

Progressing towards incoherence: Development discourse since the 1980s

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Abstract

From the perspective of archaeological discourse analysis, certain rules can be identified according to which the objects, concepts, subject positions and strategies of development discourse have been formed from the 1950s to the 1970s. Since the 'crisis of development' in the 1980s, a number of new concepts have gained prominence in development policy which highlight new aspects: 'participation' and 'ownership' and 'sustainable development' are among the best known. The article argues that this 'progress' in the 'development of development policy' leads to incoherencies and contradictions, as certain implications of the new concepts are incompatible with some rules of formation which constitute the discourse.

Keywords: Development discourse, discourse analysis, Foucault, participation, sustainable development

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Zusammenfassung

Aus der Perspektive einer archäologischen Diskursanalyse können bestimmte Regeln identifiziert werden, auf deren Grundlage die Gegenstände, Konzepte, Subjektpositionen und Strategien des Entwicklungsdiskurses von den 1950er- bis zu den 1970er-Jahren gebildet wurden. Seit der „Krise der Entwicklung“ in den 1980ern sind einige Konzepte in der Entwicklungspolitik wichtig geworden, die neue Aspekte betonen: Partizipation, Ownership und nachhaltige Entwicklung gehören zu den bekanntesten von ihnen. Der Beitrag argumentiert, dass dieser Fortschritt in der „Entwicklung der Entwicklungspolitik“ zu Inkohärenzen und Widersprüchen führt, da bestimmte Implikationen dieser Konzepte nicht mit den grundlegenden Formationsregeln des Diskurses vereinbar sind.

Schlagwörter: Entwicklungsdiskurs, Diskursanalyse, Foucault, Partizipation, nachhaltige Entwicklung

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1. Introduction

Following or criticising the Post-Development approach in development theory (see above all Sachs 1992a), many studies have been analysing the discourse of ‘development’ in the past two decades (Ferguson 1994; Moore/Schmitz 1995; Crush 1995; Rahnema 1997; Cooper/Packard 1997; Grillo/Stirrat 1997; Groves/Hinton 2005; Mosse/Lewis 2005; Eriksson Baaz 2005; Cornwall/Eade 2011; Ziai 2013). Although these – often interesting and insightful – studies and this line of inquiry in general have often been associated with the work of Michel Foucault (e. g. Storey 2000: 40), most of them have more or less traced the link between knowledge and power and few of them have seriously engaged in applying Foucaultian concepts (these notable exceptions are e. g. Escobar 1995; Brigg 2002; Rossi 2004; Li 2007). However, none of these have actually implemented the methodology for discourse analysis outlined in Foucault’s *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972). The article undertakes a first attempt to do so.¹

The methodological approach of archaeological discourse analysis is able to illuminate discursive structures and thus aspects of development policy hitherto unnoticed. The way the objects of development policy are discursively constructed and the rules according to which this is done are certainly relevant to scholars of development studies.

Based on a rough sketch of Foucault’s archaeology, the first section will try to identify the rules of development discourse as it was constituted in the middle of the 20th century. The next section will deal with the transformations in development discourse which occurred as a reaction to the ‘crisis of development theory’ in the 1980s and the corresponding rise of new concepts in development policy. Three of these discursive transformations – the rise of concepts like civil society participation, ownership and empowerment, the awareness of ecological questions and the commitment to sustainable development, and the rejection of ‘one size fits all’-solutions in development policy – are examined more thoroughly in the context of an empirical study of development institutions in the beginning of the 21st century. This examination reveals that these transformations resulted in incoherencies and con-

tradictions regarding the discourse of ‘development’. It is argued that these incoherencies and contradictions arise inevitably because some of the new concepts like participation and sustainability have implications which are incompatible with the rules of development discourse which have been formed in the post-WWII-period.

2. Foucault’s Archaeology and the discourse of ‘development’

In this section, I will reconstruct the methodological rules of Foucault in a very simplified form and apply them to the discourse of ‘development’. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault (1972) provides a methodological framework for the analysis of discourses. Foucault argues that the scientific disciplines he analysed as discourses were united not by common objects, types of statements, concepts or themes, but by ‘a group of rules that are immanent in a practice, and define it in its specificity’ (46), by the rules according to which the formation of objects, enunciative modalities, concepts and strategies takes place. However, Foucault claims that these rules ‘operate ... in discourse itself; they operate therefore, according to a sort of uniform anonymity, on all individuals who undertake to speak in this discursive field’ (63).

