

Post-Sustainable Development

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Stephen Morse

Department of Geography

Whiteknights

University of Reading

Reading RG6 6AB

Berkshire

UK

Email: [s.morse@reading.ac.uk](mailto:s.morse@reading.ac.uk)

Telephone: +44 (0)118 9318736

### **Abstract**

The past 15 years have witnessed the rise of post-development theory as a means of understanding the development discourse since the 1940s. Post-development argues that Intentional development (as distinct from Immanent development – what people are doing anyway), is a construct of Western hegemony. Sustainable development, they argue, is no different and indeed is perhaps worse given that most of the global environmental degradation has been driven by consumerism and industrialisation in the West. Critics of post-development counter by stating that it only provides destruction by tearing apart what is currently practiced in ‘development’ without providing an alternative. When post-developmentalists do offer an alternative it typically amounts to little more than a call for more grassroots involvement in development and disengagement from a Western agenda. Post-sustainable development analysis and counter-analysis has received remarkably little attention within the sustainable development literature, yet this paper argues that it can make a positive contribution by calling for an analysis of discourse rather than a hiding of power differentials and an assumption that consensus must exist within a community. A case is made for a post-sustainable development which acknowledges that diversity will exist and consensus may not be achievable, but at the same time participation can help with learning. The role of the expert within sustainable development is also discussed.

Key words: Sustainable development, post-development, participation, expert

## **Introduction**

There are many meanings of the term 'development'. Cowen and Shenton (1998), for example, make a convincing case that development has two forms:

1. Immanent development (or what people are doing anyway): a broad process of change in human societies driven by a host of factors including advances in science, medicine, the arts, communication, governance etc.
2. Intentional (or Interventionist) development: a focussed and directed process whereby government and non-government organisations implement projects and programmes to help develop the under-developed.

Both occur in parallel with Immanent development as a canvass of change in societies and Intentional development as planned interventions. Sustainable development (SD), typically defined as *"development that meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs and aspirations."* (WCED, 1987: the so-called Brundtland Report) is interwoven through both of these forms. It is increasingly helping to influence change within immanent development, driven in part by the voices of green pressure groups and the realities of climatic change, and is often the goal of intentional development funded by aid agencies. Immanent development has been around as long as the human race, but what is regarded as modern Intentional development is generally seen as being born in the early post-second World War period. President Truman's program for peace and

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freedom (1949) stressed four major courses of action that his presidency would pursue, and one of them states:

*“we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas..... The United States is pre-eminent among nations in the development of industrial and scientific techniques. The material resources which we can afford to use for assistance of other peoples are limited. But our imponderable resources in technical knowledge are constantly growing and are inexhaustible. I believe that we should make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life. And, in cooperation with other nations, we should foster capital investment in areas needing development.”*

In parallel with this modernising intent the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War also saw the birth of powerful institutions to help with the realisation. The ‘Bretton Woods’ institutions (named after the conference venue in New Hampshire where their creation was agreed), the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the World Bank) and International Monetary Fund (IMF), were born on July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1944 and became operational in 1946. Fixing a starting point for Intentional development like this may be simplistic (Pieterse, 2000; Brigg, 2002) in that it ignores what was happening before 1949 but it does at least have the advantage of providing a clear starting point.

While both these forms of development are obviously driven by people, they differ markedly in terms of who these people are. Immanent development as a process has a

