Global South

Rebeca Roysen / Jens Koehrsen / Nadine Brühwiler / Lasse Kos

Global South is a geopolitical concept that is used to describe places located outside the centres of economic, cultural and political power. These are places that were/are negatively affected by colonialism, imperialism and global capitalism. At the same time, these are places where alternative pathways to sustainability are emerging, based on communal and relational models of life.

Introduction

Global South is a contested and relational concept. It only exists in opposition to a "Global North", although the boundaries between the two are fuzzy, unstable, and socially constructed in many different ways. In this entry, we first make a brief description of the history of the term. Then, we describe how colonialism, neo-colonialism and global capitalism have shaped the economy and cultural processes of the Global South. After that, we present some alternative discourses emerging from the Global South that question the predominant Northern/Western model of development and propose new pathways for sustainability. We conclude with a reflection on the need to use this term in a critical way in order to avoid homogenising the different histories, cultures, and experiences of the places situated in the "Global South".

A brief history of the term

The "South" as a geopolitical concept emerged in the 1970s to describe "Third World" or "underdeveloped" societies at the periphery of the world economy. The term was popularized by the Brandt report from the World Bank entitled "North-South: A Program for Survival" (1980). The report described economic disparities, based on GDP per capita, between countries geographically located on different sides of a line that encircles the world at a latitude of 30 degrees, passing between the United States and Mexico, between Europe and Africa, Russia and China, and then diverging South to include Japan, Australia and New Zealand as belonging to the North. The report also advocated financial fluxes from the North to the South to stimulate the development and modernization of the South (Armillas-Tiseyra/Mahler 2021; Dirlik 2007). In the 1990s, the term "Global" was affixed to it and it replaced "Third World" after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Levander/Mignolo 2011). The term "Third World" had been coined by Alfred Sauvy in 1952 to refer to the formerly colonized or neo-colonized territories, and to differentiate them from the modernising parts of the world under the influence of capitalism (First World) and socialism (Second World) (Dirlik 2007).

Since the fall of the "Second World", the term Global South has gained currency in global politics, international development and the social sciences. While the term Global South initially referred to the geographical location of the regions South of the Brandt line, the geographical references of the term have changed over time (Dirlik 2007). Nowadays it mostly describes the regions outside Europe and North America – the "rest" outside the "West" (Mahbubani 1992). However, the term Global South has also been used to refer to peoples who are negatively impacted by capitalist globalization even within the border of wealthier countries (Armillas-Tiseyra/Mahler 2021). The concept of a "South in the North" often refers to migration from Africa, Asia, Latin America and

the Caribbean to the United States and the European Union. It is also used to refer to poverty pockets, racial conflicts and subaltern groups within developed countries. In this sense, "Global South" is a relational term that is employed to address the negative impacts of capitalist globalization in both the South and the North. Vice versa, the "North in the South" often refers to elites located in countries of the South that seek to reproduce the dominant structures of global capitalism and internal colonial practices towards racialized populations and natural resources. Some regions, such as Central Europe, Russia and Central Asia, sometimes remain in a grey area, neither in the North nor in the South (Levander/Mignolo 2011).

Global South and Sustainability

The legacies of colonialism

The colonial enterprise has shaped the way in which countries from the Global South were incorporated into global capitalism. The exploitation of their territories as resource providers to enrich the (neo) colonial powers has led these countries to often become producers of primary goods and raw materials to supply the industries of the Global North. A recent study (Dorninger et al. 2021) has shown that higher-income (Global North) countries' demand for raw materials far exceeds their domestic extraction. At the same time, all other world regions are net providers of raw materials, i.e. their production exceeds their consumption of resources. Global North countries also appropriate a disproportionately large share of energy, labour and land. However, the monetary compensation for resources exported by countries in the South – especially labour – is lower, and countries of the Global North tend to receive more than double the Trade in Value Added (TiVA) per embodied energy exported than poorer countries (Dorninger et al. 2021).