How can we analyse these rules of formation? Referring to the formation of objects, Foucault tells us to ask when these objects appeared, in which context, under which conditions, and according to which criteria they are classified by the discourse (41f). The formation of enunciative modalities is described by answering the questions which individuals are accorded the right to speak, from which institutional sites the discourse is made, and which subject positions it implies in relation to the various objects. The formation of concepts refers to ‘forms of succession’ and ‘forms of coexistence’ of statements (56f). Finally, the formation of strategies reaches the level of themes and contents. The strategic and thematic choices are, according to Foucault, also dependent on ‘the function that the discourse under study must carry out in a field of non-discursive practices’ (68).

So how is this approach able to illuminate aspects of the object of inquiry that have not been perceived so far? How can development discourse be analysed from the perspective of archaeology? The analysis presented here is based on research conducted during my PhD and focuses on the similarities in development theory

¹ The argument of this paper has been presented at the 6th Interpretive Policy Analysis Conference in Cardiff/UK in 2011. I would like to thank the panel convenors Elena Heßelmann and Franziska Müller for useful comments.

to be found in the literature which constitute a discourse of development. The following remarks refer primarily to the period of the 1950s to the 1970s, but many of the features encountered are still prevalent today. Discourses are formed under specific historical circumstances and, as parts of a dispositive (apparatus) which links discursive and non-discursive practices, in reaction to strategic necessities (Foucault 1980: 194f). Without going into detail, one could argue that development discourse, drawing on 19th century evolutionism as well as on concepts of social technology, emerged out of colonial discourse during the first half of the 20th century as a problem-solving theory which linked the newly-perceived problem of global inequality to the geopolitical and economic interests of the USA and its allies during the Cold War. As a discourse of 'the West and the Rest' (Hall 1992), it provided an analysis of societies of Africa, Asia and Latin America with a focus on their deficiencies in comparison to the ideal Western society and on the interventions necessary to improve them, to implement or induce processes of 'development'.

2.1 Formation of objects²

Correspondingly, the objects of development discourse were socio-geographically defined units (states, but also regions or villages) classified as 'underdeveloped'. The limitation of these units, mostly according to state borders, forms the basis on which statements on the 'level of development' are being made and has the effect of sidelining the vast differences in standards of living within these units. More specifically, certain aspects of these units appeared as objects of development discourse, aspects which were very heterogeneous – ranging from population growth, the lack of 'achievement motivation', an inadequate savings rate, an insufficiently diversified economy, lack of school education, unsustainable agricultural practices, an inadequate integration of women, to problems of bureaucracy and governance – but they all adhered to a certain rule of formation: they appeared and gained visibility as elements explaining the 'underdevelopment' of the societies in question and thus as deficiencies to be corrected

by interventions of development policy. Here, the analysis proceeds by acknowledging the discontinuities (new concepts were being introduced regularly) while pointing to the overarching structure – all the concepts reflected or constructed a lack in comparison with the norm of 'developed' countries.

The appearance of the objects is regulated by a pattern of specification which visualizes (Escobar 1988) and registers ways of life deviating from the norm through certain indicators and simultaneously defines them as deficient. Generally, development discourse divides the world into 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' units, and only the latter become the objects of this discourse. Accordingly, global development institutions classify the units as 'developed', 'less developed' and 'least developed' or sometimes as high, middle or low-income countries. More concretely, we can recognize what Derrida has termed logocentrism (Manzo 1991: 8). The non-Western world is subjected to hierarchical dichotomies, it is described solely according to the criteria of and in relation to the West: as non- or less industrialized, non- or less rational, non- or less democratic, etc., all in all as an inferior version of the original. The countries of Western Europe and North America, though, have hardly been seen as 'developing' by development theory, they belonged to the realm of logos, of pure and invariable presence in no need of explanation (ibid.: 10). This also explains why development theory and policy have (with few exceptions) been dealing only with those regions where there was no or too little 'development': they are social science disciplines dealing with the Other.³

A central part of the rules of formation of the objects of discourse is therefore that the objects are judged not according to what they are but what they are supposed to become one day according to the order of discourse.⁴ To achieve this goal, measures founded on knowledge on these objects, their future state and the process of transition are necessary. The rule governing the appearance of objects in this discourse thus implies the diagnosis of a deficit as well as measures to compensate it through knowledge-based interventions. However, because the problem-solving envisioned

² The analysis of the rules of formation has been presented at the research workshop 'Developing Africa. Development Discourse(s) in Late Colonialism' in Vienna in January 2011 (and in a very early version at a conference on 'Post/Modern De/Constructions' in Erlangen in 2002).