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rich and complex blend of influence, perhaps becoming even more so with the rise in accessibility to a global media. While it may be viewed as organic and indigenous to some extent there is nonetheless a set of influences from powerful individuals and groups that can direct the process into a particular direction. But beyond this direction Immanent development has no defined endpoint. It is a constant process of change. Intentional development, on the other hand, has had its fair share of critics in the decades spanning the turn of the last century, largely because it is based on a constructed sense of who is – and who isn't – developed (Schuurman, 2000). The problem is that the construction is made by those with power in the developed world and applied to those in the developing world, and is seen by some as nothing more than the “ideological expression of the expansion of post-World War II capitalism” (Escobar, 1992; page 413). This arrogant hegemony has resulted in a backlash referred to as the ‘post development’ movement (Rahnema and Bawtree, 1997) or sometimes as anti-development (Simon, 2006). Proponents of ‘post-development’ argue that what has been promoted as Intentional development since the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War is driven by the richer nations to create a world in their image (Estreva, 1992; Escobar, 1992, 1995; Mathews, 2004; Siemiatycki, 2005; Simon, 2006, 2007), almost a reconfiguration of colonialism (Sidaway, 2007). There may have been a discourse of sorts but, they argue, it has been highly uneven. They also argue that Intentional development has patently failed to deliver (Rahnema and Bawtree, 1997; Pieterse, 1998; Hart, 2001), with Africa often cited by post-developmentalists as the classic example of failure (Mathews, 2004).

Thus post-developmentalists argue that while they are not against helping to alleviate problems of disease and poverty the key is to break away from a developed world

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hegemony implemented by expensive agencies. They argue that Intentional development has created a tautology (Pieterse, 2000), with the developed world creating the definitions and while the instrumentation (the tactics) for achieving these targets can evolve and be flexible (practitioners may see some of this change in tactics as groundbreaking and revolutionary), it doesn't hide the fact that at a strategic level Intentional development is based on a set of assumptions over which those being 'developed' have no influence. Thus the problem is not so much a lack of success in achieving the target but the target itself.

SD, either expressed as an influence within Immanent development or as a specific target of Intentional development, is seen by post-developmentalists at best as simply yet another example of Western hegemony (Nustad, 2001) and at worst as a cruel deception. Nice sounding words and ideals but which is in fact nothing more than business as usual given that 'progress' equates to consumerism, industrialisation and inevitable pollution (Escobar, 1996; Rahnema and Bawtree, 1997; Banerjee, 2003). They see the promotion of SD as the response of some countries to their failure to protect their environment and legacy to future generations, but it is being promulgated by them to other countries which were not part of the problem in the first place. When expressed as a target of Intentional development SD is seen by post-developmentalists as an attempt to repackage a failed approach with enticing language of care for the environment and a respect for the rights of future generations but is nothing more than a capitalization of nature (Escobar, 1996). As Escobar (1996; page 329) reiterates:

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*“The question in this [SD] discourse is what new manipulations can we invent to make the most out of nature and ‘resources’. But who is this ‘we’ who knows what is best for the world as a whole?”*

When applied to SD post-development has some resonance with the attacks of deep ecologists (Pieterse, 2000), and the challenge to post-developmental critique is a significant one:

*“The Brundtland report, indeed the entire sustainable development movement, is an attempt at resignifying nature, resources, the earth, human life itself, at a scale perhaps not witnessed since the rise of empirical sciences.”*

Escobar (1996; page 336)

Strong words, but is this a fair vision of SD? Can it really be seen as nothing more than a Trojan horse to extend commercial interests within Immanent development and hide the deficiencies of Intentional development? Finally, does ‘post-development’ critique actually provide benefits to those wishing to see SD? Post-development arguments have received remarkably little attention within the SD literature, although they have featured strongly in development journals over the past decade. The premise of this paper is that the post-development case, for all the faults that will be discussed, can make a positive contribution to SD in both Immanent and Intentional mode.

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The paper will begin with a summary of the alternative vision to development espoused by post-developmentalists and how this matches with attempts to incorporate stakeholder participation within SD. The paper will then move onto the role of the external expert in SD, a notion that can be anathema within post-development.