This unequal exchange not only indicates disproportionate access to resources by countries of the Global North, but it also suggests that economic growth and technological progress in the North depends on

the exploitation of land and people in other regions of the world (Dorninger et al. 2021; Jorgenson/Clark 2009). In 2023, Global South countries, defined by GDP per capita, contained roughly 75% of the world population but earned 20% of the global wealth (World Population Review 2023).

Besides its economic implications, processes of colonisation and imperialism have also had cultural consequences. Colonial powers imposed knowledge, meanings and interpretations developed in the North to the rest of the world. They classified the world population as either inferior/irrational/primitive peoples (the colonised) or superior/rational/civilized (the Europeans) (Quijano 2007). The South was then ideologically constructed as a space of exception "outside the bounds of humanity and human rights" (Sparke 2007: 118). These ideological constructions legitimised the use of violence and the dispossession of local groups in the name of "civilization".

Many scholars, political actors and social movements are re-signifying the term Global South in order to challenge the control of the Global North on knowledge production, economy, history and politics. The Global South as a critical concept reflects on the failure of the hegemonic discourse of globalization by examining the consequences of colonialism, imperialism and global capitalism on those peoples who are marginalised from the benefits of globalization, but suffer the uneven impact of its costs (Armillas-Tiseyra/Mahler 2021; Lopez 2007). It has also been used to unveil pathways and alternatives to development that diverge from the pathway followed by the industrialised, developed countries of the Global North. In the next subsection, we will present some of these alternatives that are emerging from the Global South.

Sustainability discourses emerging from the Global South

Many discourses around the world have been calling for a radical transition away from current models of social life, which are seen as the underlying cause of the current civilizational crisis. The main proposals for these transitions emerging from the Global South

include the concepts of post-development and alternatives to development, *Buen Vivir*, communal logics and transitions to post-extractivism. The concepts of post-development and alternatives to development question the basic assumptions of Western discourses on development, including the ideas of growth, progress and instrumental rationality. They see development as a set of representations and practices that produces "underdevelopment". They strive to open up the imaginary to other ways of understanding the conditions of societies in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and look for alternatives emerging from the practices of grassroots movements (Escobar 2015).

Within post-development discourses, the concept of *Buen Vivir* has gained impetus. Based on indigenous ontologies, *Buen Vivir* (as a social movement and not its appropriation by some Latin-American States) can be described as the search for a good life based on the collective well-being of communities, putting the preservation of nature and social justice as having priority over economic objectives. The concept of *Buen Vivir* connects struggles of indigenous communities with the transformative agendas of peasants, Afro-descendants, environmentalists, students, women, and youth movements. Its "key criteria is that *growth and the economy should be subordinated to BV [Buen Vivir] and the rights of nature, not the other way around*" (Escobar 2015: 456).

Researchers from the Global South have increasingly recognised the sustainability of indigenous and traditional ways of life and their role in protecting biodiversity. Indigenous and traditional knowledge, while still marginalised, could offer alternatives to development - alternative visions of "the good life" based on non-capitalist ways of living. They offer worldviews which value nature, interconnectedness and community (Escobar 2015) and, as such, may provide alternative civilizational models to the technology-driven sustainability transitions predominantly promoted by the Global North. Indigenous and traditional ontologies also inspire communal frameworks. These are frameworks centred on place-based practices of grassroots groups that organize life around commu-

nal, non-state and non-capitalist practices. This does not mean that these communities are not traversed by power relations, or that they do not engage with markets. The idea here is to displace the individual and put the communal at the centre of societal models (Escobar 2015). The communal, in relational ontologies, also includes territories and non-humans.

Another sustainability discourse emerging from the Global South is transitions to post-extractivism. It focuses on the critique of "extractivist models based on large-scale mining, hydrocarbon exploitation, or extensive agricultural operations", which are often legitimized as the most efficient growth strategies (Escobar 2015: 455).

These trends emerging from the South offer alternative pathways towards sustainability. Pathways that move away from capitalism and Western modernity and are, instead, based on communal and relational models of life. The Global South can be seen, therefore, as the places "where decolonial emancipations are taking place and where new horizons of life are emerging" (Levander/Mignolo 2011: 4f.).