³ In contrast, 'normal' political science or sociology deal with industrialised 'developed' societies.

⁴ Therefore, policy practices inspired by the post-development critique of development discourse have superseded the analysis of 'needs' within a community with an analysis of the 'assets' present (Gibson-Graham 2005).

by the discourse has to fail in terms of transforming the objects according to the norm – on the one hand because of the magnitude of the task, on the other because the order of discourse *defines* these objects as the Other of the norm⁵ – there are at best partial successes and often failures. These give rise to new, modified attempts of problem-solving through making visible, incorporating and treating a new aspect of the object. In the history of development theory, this new aspect was first infrastructure, then the rural poor, basic needs, women, ecology, the market and governance, to name but the most prominent (Escobar 1995; Rist 1997). After admitting the failures of ‘development’ the expansion of the object area to new aspects and new plans for transforming society according to the ideal of ‘real’ ‘development’ follow. This was possible through the invention of new subdiscourses or the linkage of development discourse to others.

2.2 Formation of enunciative modalities

The enunciative modalities in discourse are also governed by certain regularities. The competence and legitimacy to make statements and knowledge claims is confined to development experts – mostly, but by no means necessarily, white men from ‘developed’ countries. The institutional places from which the discourse is possible are on the one hand organisations or institutions of development policy, on the other hand also certain university departments dealing with issues of ‘development’ (often from economics, agricultural science, political science, sociology, anthropology or geography). Truth claims on the objects are usually based on the knowledge production of these experts and institutions.

The most important of the rules of formation regarding the modalities of articulation is the one governing the subject positions. As Hall paraphrases Foucault: ‘every discourse constructs positions from which alone it makes sense. Anyone deploying a discourse must position themselves *as if* they were the subject of the discourse’ (Hall 1992: 292). While there might be different subject positions of academics, politicians and practitioners, a statement in development discourse implies the position of a person who knows what ‘deve-

lopment’ is and how it can be reached. Only from this position meaningful statements within the discourse are possible. Statements from a different position and therefore not claiming this kind of knowledge are outside the discursive formation, and are judged to be useless from the perspective of this discourse. However, because ‘development’ is conceived as the state of a ‘good society’ and the process of getting there, and because there are in fact different conceptions of how such a society should look like and which measures are necessary to achieve it, the position one has to adopt implies the subordination of other people’s views on desirable social change. Development discourse therefore constructs the subject position of a knowing and prescribing expert and thus invariably contains an authoritarian element. This effect of the enunciative modality is independent of the intention of the subject occupying the subject position.

2.3 Formation of concepts

Concerning the formation of concepts in development discourse, there are two main characteristics to be identified: First, in analogy to the object ‘underdevelopment’ problems are conceived as deviations from the norm and the concepts are formed correspondingly: ‘illiterate’, ‘malnourishment’, ‘unemployment’, ‘overpopulation’ (Escobar 1995: 41). One could add ‘failed states’, ‘bad governance’, ‘defective democracies’ and other concepts. The implied norm is that of the ‘developed’ society. The rule is that in ‘underdeveloped’ societies, there is a lack – a lack of capital, of knowledge, of entrepreneurship, of technology, but always a lack which is responsible for the problems and which is addressed by these concepts.

Second, in the history of development theory and policy, the arrangement of concepts occurs according to a general pattern. An aspect of the objects is identified as a crucial factor leading to ‘underdevelopment’ and a corresponding concept gains significance. The claim is that if this concept is given political priority, the problem of ‘underdevelopment’ will be solved and ‘development’ will take place. After the desired results fail to appear, the insufficient implementation of the policy advice by institutions and organisations of ‘development’ is made responsible and bemoaned. But soon scientific studies reveal the importance of a new factor hitherto neglected, and a new concept is promoted in development policy, reiterating the promise of well-being and abundance in the future – if the correct policies are applied. There is

⁵ There are clear parallels to Homi Bhabha’s analysis of colonial discourse: ‘colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite’ (1994: 122).

a cycle of diagnosis – prescription and promise – disappointment – new diagnosis etc. in which new concepts emerge regularly and which is based on the clinical gaze of the ‘development’ experts who know how to cure the ills of deficient societies.