### **The ‘doing’ of post-development**

Although post-developmentalists readily point out the deficiencies of the Intentional development mission their alternative is less clear (Simon, 2007), although some claim that it is not their job to put forward alternatives but only to provide an analysis of failure (Pieterse, 2000; Brigg, 2002). Escobar (1997) makes the interesting point that there is no grand solution or alternative paradigm to development. For those that do try to suggest an alternative they invoke somewhat vague language which tends to revolve around the need for more local articulation of the meaning of development and control over how to put it in place (Ziai, 2004). For example, Escobar (1992) refers to the need for an ‘endogenous discourse’ and “new ways of relating to nature and to each other” (page 434), Siemiatycki (2005) calls for a nexus with grassroots movements and empowerment and Ziai (2004) for a ‘radical democracy’. But what do these terms mean and how are they to be arrived at? Radical democracy (= ‘root of democracy’; Laclau and Mouffe, 2001), for example, embraces difference and rejects the need to seek consensus, and calls for a resistance from ‘below’ by social movements (Mohan and Stokke, 2000; Ziai, 2004). Radical democracy builds upon Marxist traditions, but while the rhetoric is rich how it may be achieved in practice is



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less clear. Pieterse (2000; page 183) states that “*at times one has the impression that post-development turns on a language game rather than analysis*” and that “*post-development is caught in rhetorical gridlock*”. Indeed, there are explicit undercurrents of disengagement and withdrawal from the Intentional development strategy as the only desired ‘action’ of post-development (Ziai, 2004), and ironically “*post-development arrives at development agnosticism by a different route but shares the abdication of development with neoliberalism*” (Pieterse, 2000; page 187). Post-development alternatives to SD follow very similar emphases on social movements, but with seemingly even greater challenges such as a call for “*new epistemology of biology.....new narratives of life and culture*” (Escobar, 1996; page 341).

Such vagueness about meaning coupled with a sense of disengagement can leave post-development theory exposed to an obvious counter-attack (Blaikie, 2000).

*“Post-development theory has failed, in a direct sense, to put food in the mouths of the hungry, to put roofs above the homeless or to put money in the pockets of the penniless.”*

Siemiatycki (2005; page 60)

After all, if such ‘grassroots movements’ are so effective why does Africa remain so poor and why is there so much concern over environmental problems in rapidly emerging countries such as China? The over-riding emphasis on the local, albeit within an international dimension of grassroots movements, also tends to ignore the need for futurity; the local extended through time. If such movements or discourse are

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to be ‘facilitated’ by others then isn’t that the very trusteeship that post-developmentalists claim to decry (Grischow and McKnight, 2003)?

Even so, calls from post-developmentalists for an enhancement of the ‘local’ do have a resonance with the rise of participation within Intentional development projects and programmes since the 1960s and indeed are increasingly a core concern within SD, although admittedly the practice is far from being easy (Ball and Morse, 2003). The principle is enshrined within Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration of Environment and Development:

*“One of the fundamental prerequisites for the achievement of sustainable development is broad public participation in decision-making. Furthermore, in the more specific context of environment and development, the need for new forms of participation has emerged. This includes the need of individuals, groups and organizations to participate in environmental impact assessment procedures and to know about and participate in decisions.”*

UNCED (1992). Earth Summit. Preamble of Chapter 23, ‘*Strengthening the role of major groups*’.

*“Democracy, respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development, transparent and accountable governance in all sectors of society, as well as effective participation by civil society, are also an essential part of the necessary foundations for the realization of social and people-centred sustainable development.”*

UNCED (1997). Earth Summit+5. Paragraph 23.

So what is the difference between ‘participation’ within SD and ‘endogenous discourse’, a nexus with grassroots movements and a ‘radical democracy’?

### **Participatory sustainable development: a critique**

Post-developmentalists have argued that SD has had a success rate in practice which is no different to that seen within the broad church of Intentional development, and while its philosophy may be having an influence within Immanent development the inevitable trade-offs between economic gain and environmental protection are never far away (Escobar, 1996). Indeed, some have argued that SD is nothing more than a co-opting of a wide range of groups into an agenda that does nothing more than promote neo-liberal economic growth at all cost albeit with a ‘green’ face (Doyle, 1998). It is perhaps understandable that many will express agreement with the philosophy but not necessarily change their own behaviour to help bring that philosophy into practice (Dovers and Handmer, 1993; Meadowcroft, 1997).