For further thinking

Global South is a contested concept and there is no universally agreed definition of the term (Dwivedi/McGillis 2022). It is a concept that can be homogenising, but it can also be used to criticise globalist accounts by emphasizing the existing asymmetries and inequalities between places (Dwivedi/McGillis 2022; Sparke 2007). In this sense, "Global South" can be used to redress historical injustices (Dwivedi/McGillis 2022).

The term Global South must be used with the understanding that it is a contradictory term that integrates a plurality of histories, cultures, and experiences into one geopolitical space. Used critically, the term Global South addresses the challenges and solutions of marginalized groups that experience globalization "from the bottom" (Lopez 2007). It can, thus, be used to resist North-oriented globalization (Dwivedi/McGillis 2022) which tends to maintain Southern countries in a peripheral position and to keep the circula-

tion of resources within "selective groups of valued lives" (Dwivedi/McGillis 2022: 7).

Further reading

Escobar, A. (2018): Designs for the Pluriverse. Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Kothari, A./Salleh, A./Escobar, A./Demaria, F./Acosta, A. (2019): Pluriverse. A Post-Development Dictionary. Delhi: Tulika Books.

Martínez-Alier, J. (2003): The Environmentalism of the Poor: A Study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuation. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Pub.

Santos, B. de S. (2014): Epistemologies of the South: Justice against epistemicide. Boulder: Routledge.

References

Armillas-Tiseyra, M./Mahler, A. G. (2021): Introduction: New Critical Directions in Global South Studies. In: Comparative Literature Studies, 58(3), pp. 465–484. https://doi.org/10.5325/complitstudies.58.3.0465

Dirlik, A. (2007). Global South. In: The Global South, 1(1), pp. 12–23. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315534619

Dorninger, C./Hornborg, A./Abson, D. J./von Wehrden, H./Schaffartzik, A./Giljum, S./Engler, J. O./Feller, R. L./Hubacek, K./Wieland, H. (2021): Global patterns of ecologically unequal exchange: Implications for sustainability in the 21st century. In: Ecological Economics, 179. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2020.106824

Dwivedi, O. P./McGillis, R. (2022). Introduction: Hope and Utopia in Global South Literature. In: Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory, pp. 1–8. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24193/mjcst.2022.14.01

Escobar, A. (2015): Degrowth, postdevelopment, and transitions: a preliminary conversation. In: Sustainability Science, 10(3), pp. 451–462. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-015-0297-5

Jorgenson, A. K./Clark, B. (2009): Ecologically unequal exchange in comparative perspective: A brief introduction. In: International Journal of Comparative Sociology, 50(3–4), pp. 211–214. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020715209105139

Levander, C./Mignolo, W. D. (2011): The Global South and World Dis/Order. In: The Global South, 5(1), pp. 1–11. https://doi.org/10.3998/jar.0521004.0067.202

Lopez, A. J. (2007): Introduction: The (Post)global South. In: The Global South, 1(1), pp. 1–11. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40339224

Mahbubani, K. (1992): The West and the Rest. In: The National Interest, 28, pp. 3–12.

Quijano, A. (2007): Colonialidad del poder y clasificación social. In: Castro-Gómez, S./Grosfoguel, R. [Eds.]: El giro decolonial Reflexiones para una diversidad epistémica más allá del capitalismo global., pp. 93–126.

Sparke, M. (2007): Everywhere but Always Somewhere: Critical Geographies of the Global South. In: The Global South, 1(1), pp. 117–126. https://doi.org/10.2979/gso.2007.1.1.117

World Population Review (2023): Global North Countries 2023. https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/global-north-countries [Date of Access: 06.11.2023].

....

Authors:

Rebeca Roysen*, Centre for Religion, Economics and Politics (ZRWP) - University of Basel*
rebeca.roysen@uni-bas.ch

Jens Koehrsen*, Centre for Religion, Economics and Politics (ZRWP) - University of Basel*
jens.koehrsen@uni-bas.ch

Nadine Brühwiler*, Centre for Religion, Economics and Politics (ZRWP) - University of Basel*
nadine.bruehwiler@unibas.ch

Lasse Kos*, Centre for Religion, Economics and Politics (ZRWP) - University of Basel*
lasse.kos@unibas.ch