2.4 Formation of strategies

According to Foucault, a discursive formation does not occupy the whole space prefigured by the rules of formation of its objects, modalities of articulation and concepts. Its actual content is guided by the formation of strategies or thematic choices, and these are related to historical factors and social functions. The rules of formation outlined so far imply that some countries are seen as the norm, but not which ones. In the case of development discourse, the industrialised societies of North America and Western Europe constituted the norm. A great deal of the conflicts in development theory took place between the discursive subsets of modernisation and dependency theories which both agreed on this point. The latter theories did not fundamentally break with development discourse, but implied significant modifications mainly on the level of thematic choices (strategies promoted to achieve ‘development’). The same holds true for most theories of ‘alternative development’, as the post-development critics have correctly pointed out. A critique of development policy demanding better projects or a more equal distribution of resources still remains within the same discursive formation. To a lesser extent, this even holds true for a critique formulating a goal different from modern industrial society.⁶ Only a fundamental rejection of the possibility of comparing and evaluating societies according to universal standards, of expert knowledge on ‘development’ constitutes a break with the discourse.

But there is more to be said on the formation of strategies in development discourse. Regarding the interaction between discursive and non-discursive practices, it seems that there is a dependency or at least

⁶ A case in point is Rahnema’s post-development critique (in his contributions in Rahnema 1997), in which he substitutes the development experts for wise village elders and advocates ‘vernacular societies’ – on the basis of a diagnosis of industrialised societies as infected by a virus. He thus occupies the position of the ‘development’ expert judging societies to be in need of change according to a universal model, merely reversing, but not abolishing the clinical gaze mentioned above.

a strong relationship of the theories and strategies in development policy from the historical constellation of North-South relations. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, when actors like the G 77 and the Non-Aligned Movement were active and influential, development aid gained in importance and the policy recommendations of development institutions were often concerned with regulating markets and ‘redistribution with growth’ (Chenery et al. 1972). With these actors becoming less significant, with the debt crisis of 1982 and finally with the end of the Cold War, the economic and geopolitical constellation changed: development cooperation became less important and the policy recommendations of development institutions often refocused on growth (without redistribution) and promoted liberalisation – according to critics in the interest of Northern companies and banks. The new concept of good governance which rose to prominence during the 1990s was possible only after the perceived necessity to support anti-communist dictatorship had diminished with the demise of the Soviet Union. Apparently the formation of theories and strategies in development discourse was significantly influenced by non-discursive practices and specific historical constellations.

3. The transformation of development discourse

Although the classical development discourse described above was not a rigid, stable system, its rules of formation remained in operation as mostly unquestioned discursive structures from the 1950s to the 1970s, things have changed since then. Especially since the ‘crisis of development theory’ in the 1980s and some corresponding historical experiences in development policy the discourse has undergone a number of modifications and processes of change. New concepts have appeared and become influential in development policy, the most prominent of which are sustainable development, good governance, globalisation, global governance, participation, civil society and ownership.⁷ The way we talk about ‘development’ has changed, a transformation of development discourse can be observed. The question is, whether the rules of formation of development discourse have been affected by this transformation as well. Even the most sharp-sighted critiques of development discourse such as Escobar (1995) and Ferguson (1994) have

⁷ Neoliberalism does not appear in this list because it is debatable whether it still belongs to development discourse, as it rejects some of its principles (see Ziai 2010).

not sufficiently explored this transformation and, above all, its implications for the structure of the discourse. It is here that the approach of archaeological discourse analysis can contribute to further our understanding.

Development discourse in the 21st century can be conceptualised as a network of interrelated and partly competing (sub-)discourses. Its transformation since the 1980s and the factors leading to the rise of these new discourses can, in a slightly simplified manner, be sketched as follows:

The perception of an ‘impasse’ in (above all Marxist and structuralist) development theory and its universalist and determinist assumptions (Booth 1985) allowed the neo-liberal ‘counter-revolution in development theory and policy’ (Toye 1987). It also led to a focus on less ambitious and more specific ‘middle-range theories’ rejecting the universalist ‘one size fits all’ approaches in development theory and policy and an intensified debate on socio-cultural factors in ‘development’. The perception of failures in development policy led to widely diverging interpretations. In some circles, the market – as opposed to inefficient and corrupt state apparatuses – was discovered as a universal remedy, in others the lack of civil society participation was blamed for the failures. Still others gave up on the entire ‘promise of development’ and suggested confining the efforts to ‘relief instead of development aid’ (Myrdal 1981) – thoughts which were taken up in later debates about crisis prevention, failed states and trusteeship. A different conclusion of the same diagnosis was drawn by the post-development school: turn away from the ‘development industry’ and look for grassroots ‘alternatives to development’ (Sachs 1992a; Escobar 1995).