While notions of participatory development are not geographically specific, Shelly Arnstein’s seminal work (Arnstein, 1969) on the topic emerged within a planning and community development context in the USA, it did achieve its greatest and most visible prominence within Intentional development projects of the 1970s onwards. There are a number of reasons for this (Miller et al., 2005a, 2005b), but perhaps the

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foremost is that many developing countries emerged from a non-democratic colonial past during the late 1950s and 1960s. Truman was highly critical of colonialism and the US was a major force in encouraging disengagement of its European friends from their Empires. Thus modernisation went hand-in-hand with a promotion of freedom, and both were pre-emptive strikes to the spread of communism. But the rise of participation within Intentional development was not solely a result of the colonial legacy. During the 1960s there was a gradual disenchantment amongst social scientists with macro-economic policies as the tool for development (Sellamna, 1999), and this enthusiasm for participation should also be seen within the context of other influences in social science (Hoben, 1982). The writings of Lewin (1948) and others regarding organizational structures and management in the developed world were highly influential as indeed was Liberation Theology (Aldunate, 1994) and the writings of Paulo Freire (1972). Lewin coined the term 'action research' and the idea that research should directly facilitate change help spawn what are now generically called Problem Solving Methodologies (PSMs; Checkland, 1981; Checkland and Scholes, 1990) which have increasingly become incorporated within SD projects (Bell and Morse, 2003; Conroy and Berke, 2004; Jonasson, 2004; Vantanen and Maritunen, 2005). The result of this maelstrom of influence was that social scientists working in Intentional development initiated a process of dialogue with primarily rural-based populations in order to better understand their circumstances and wishes. This was referred to as Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA; Chambers 1983) and was essentially an extractive process focused on information gathering to feed into the planning of policy, research and other interventions. During the 1980s RRA evolved into a catalysation of community awareness and action (Chambers, 1993, 1997). The new approach, termed Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), widened in the 1990s to

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include a sense of collaborative learning rather than 'appraisal' (Participatory Learning and Action, PLA). More recently there has been a growing emphasis on participation as a means to facilitate 'knowledge rights' in scientific decision making (Leach et al., 2002) and citizenship (Williams, 2004a; Hickey and Mohan, 2005). Here the language is one of a wider sense of emancipation or empowerment rather than a more narrow focus on an immediate implementation of a project (Chhotray, 2004). Within these broad headings are a plethora of different techniques and methods favoured by individuals and organisations, but all share the same sense of a valuation of the local (Mohan and Stokke, 2000). Such has been the popularity of participation within Intentional development that one writer (Francis, 2001) has claimed that it has taken on almost mystic undertones amongst development donors as a rite of communion for previous sins when macro-policies held sway. Given this emphasis it is of no surprise that SD has embraced participation as a core ideal (Rockloff and Moore, 2006).

So what is the difference between participation within Intentional development and the sort of grassroots emphasis advocated by post-developmentalists? After all grassroots groups are not exactly rare in SD, including within Western contexts (Newman, 2007), and most development practitioners would see participation as a human right and not just as a means of 'delivering better development' (Miller and VeneKlasen, 2005a). Indeed Sellamna (1999) makes a case that PRA/PLA are attempts to realise the post-development ethos. But while participation may provide the community with some control over the form of the process and its pace they are still being 'acted upon' by an external body (Kothari, 2001) and post-developmentalists argue that with this form of relationship the Western hegemony is

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entrenched, not weakened. It also has to be said that there is surprisingly little empirical, as distinct from anecdotal, evidence to support the contention that participation within Intentional development projects does generate positive benefits (Cleaver, 2001), and a few empirical studies have actually pointed to the contrary (e.g. see Beard, 2005, study of participation in development in Indonesia). Unfortunately participation is often assumed to be another word for 'panacea' (Bevan, 2000; King, 2003). Indeed since the late 1990s a number of critiques (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Mansuri and Rao, 2004) and counter-critiques (Mutamba, 2004; Parfitt, 2004; Williams, 2004a) of participation in Intentional development have been published, but this debate is rarely, if ever, echoed within the SD literature.

