowledge about the Global South is innately racist and driven by euro-centricity as it is generated to justify the imposition of modernity as development on the Global South during and since colonisation. One implication is that only indigenous knowledge generation is of value; an alternative is, drawing on the thinking of Samir Amin, a critique of culturalism/cultural relativism and call for universalism and solidarity (see discussion of Smith and Lester 2023).



development problems and their solutions are neither the preserve of the North/West nor the South/East alone, and well-being in the North/West and South/East is increasingly connected.

The statement that the original defining dichotomy in Development Studies—that of developed vs developing countries—has lost validity is not without critics. Wiegatz et al. (2023), for example, argue that the North–South framework remains a useful heuristic device and instead of ‘de-centring’ the North–South framework, DS should (re)centre the Global South and employ theory emerging from the Global South or the lens of the Global South instead. And not forget legacies of history entrenched in the global economy’s structure that hinder development in the Global South. Further, the limits of convergence assessed by falling global inequality, in that it is likely to be temporary, as it is driven by China’s development and in due course China’s and other populous countries development is likely to put upward pressure on global inequality (see discussion in Kanbur et al. 2022).

Discussion

This paper commenced by noting the outward appearances of robust health in DS in terms of teaching and research, alongside the on-going fragmentation in DS that began in the 1990s (perhaps even earlier) at the very same time as journals, institutes, and associations celebrate major anniversaries. As noted, the fragmentation is not new. It can perhaps even be traced back to the origins of social sciences in that all contemporary approaches in DS have roots or traces in classical economic, political, or sociological theories. Furthermore, there has never been a consensus across DS on what or how to pursue (if at all) development. That said, the contemporary differences noted in the typology presented seem to the author to be more fundamental.

The paper made an argument that contemporary DS has four broad ‘schools of thought’ with differing positions on the framing of, and universality of development. The paper proposed a typology based on this. So what? Does it matter if there are chasms between different schools of thought in DS on the basic tenets of DS? I believe it does matter because DS would be healthier intellectually if these divides were the subject of greater dialogue. DS would be healthier intellectually because the process of fragmentation would be challenged, which itself may be productive and encourage more traffic—people and ideas—moving between schools and/or working at the overlaps (as some already do) and questioning the echo chamber that any school of thought is at risk of becoming. The fundamental differences between the schools place limits on what is possible. Some schools will inevitably find it easier to mix with than others as they are closer on framings of development or the universality question.

How does the proposed typology help? It provides a map of DS and the identification of internal differentiations within DS could contribute – in principle – to a better understanding of each school of thought and allow for more meaningful exchanges. In one sense, making clear what the disagreements are about. However, more unpacking is needed. Each school has been outlined as crude aggregate.



Various sub-approaches are situated within each school and there are different dominant disciplines, varying methodologies, and different ways of knowing to elaborate in each. Additionally, few institutions work entirely in a single quadrant and some researchers do already cross between schools and/or work at the overlaps, albeit as noted that some overlaps are much easier to work at than others.

The crux of the matter boils down to a two points of contention between the different schools of thought. First, on whether national development should be transformatory or maximalist versus a more minimalist better status quo. This also includes the question of whether the desirable development is perceived to be possible and under what conditions or pre-requisites. Second, on the universality of development versus the 'special case' of some countries vis-à-vis others. In other words, which societies are the focus of enquiry—the poorest countries or fragile and conflict-affected states, middle-income countries, all former colonies, or all countries of the world—, how/whether the countries of the North are situated in the study of development, and the hierarchy of scales (sub-national/local versus national or global or interactions between scales).

There has been some cross-pollination across schools, and there are those working at the overlaps between schools though if it is possible, at a large scale, given that, the different schools of thought respond to different approaches and worldviews of society, economy, and politics, is an open question. To have greater dialogue across the divides, if one accepts that this is desirable to at least some extent, then new conceptual thinking and vocabulary are needed and a willingness to experiment with some intellectual discomfort. Four potential avenues for initiating this discussion can be identified, doubtless there are others. First, although it may sound surprising is it possible to consider de-centring the core concept of DS, namely, 'development'? The term has become so laden with baggage about what it is and whose interests it reflects that it now acts as a flashpoint for conflict across DS. For some it means raising living standards, while for others it is the imposition of western oppression. Could 'development' be de-centred and a unifying, less contentious concept takes its place? What if 'global inequality' or 'global justice' took centre stage? What other core concepts might be unifying? Could de-centring 'development' with a different concept provide a unifying point across schools of thought in DS, offering a fresh perspective and facilitating exchanges?

Second, what if the ontological and/or epistemological assumptions within each school were relaxed? This could entail experimenting more, for example taking the idea that modernity can be reconceptualised drawing from global origins; or that there are multiple forms of modernity and anti-modernity, with none being necessarily oppressive. Of course, there is already thinking in this area to draw from, and the point here is not about the example but to say that core assumptions could be experimentally relaxed and that might be productive.

Third, the above points raise the issue of a need for greater prioritisation of basic research in DS, and perhaps across schools of thought if possible. For example, research that seeks alternative ways of conceptualising the similarities and differences between societies. By engaging in such foundational research, new perspectives might help reconcile some of the chasms between the competing schools of thought.



Finally, conversations with neighbours could prove useful. Close areas of inquiry to DS are Area Studies and International Studies, which both share some characteristics with DS, such as a cross-disciplinary approach and inclusion of the Global South in the analysis. However, neither are overtly as normative in their purpose as DS is. Nor do either Area Studies or International Studies have the focus on ‘development’ (however defined). Area Studies tends to focus on specific regions. In contrast, International Studies places emphasis on the global level, and on international relations, diplomacy, and global governance questions. Discussions with both Area Studies and International Studies could prove useful in thinking further about the questions raised in this paper. This could extend to a more explicit emphasis in DS on cross-/multi-/inter-disciplinarity in DS especially so across those disciplines that are harder to mix.

In conclusion, this paper has argued that DS would be better off intellectually by recognising the divides highlighted and engaging in more dialogue on these issues. These exchanges could be pursued by de-centring and/or redefining core concepts, relaxing assumptions and prioritising basic research and speaking to neighbouring areas.

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Declarations

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