The experience of successful industrialisation in South-East Asia was also interpreted in different ways: while some saw it as proof for the neo-liberal hypotheses of the Washington Consensus, the inevitability of world market integration and the beneficial effects of economic globalisation (World Bank 1993), others stressed the significance of institutions for economic policies, advocating a new role of the state – though often without fundamentally challenging neo-classical economics. The end of the Cold War was even more influential: it intensified the neo-liberal discourse surrounding market solutions and globalisations (there was no need to prove the superiority of the capitalist system through regulatory social policies) as well as the discourse of abandoning the ‘promise of development’ (fear of former colonies joining the communist block had been one if not the major motive for development aid in the first decades)

and it made demands for good governance in the South possible (World Bank 1992) (while anti-communist dictatorships were rarely confronted with their shortcomings in the areas of democracy and human rights beforehand). On the other hand, the end of the Cold War also made possible the discourses of One World and Global Governance, in which the world’s governments co-operate to solve the world’s problems (Commission on Global Governance 1995).

The latter point is also closely related to the perception of global ecological problems which do not stop at the border of nation-states and which endanger the lives of future generations. The concept of sustainable development was promoted by the Brundtland report (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987) and increased in momentum after the ‘Earth Summit’ in Rio 1992. The concept contributed to the abandoning of the ‘promise of development’ and to the Global Governance discourse. A factor which enabled the rise of the concept of sustainable development was the critique from civil society since the late 1960s. Similar critiques led to the inclusion of the discourses of empowerment, participation and ownership on the one and women (Women in Development) and gender (Gender and Development) on the other hand into development discourse, as well as to the concept of human development put forward by the United Nations Development Programme. Finally, the politics of structural adjustment was also involved in the rise of the good governance agenda (political factors were made responsible for the disappointing economic results) (Abrahamsen 2000), while the confined capacity of states for certain types of policies in the context of neo-liberal globalisation contributed to the perception that globalisation has to be regulated through global governance.

While this cursory description of the transformation of development discourse is based on primary and secondary literature in development theory and policy, my own empirical research for my PhD thesis led to some interesting specifications. In 20 qualitative interviews conducted with staff of different development organisations (the World Bank, the German ministry of development BMZ and two German NGOs, *Misereor* and *medico international*),⁸ the transformation of

⁸ The interviewees were predominantly from the middle management level and from different departments of the organisations, so as to render the sample at least moderately representative. The interviews were semi-structured and based on questions concerning the conception of ‘development’ and the role of development experts.

development discourse and the prominence of the new concepts were clearly visible. But what could also be discerned were some incoherences and contradictions which – this is my central argument here – arise because some of the more progressive concepts and arguments adopted in this transformation are incompatible with the rules of formation of development discourse outlined in section 2. Nevertheless, these rules are still partly adhered to because they are closely linked to questions of identity and institutional interests. In the following, interview sections centring on three of these new concepts – participation, sustainability and the rejection of universal models – will be drawn on to elaborate my argument.

3.1 Participation vs. expert knowledge

Despite ideological differences between the different organisations (and individuals), the sentence which occurred in one form or another in almost all the interviews was ‘the people have to decide themselves what development is for them’ (Int 8, 9, 12). Variants of this statement were e. g.: ‘we are neither legitimised nor competent to define development for others’ (Int 16), ‘development ... does not mean that we decide about concrete goals because actually it is the partner who should decide’ (Int 2), ‘The developing country must be the one who decides about development goals’ (Int 6), or ‘It is not our task to define for Burkina Faso or indigenous people in Brazil’s rainforest how their development should look like. ... We must not define for others. This is virtually the categorical imperative’ (Int 18). This attitude was justified and linked with concepts of ‘participation’ (Int 3), ‘partnership’ or ‘partner-driven development’ (Int 11, 1) and ‘ownership’ (Int 6, 16).