So why wouldn't participation in development succeed? One would have thought that giving people more power, be it within Intentional or indeed Immanent development, would always be beneficial. There are a number of limitations to participation, and while this issue has received some attention over recent years within the development literature it has received remarkably little attention within the SD literature. To begin with, while participation can certainly help in highlighting problems and issues that need to be tackled, and perhaps even provide some insights as to how these could be best addressed, if people have no real power to change a situation, and unfortunately this is often the norm rather than the exception, then highlighting the problems they face is not in itself going to change their circumstances. Giving people a louder voice does not necessarily mean that those with the power to make changes will listen, or indeed that the community has the resources available to make those changes (Mohan and Stokke, 2000). After all, policy makers and managers are often tied to other more pressing mantra including 'value for money' and efficiency of service delivery.

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Indeed they may pretend to be concerned and responsive while having little interest in substantive change in response to demands from the grassroots. Participation and deliberation can become corrupted terms as they may do nothing more than reinforce external power and deepen distrust and resistance (Nuijten, 2004; Parkins, 2006), or, at the other extreme provide an excuse for the State to withdraw from its responsibilities (Mohan and Stokke, 2000).

Secondly there is the ‘myth’ of consensus (Peterson et al., 2005) allied to a myth of harmonious community (Guijt and Shah, 1998; Mohan and Stokke, 2000). Participatory techniques are usually applied to order to draw out some underlying issues that need addressing or to go further and explore solutions that can emerge from the community itself. What is typically being sought is a consensus; an agreement as to what ‘is’ and what ‘needs’ to be, even if these are multiple rather than single in nature. It is assumed that such a consensus can be reached and that it adds legitimacy to the actions that would follow (Heysse, 2006). Well-established techniques such as multi-criteria analysis (MCA), integrated assessment (IA) and risk-analysis can help elicit a pattern given such a set of multiple goals, objectives and perspectives (Marjolein and Rijkens-Klomp, 2002; Willis et al., 2004; Mendoza and Prabhu, 2005). There is an inevitable move to reduce and arrive at consensus but is this realistic and does a participatory or deliberative process inevitably have to end in consensus?

Much, of course, depends upon who is included and there are practical concerns over representation; ensuring that all those who have a stake, either as ‘winners’ or losers (as perceived by those included in the process), have a voice (Barnes et al., 2003). In

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SD where concessions have to be made by at least some people if not all to avoid unsustainability this can be difficult. What if there is little agreement as to what the important issues are, let alone how to address them? Any community encompasses a wide range of individuals and social units spanning gender, age, ethnic, experience and wealth spectra, and a priori one would expect to find plurality rather than consensus (Hibbard and Lurie, 2000). Indeed, plurality is not in itself a bad thing (Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2006). A participatory approach could well discover such richness and that would be a valid finding in itself (van de Kerkhof, 2006), but is hardly a good starting point for focused action within SD. It is more likely that these differences will lead to a diverse set of actions, some of which may well be contradictory such as environmental protection (*limit air travel*) and economic growth (*build more airports*; Holden, 1998; Castro, 2004; Peterson et al., 2005). Worse still it may be that differences are suppressed either by the community or, even worse, by the facilitator(s), in order to arrive at an imagined consensus or even ‘steered’ in a particular direction so as to appease a sponsor (Parkins, 2006). MCA is a useful approach for achieving an apparent consensus, but does tend to hide two critical points. First it is usually applied by an external facilitator and secondly it seeks to arrive at consensus, even if combined with a participatory ethos (Mendoza and Prabhu, 2005). While everyone may feel a sense of fulfilment (or relief?) that the process is finally over, agreed action points may rapidly evaporate. The participatory exercise may do no more than draw out the views and wishes of those with the loudest voice and simply reinforce and exacerbate existing power inequalities within the community (Mosse, 2001; Cornwall, 2003; Peterson et al., 2005). Forde (2005) describes how “*pseudo-participatory*” approaches were applied in Ireland as a means of strengthening the role of citizens in local democracy but instead the process



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consolidates a top-down administration. A similar example is provided for South Africa by Williams (2004b).

