



## Social Development

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### 1 Definition

Numerous models have been formulated to describe development. Generally, these start off with a state of not-yet development or nondevelopment, and then go on to contrast this with a second state: some kind of plan or blueprint for development. As a result, the process of development is equated with a series of completed stages. Like having to climb the rungs of a ladder, one moves up and up in order to become more and more developed. The associated catching-up processes are then frequently described with phase models. In contrast to such goal-directed perspectives on development with their links to modernization theory, social development pursues an alternative approach focusing on the empowerment and autonomy of actors, and also taking account of the structural obstacles that confront them as they shape their daily lives in the sense of learning to develop their selves. This means that development is always conceived within a twin framework of self- *and* other-development. Social development represents a holistic approach that is non-static and process-oriented.

James Midgley (1995) has had a decisive impact on the international discussion on social development. He conceives it as a "process of planned social change designed to promote the well-being of the population as a whole in conjunction with a dynamic process of economic development" (Midgley 1995, p. 25). The goal of social development in the context of modern welfare is to produce a social well-being that makes people capable of acting and making their own decisions in the broadest sense. Midgley's definition of social development "as a process of promoting people's welfare" can be elucidated as an enabling perspective, because it focuses attention on the potentials for action without forgetting the structural constraints to which actors are subject. The strengths of social development lie in the fact that its intervention strategies address the macro-, meso-, and microlevels. This means that it draws local communities into its strategy packages just as much as governments and international organizations.

### 2 Main Issues

Social development first attracted widespread attention through the principles set out in the millennium goals of the United Nations in 1995 (the Copenhagen Declaration - „World Summit for Social Development"). These revealed how social development should serve to build up egalitarian and solidaristic communities and create societies in which human beings can live together in peace and in which their basic rights are respected.

Although peaceful coexistence and the sanctity of human dignity enjoy general recognition throughout the world, they continue to be circumvented on a number of different levels—for example, in western nations that export their values without always applying them at home. In addition, from a universal perspective, social development is not just restricted to specific target groups such as the poor and migrants. Fundamentally, equal access to society's goods

(such as health or education) should be available for all. Equal participation should provide everybody with opportunities for fulfillment. Even when an education program is targeted specifically on the poor and disadvantaged, its implications always have to be viewed in relation to society as a whole. The same applies to, for example, micro-credits for the poor and disadvantaged.

Although social development aims to promote the social and economic well-being of societies or social groups, such units are always composed of individual actors. From a reflexive perspective, social development is conceived as development of the individual human being and is therefore associated with self-development. It stands for making specific individuals capable of acting, who then, with the help of participation, serve as motors to drive forward the economic and social well-being of the community as a whole. Under headings such as capacity building and capacity development, this goal of enabling people to act is often viewed macrosocially and linked to institutionalized forms of cooperative development.

In line with agency approaches (cf. Emirbayer & Mische 1998), we, in contrast, conceive enablement on a microsocial level, that is, as one individual's experience of efficacy and self-determination in his or her concrete social action context. The goal has to be to link the enablement opportunities given in existing living conditions with opportunities like those addressed in agency research. In this sense, enabling individuals targets at greater recognition and respect. Nonetheless, it simultaneously runs counter to standardized expectations.

Social development and, correspondingly, a development-related social work are not directed toward re-establishing normality in a sense that is finally defined in terms of deficits. The philosophy of social development and social work addresses the individual actor, his or her agency, that is, power to act.

In contrast to the dominant deficit orientation in social-work interventions, a social development perspective focuses positively on actor-specific abilities and skills. Although the goal continues to be to produce normality, the definition of this normality is oriented toward the demands and concerns of the actors involved. This shifts the focus of social work activity onto actors functioning meaningfully within the context of their specific sociospatial lifeworlds and living conditions. From an enabling perspective, disadvantaged and marginalized actors are no longer viewed as victims of difficult and disadvantaging life circumstances, but far more as agents who function meaningfully and actively in their specific life situations. Social work aims to promote the well-being of the population as a whole by strengthening economic development with a social intent. People should be drawn into participation in the formation of processes of social development.

### **3 Critical Placements and Perspectives**

Although social development has already become a central principle of international social work (cf. Cox & Pawar 2006; Midgley 1995), its significance for social work in the German-speaking countries (Austria, Germany, and Switzerland) has yet to be analyzed sufficiently, let alone explained. Nonetheless, one can see signs of the development concept being applied in the German-language discussion, and (alternative) ideas on social development are being considered under headings such as "Soziale Arbeit des Südens" (Social Work in Southern Hemisphere?), "international social work," and "community economics."

This reveals that non- or informal domains such as the "civil society" or the "social economy" are increasingly adopting just as strong a key role as the formal and institutional systems. The

former view the community as a unit *within* which processes of social development need to take place—set apart from the globalized economic form of development. Accordingly, local spaces ("the community") can and should be isolated from the maelstrom of globalization. This is seen as an opportunity to wrest social spaces away from globalized capital and promote a development that is not based on neoliberal logic. However, this localizing discourse has its own problems: As one of the discourses in social work, it has failed to link up with or be related to the national discourse, and there is also uncertainty about the underlying conceptions of development or social space. If social space becomes a fixed backdrop, on or before which moving action is projected, social work becomes based on an "absolutist concept of space." Such a conception neglects the fact that the emergence of such spaces is itself a social process (cf. Reutlinger 2008). This harbors the risk of local space becoming a sealed (and "cast off") container *within* which people are expected to integrate through "socially embedded economic activity in a local or regional context." Although the current structural problems related to contemporary processes of emancipation, segmentation, and loss of boundaries impact on proximal local space, they can be neither understood nor processed within it. This is what makes it difficult to use "local space" to create any alternative world to globalized capitalism. A further problem is that such antiglobal logic contains no alternative concept of development—it is far more the case that it is seen as "not neoliberal" and therefore "good." The various ideas on development within the community remain unanalyzed. They are simply smothered by a diffuse standardization of the civil society (cf. Reutlinger 2008).

Moreover, any clarification of the relation between social development and social work is hampered by the fact that although social development takes a variety of different forms throughout the world, in the German-speaking countries, it is often simply assigned to social work. However, as the concept formulated by the International Federation of Social Work already reveals, social work has two functions: on the one hand, a reactive, clinical function helping individuals and groups to cope with their burdens; on the other hand, a proactive function helping to address the circumstances that first make suffering and disadvantage occur.

The International Consortium for Social Development (ICSD), a group of practitioners, college students, and college teachers from many different countries, has addressed the latter function in its definition of social development (see <http://www.iucisd.org/>). It proposes that economic and social progress should be anchored in people's lives through processes of "capacity building" and empowerment. Unfortunately, however, the ICSD uses the social development approach to address a whole range of different topics, and such a broad use of the concept limits its applicability. It would be far better to link social development to social work—not only in theoretical discussions but also in specific contexts. One good example of how the latter can be done is the international pilot project organized by Caritas in response to the flooding of the River Elbe in Germany in 2002 (see Reutlinger and Zychlinski 2007). The background here was the insight that social work requires its own visions that go beyond the logic of the welfare state. In this empirical and also theoretical context, the concept of social development was used to shift the focus away from the institutionalized logic of welfare-state interventions and toward the normal citizen's everyday coping achievements and his or her potentials to shape society (Reutlinger and Zychlinski 2006).

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