These statements can be seen as a reaction to the critique of development policy as a top-down, authoritarian enterprise and an endorsement of the view of those critics promoting participation or empowerment since the 1980s (Friedmann 1992; Chambers 1997): that the persons affected by development projects should decide for themselves what kind of social change they desire and what constitutes a ‘good society’ for them. Here, the transformation of development discourse according to the new concepts of participation, empowerment and ownership manifests itself. Strictly speaking, the transfer of the ability to decide what ‘development’ means for them deprives the experts of their superior competence to do so and eliminates the element of trusteeship – which is revealed as a mecha-

nism for non-democratic decision-making on social values and priorities.

However, the same persons which emphatically stated this view also had different definitions of ‘development’, i. e. certain conceptions of how a ‘good society’ in the South looks like and how it can be realised. These definitions could be the ‘satisfaction of basic needs’ (Int 6), the ‘enlargement of choices’ (Int 16), ‘justice, peace and the preservation of the creation’ (Int 12) or even ‘overcoming the health-impairing condition of capitalism’ (Int 9) in another case. The same experts who vehemently opposed giving prescriptions for ‘development’ prescribed measures like ‘investing in people, empowerment, good investment climate’ (Int 16) or ‘transfer of capital, education and access to markets’ (Int 15) as remedies.

Yet this inevitably leads to a tension in the cooperation with Third World partners: On the one hand the development workers have certain conceptions of ‘development’ and are willing to implement them, on the other hand they are unwilling to force their ideas on others. The tension becomes a contradiction when the development organisations preach participation, partnership, ownership or empowerment while their politics remain framed by conditionality and good governance. Even if the conception of ‘development’ is seen as an ‘offer’ the people can decline the promise of resource transfers does lead to an adaptation (at least in rhetoric) of the donor’s demands on the part of the recipients.⁹

The transfer of the ‘right to define development’ to the ‘partner’ in the South becomes farcical when the other ‘partner’ determines the conditions, sets the agenda or decides what ‘sound economic policies’ look like. Despite the commitment to ideals of participation and partnership, there are some structural elements in the donor-recipient relationship which prevent a

⁹ The experience of the substitution of structural adjustment programs by PRSPs is a vivid illustration of this case. Officially, the government of the recipient country should prepare a poverty reduction strategy based on participation of the civil society – ownership and participation are heralded as the guiding principles of the process (World Bank 2002). But as the World Bank and the IMF decide whether or not this strategy is worth supporting through loans, the recipient governments often confine participation to social policy and adhere to the macroeconomic conceptions of the Washington consensus in order to gain approval of the donors. ‘We give them what they want before they start lecturing us’ commented an African minister of finance (World Development Movement 2001: 7).

symmetrical participation of all actors in the decision-making process. One is that the donors want to maintain control over their resources for reasons of national interest or out of accountability towards the taxpayers. Another is that the expert knowledge questioned by these ideals is closely linked to the identity of those working in the 'development business'.

Looking at the level of discourse, in order to 'speak development', one has to say what a good society looks like and how it can be attained. This is what development experts are hired to do and this is the place assigned to them in discourse, by the rule of formation of enunciative modalities. The discourse constructs the subject position of a knowing and prescribing expert. The expert is defined by his or her expert knowledge on the process of 'development', the ability to generate, articulate and apply this knowledge is constitutive of his or her identity. A development expert who takes seriously the claims of empowerment discourse and denounces the superior competence in outlining progressive social change would be confronted with the question what the use of experts is if they have no expertise.

To be precise: while statements on historical social change are still possible for experts who refuse to formulate goals for people in the South, any statement which would include normative and political elements like desirable social conditions or preferences concerning the manner in which future social change is envisioned appears illegitimate unless it is based on a clear (and ideally consensual) articulation of the people concerned. In such a scenario, the researchers would be confined to the role of assistants to social movements and communities. This is rather at odds with the traditional role of experts in development discourse.

Of course, the concepts of participation, partnership and empowerment have been adopted in development institutions often only in a selective and depoliticised manner which did hardly question existing relations of power, as has been amply illustrated by the critical literature on the topic (Rahnema 1990, 1992; Macdonald 1995; White 1996; Mohan/Stokke 2000; Cooke/Kothari 2001; Abrahamsen 2004; Cornwall/Brock 2005; Leal 2011; Batliwala 2011). However, my research suggests that even in the supposedly co-opted versions of the concepts which have lost their critical edge they exert enough influence to disturb the order of development discourse and cause incoherences and contradictions, thus highlighting the non-participatory and authoritarian rules of the discourse. So even a depoliticised version of participation leads to contra-

dictions in development policy, to unpleasant questions and incoherent practices, which in turn can be used as tools in political change. Thus there may be a potential for a re-politicisation of participation (Williams 2004; Hickey/Mohan 2004).