Unfortunately, given all of the above it would sometimes appear that participation is an appealing and convenient catch-phrase that provide a mirage of accountability yet hide business as usual. Real participation leading to real change can often appear to be as elusive as the end of a rainbow (Eversole, 2003). There is, of course, also something of a dilemma here in that what happens if participation is successful and the consensus is not to do something which SD experts might regard as not just desirable but necessary (Lundqvist, 2001)? Ironically given the discussion above this may be tolerated if the community has no power to resist and the change can be imposed, but what happens in situations where there is a vote? Is participation redundant in democracies?

## **Democracy and sustainable development**

It can be argued that in countries which have a democratic system of governance SD is participatory by definition. After all, if an electorate doesn't like what a government has implemented in its name then it can remove them at the next election. But this is not as straightforward as it may at first appear. SD requires a longer term vision which is not restricted by five year election cycles, and the environmental damage wrought by not doing something can be irreversible. Those affected by the change may be unaware of what is going on, especially if the damage is gradual or not so obvious such as a decline in air quality. Humphrey (2006) makes an interesting point that

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acceptance of defeat in a democracy can be justified by the reversibility of policy as those losing have the right to make their case at the next election and hence try to win a majority. But if changes are irreversible or have negative consequences for those residing outside the government's jurisdiction, as with environmental degradation, then this can be seen as a justification for 'direct action' (Humphrey, 2006). Thus 'direct action' may be one influence within Immanent development that tries to achieve futurity and equity outside the limits of democracy.

The scales at which democratic institutions function will be larger than a specific SD project or programme, and such scales do matter (Rockloff and Moore, 2006). While there is a growing literature on the 'politics of sustainability' especially as a way to open up public spaces for debate (Sneddon et al., 2006) there has been little focus on perceptions of legitimacy within governance akin to the discussion of 'direct action' mentioned above. The term 'democracy' is often not unpacked and, as with 'development', can mean many things to many people (Castro, 2004). Taking a simple example, different voting systems can generate different degrees of 'fair' representation. Many democracies have a system of proportional representation (PR) where the make up of the government mirrors the relative proportions of those that voted for the parties. However, with a 'first past the post' (FPTP) electoral system it is possible to have a government that is some distance from reflecting the proportion of those voting for the parties. In the UK general election of 2005, for example, the New Labour Party won 35% of the votes of those who did vote (61% of the registered electorate actually voted) and obtained a total of 356 seats in Parliament out of the 645 contested (equivalent to 55% of the seats). This hardly seems representative of what people had voted for. Irrespective of Humphrey's (2006) point about

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reversibility (or not) of policy this does leaves plenty of scope for the 39% who did not vote at all and the 65% of those who did vote but not for New Labour, together accounting for a massive 79% of the total electorate, to feel disenfranchised and justifiably challenge what the government is doing in their name. If such a government chooses to introduce SD measures which results in many of the 79% being disadvantaged (e.g. tax on air travel) it is perhaps not unreasonable for them to claim that what is being done is only in the name of the 21% who put that government in office. Of course, such concerns may arguably become less valid if there is consensus amongst the political parties with regard to environmental governance, and Meadowcroft (1999) has made a convincing case that in SD such multi-partite agreements require serious attention. But if all parties agree then what choice does the electorate have?