3.2 Sustainability vs. developed North

A similar observation can be made regarding the concept of sustainability in development discourse. The concept defines sustainable development as 'development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs' (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). This has a particular consequence for the role of industrialised countries in the discourse. As one interviewee correctly pointed out: 'If we adopt the concept of sustainability, the industrialised countries are developing countries' (Int 15, a similar phrase appeared in Int 6), because the resource use and environmental pollution caused by these countries indicate that this model of society cannot be universalised. It can be maintained only as long as it is confined to a privileged minority – one could say it is an oligarchic model of society.

Again, telling incoherences and contradictions can be encountered. On the one hand, the concept of sustainability is heralded as the new and only way forward in the interviews. One interviewee emphasised: 'We rigorously promote the concept of sustainable development' (Int 1), another asserted: 'Concerning the concept of development, we adhere to the concept of sustainable development as defined in Rio 1992.' (Int 5) Less explicit, but similar commitments could be found in many other interviews (Int 2, 6, 7, 11, 13, 15).

On the other hand the industrialised countries are still constantly referred to as the 'developed' societies – which implies that 'less developed' or 'developed' societies should become like them, and development policy should help assist them in this process. Although taking the concept of sustainable development and its often quoted definition seriously would render this traditional identification of 'developed' and 'industrialised' countries impossible, such an equivalence is exactly what can be found in many interviews. The 'developed' countries are specified as the 'OECD member states' (Int 1, 4), the 'Western world' (Int 3), or, straightforwardly, as the 'industrialised countries' (Int 6, 18). This is where the incoherence becomes manifest: either the industrialised North provides a model to be

copied or its lifestyle is entirely unsustainable. The two perspectives are not compatible.

While the development experts do pay at least lip service to the new influential concept of sustainable development, they still refer to Northern countries as ‘developed’ and thus adhere to the rule of formation of strategies which dates back to the postwar era and identifies the industrialised North as a model for all other societies. According to this rule, the statement ‘the USA is an underdeveloped society’ does not make any sense, because what is understood as a ‘developed’ society is intimately linked to the USA through a chain of equivalence between the signifiers (Laclau/Mouffe 1985: 127ff). That statements like these appear today provides another example of the disturbing effects that an originally critical but supposedly co-opted and mainstreamed concept can unfold in development institutions. Many studies have convincingly argued that sustainable development has been re-interpreted as ‘sustainable growth’ (World Bank 1989) and instrumentalised as yet another concept reinforcing technocratic constructions of social problems and the competence and duty of the North to manage the planet because of its superior technology (Sachs 1992b; Adams 1995; Sachs 1995; Sachs 1999; Scoones 2011). The argument here does not disprove the criticism raised against this process of co-optation, but puts it into perspective: it is less encompassing as its critics fear.

3.3 Heterogeneity vs. ‘one size fits all’

A third area where incoherences and contradictions are visible is not as closely related to the rise of a new concept as the first two. However, a significant realisation which became prominent during the ‘crisis of development theory’ of the 1980s was that the countries of the South were more heterogeneous than had hitherto been assumed. The perception of a growing process of differentiation within this group of countries – into successful industrialisers, rich oil-exporters and an increasingly impoverished rest – together with the demise of the Soviet block led to the catchword of the ‘end of the Third World’ (Menzel 1992; Berger 1994). The corresponding criticism implied that development theory had been wrong in lumping together a group of countries with widely diverging economic and political conditions and social and cultural backgrounds and in assuming a single bundle of problems and corresponding solutions, a single pattern of social change, a single process of ‘development’ in all of them, a single ‘size’ for all.

This transformation of discourse can be observed throughout the interviews. The heterogeneity of conditions and factors influencing social change in different societies is readily acknowledged, and we find statements that ‘There is not one solution’ for the problems of the ‘less developed’ countries (Int 3), that ‘The conditions for development are different in each country. Patterns of development, like the industrialisation of Germany, cannot be transferred to developing countries’ (Int 4), and that ‘There are no blueprints for development. There are different cultural conditions in each country, different economic, geographical conditions’ (Int 5). The interviewees insist that ‘Each country has to find its own way’ (Int 15, 16), ‘individual solutions for each country’ (Int 6) and a ‘tailor-made approach’ (Int 16) were needed, and a ‘one size fits all’ or a ‘cookie-cutter approach’ are vehemently rejected (Int 16, 18). What this implies is that there is not *one* process of social change which takes place in all societies sooner or later, but that there are different historical ‘developments’.

Despite this insight, there are numerous references to be found to ‘the process of development’ (Int 6, 7, 9, 12) which suggest that there is a universal process and thus a single model. Sometimes, the experts were even more explicit and argued that the process of ‘development’ in Europe ‘surely is a model’ for the developing countries (Int 4), maintained that ‘if you try to find Somalia’s level of development in European history, you have to go back a few hundred years’ (Int 18) and stated that ‘Development is actually a process, human development simply progresses and there are few cultures who want to live as they did a thousand years ago’ (Int 3). In other words: there is a pattern of social change which occurs in all societies irrespective of their different conditions and backgrounds and it has taken place in Europe and North America earlier than in other societies which is why they are at the top of the universal scale of ‘development’. Modernisation theory is not dead yet. Or rather, the rules of development discourse, specifically the norms guiding the formation of objects and concepts, are still present even after a discursive transformation has asserted the contingency and historicity of processes of social change and the heterogeneity of conditions and factors influencing them in different places of the world. Again, a coherent progress in development policy is prevented by the order of development discourse which assumes that there is universal knowledge on social change irrespective of regional circumstances.

In this context, it is worthwhile noting that development institutions are based on the assumption of such knowledge. How else could they justify that their experts are able to analyse and design social change in societies where they have not lived for more than a few months or even weeks? That their competence in doing so is superior to those who have lived there all their lives? Only because they possess knowledge on social change which is universal in character and therefore applicable all over the world.

4. Conclusion

The method of archaeological discourse analysis employed here (building on earlier critiques) has yielded some interesting insights. The objects of development discourse are socio-geographical units categorised as deficient in relation to the norm of the Western society and thus classified as 'underdeveloped'. Correspondingly, the concepts of the discourse are always concerned with some lack or deficiency (e. g. 'failed states'), which, however already imply a cure or positive strategy (e. g. 'state-building'). Usually, the problems of these units are constructed as lack of capital, knowledge or technology and in general as problems amenable to non-political, technocratic solutions offered by 'development' institutions and organisations. The diagnosis of deficiency is articulated from the subject position of the knowing, prescribing expert which has to be assumed by anyone performing ('speaking in') the discourse. In the history of development policy, several diagnostic cycles can be identified: E. g. in the 1960s the particular aspects of the objects of discourse which gained new visibility in economic modernization theories were the rates of savings and economic growth. They were seen as keys to 'development'. After sustained economic growth during the 1960s had not led to substantial reductions in poverty, 'development' was redefined to explicitly include poverty and a new focus on the rural poor and their basic needs emerged, coupled with a new promise given by the development industry. Further cycles put forward a focus on women, the environment, markets, and institutions/governance. Each diagnostic cycle linked the explanation of earlier failures with a new aspect, a new prescription, and a new promise.

Yet some of the concepts adopted in development discourse since the crisis of the 1980s led to significant discursive transformations. In this article, we examined the concepts of participation/ownership/empow-

erment, sustainable development and the rejection of 'one size fits all'-solutions. In all three areas, we see that due to external criticisms and internal learning processes, the discourse of development institutions has taken aboard concepts which appear as progressive in comparison to the older conceptions tending towards top-down measures, universal blueprints and neglect of environmental consequences. However, these progressive changes lead to incoherencies in development discourse because some elements of these new ideas are incompatible with the rules of formation of development discourse. The willingness to adopt these new concepts combined with an unwillingness to abandon the discursive rules of 'development' produces the contradictions we have encountered in the interviews. The practice of development institutions to include and co-opt formerly oppositional concepts which have (supposedly) been robbed of their critical content thus has unintended effects. On the other hand, progressive transformations in development policy are confronted with certain limits which are constituted not only by the structures of the development industry, but also by the structures of development discourse. Overcoming these limits presupposes not only political will but first of all an awareness of these structures.

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