Recent years have seen the rise of deliberative democracy based on the argument that citizens also have a right to routinely and directly partake in lawmaking in addition to choices made at each election. But deliberative approaches are geared towards extraction; the gaining of a sense as to how a representative group 'feels' about an issue through the use of citizens juries or perhaps by a 'deliberative opinion poll'. They are thereby said to improve the health and vitality of democracy (Hamlett and Cobb, 2006), and indeed there are even faint echoes with the 'radical democracy' of Ziai (2004).

### **Back to the expert?**

So if participation and even democracy are fraught with problems within SD either within an Immanent or Intentional development mode maybe there should be a level of acceptance that a degree of 'top down' technical dictate is inevitable. Should there not be an 'ecocracy' which makes objective SD decisions free of the need to consult and debate (Ophuls and Boyan, 1992), or at least provide a strong technical influence? The 'external expert' is decried in post-development as it is perceived by them to lead to a domination of knowledge and results in a conception of development as primarily a technical issue (Escobar, 1999). Indeed there are occasional undertones of this rejection within SD debates. The following, for example, is an excerpt from the 'Sustainable Community Action' discussion forum (a Wiki resource) referring to the UK SD agenda:

“Since the contraction of Local Agenda 21 the field of sustainable development in England seems to have been dominated by professional and expert, remote and establishment elites..... No matter how cleverly experts talk amongst themselves, there won't be enough progress till there's genuine involvement and inclusion of ordinary citizens..... There's been a lot of rhetoric recently about devolution and localism, but much practice can seem to remain top down - however much people may object to that term.”

Accessed at [sca21.wikia.com/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://sca21.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page) on the 19<sup>th</sup> August, 2007

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It is easy to have sympathy with this perspective, especially as there has been no shortage of attempts to derive technocentric drivers to help encourage the attainment of SD. In a paper such as this it is not possible or necessary to review them all, but one can certainly be left with a feel that SD is “dominated by professional and expert, remote and establishment elites”. One example that would have resonance within the context of the above quotation is provided by the OECD’s ‘Environmental Country Reviews’ (ECR) published by their Environmental Directorate (Lehtonen, 2005). Details can be found by navigating through the [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org) website. The process of generating each country ECR is classically technocentric; peer review by experts of each country’s performance towards meeting their own stated goals as well as international commitments. There is some local consultation involving government, business and non-governmental organisations. There are also ‘Environmental Performance Reviews’ (EPR) generated by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE; [www.unece.org](http://www.unece.org)) based upon the approach of the OECD with its ECRs but extended to cover the whole of Europe and not just the OECD members. ECRs and EPRs are terms which are often used interchangeably, and the coverage across Europe since the mid 1990s has been good, with some countries having two assessments during this period. But just because this may be more of an expert-driven process this is not to say that the reports can be dismissed as useless or that overlaps do not exist with participatory approaches. The reviews can play a role in informing debate at many levels (international, national and local) among members countries even if they come from such a ‘top down’ and technocratic source (Lehtonen, 2006). While they provide one perspective they can also be a part of a discourse amongst the ‘local’, perhaps mediated by exposure in the media. Thus

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the 'public' and the 'expert' are not mutually exclusive, and both need to be involved in SD. It's a matter of balance rather than exclusion.

### **Conclusions**

So what contribution can post-development make to SD? Post-development analysis points to a Western hegemony over SD, be it directly through Intentional development or more subtly through Immanent development (Escobar, 1996). In either mode it is perceived by some as an attempt by those countries that have caused the environmental problems to impose their analysis and solutions on the rest of the world. Post-developmentalists have highlighted the need for all to be aware of the potential for the rich to want to see the world as an extension of themselves. Secondly, post-developmentalists have reiterated the importance of the grassroots even if they are vague as to what the grassroots should do or how. Participation within SD has tended to follow a conventional path, with approaches and toolkits more or less taken off the shelf or adapted slightly. Participation has been largely focussed on achievement of a tangible goal within SD projects, attainment of which can be measured through evaluation, and as a sense of empowerment or learning has been far less evident except as a by-product (Bell and Morse, 2003). Therefore, even if post-developmental analysis does no more than point out the deficiencies of a discourse and the potential for corruption of participation this is nonetheless a useful service (Escobar, 1996; Schuurman, 2000; Brigg, 2002; Ziai, 2004). It is all too easy for the

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rich and the experts to dominate not just in terms of the instruments for the doing of SD but also and more fundamentally in terms of what SD means (Escobar, 1996).

However, while a post-development critique can provide an essential counterweight and warning as to the dangers of Western hegemony over SD there are nonetheless concerns with such extreme populism. Participation can be beneficial within SD although it is not a panacea and does have limitations, yet these are rarely discussed within the SD literature. Post-development represents an extreme populism; an assumption that the local is always right. Thus while it would be a simplistic argument to say that all post-developmental analysis rejects the possibility of their being positive elements to modernity (Ziai, 2004), there are nonetheless undertones of withdrawal and rejection. After all, as Pieterse (2000) points out its all very well having a 'creative destruction' but the danger is that without creation only destruction remains. Given the ramifications for all, an apparent disengagement by the West from SD advocated by the post-developmentalists is not an option. Also, an over-riding emphasis on 'grassroots nexus' and 'endogenous discourse' for achieving development could miss negative impacts operating over larger scales than the 'local'. As Nustad (2001, page 284) has pointed out "*there is no way one can assume a 'common interest' as a basis for policy*" and there is a need for institutions to act on behalf of the common interest. The 'local' is just as likely to have some with louder voices than others within a 'consensus', but assuming the 'local' is always virtuous and right is naïve (Blaikie, 2000).

Post-development analysis negates the validity of an external expert to facilitate (Ziai, 2004), but in SD such knowledge is arguably not just desirable but vital (Birrer, 1999)

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and this is gradually emerging from a number of recent studies that have sought to analyse how expert and local knowledge can be integrated (Reed et al., 2006). Participation is important in SD but the stakes are higher than an unbridled populism would allow. After all, post-development was a reaction to what some saw as the hegemony of an Intentional development process driven by the West to modernise the world in its image, but SD is also a reaction to the environmental problems of Immanent development on a global scale, even if the worst offenders are in the West.

Hence there needs to be a post-SD which acknowledges the importance of a true discourse in SD but also that there may be an uneven discourse. Rather than decry that as a universal negative and leap to a promotion of the local and grassroots at all cost the differential needs to be analysed, understood and frankly, if necessary, defended. Acting locally needs to be combined with thinking globally and it is here that the external expert can play a major role. Thus post-SD would be a process of discourse, from grassroots to expert and from expert to grassroots. Post-SD would avoid participation for the sake of it or simply as a means of putting expert knowledge into practice and instead emphasise a sense of partnership. But it's a partnership where one partner may be over-ruled if that is deemed to be in the best interest of distant others or future generations. Thus while post-SD would share with post-development the need for grassroots participation, analysis of discourse and embracement of diversity, it would also include the voice of the expert and accept that within this analysis some local voices may simply be wrong and the expert may be right. To date there have been few analyses of discourse in the SD literature.



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What does post-SD mean in practice? It means an increased emphasis on process and not just end-point by encouraging self-reflection by all involved to help with a setting of endpoints (outputs) and approaches but also to facilitate an appreciation of why decisions are being made (Bell and Morse, 2007a, 2007b). The reflection needs to include an analysis of discourse within process, and embrace diversity in a way which mirrors radical democracy rather than always look for an unachievable and hence false consensus to guide policy. All too often the emphasis in SD has been upon the endpoint, the goal, with participation merely a way to derive an assumed legitimacy and accountability for funders (the real owners?) based upon the inclusion of a few stakeholders (Bell and Morse, 2003, 2007a, 2007b). SD has to have people at its heart as without people there is no SD, but as one of the US presidents who followed President Truman has said:

“We have become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams.”

President Jimmy Carter

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