



The roles of theory & meta-theory in studying socio-economic development models

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Theoretical Surveys & Metasynthesis

- From the initial project to thematic syntheses (from work-package 1 to work-package 2)
- Complexity and its Reduction
- Metatheoretical Convergence
- The General Set of Themes and Concepts
- The Question of agency
- Areas for Further Work
- Plans for Publication and Future Research

From the Initial Project ...

- *Historical surveys* of theoretical approaches to socio-economic development from selected perspectives with diverse spatio-temporal horizons
- *General surveys* of various approaches to major institutions and/or processes of general interest, such as the state, reproduction, development
- *Methodological papers* on calibrating and operationalizing the chosen theoretical instruments for use in case-studies and observatory

... to Thematic Synthesis Papers

- Objectives of Thematic Synthesis Papers:
 - Synthesize results of the initial surveys (ABC papers) around five core themes & identify their contributions to the overall project and to future theoretical research
 - Move towards shared understandings of scientific inquiry in general and in DEMOLOGOS project
 - Enable production of commensurable sets of concepts as basis for identifying key themes for the empirical research and suggesting common research strategies
 - Facilitate the eventual development of a grand synthesis (synthesis of syntheses) linking concepts and themes from all theoretical papers

The Five Thematic Synthesis Papers

TSP 1	Agency, Structure, Institutions, Discourse (ASID)
TSP 2	Capital-, class-, and form-theoretical approaches to (il)logics of capitalism & to role of extra-economic factors and forces in socio-economic development
TSP 3	Regulation, Reproduction, & (Meta-)Governance
TSP 4	Culture, Discourse, Ideology, Hegemony (CDIH)
TSP 5	Dynamics & development - actual, real, & 'concrete utopian' alternatives. Politics of the possible. Knowledge, strategies, and outcomes

... and to Transversal Synthesis of TSPs

- Provide general guidelines for case studies
 - Historical-geographical context
 - Periodization in terms of stages, steps, crises, etc
 - Narrative analyses of key strategies & policies
 - Identify key actors and emblematic moments
 - Identify sites of resistance and counter-hegemony
 - Draw general conclusions for the overall research project
- Agree on specific foci of each case study to highlight particular issues and facilitate complementarities
- Create a 'platform' for further empirical research

Complexity and its Reduction 1

Some forms of complexity

- **Descriptive** – length of statement (and time) required to produce ‘adequate’ description of relevant system as basis of valid observation and effective action
- **Organizational** – heterogeneity of possible (and compossible) sets of relations in systems and broader ensembles
- **Hierarchical** - elaborateness of emergent properties and/or systems & resulting relations of super- and subordination
- **Operational** – complexity of modes of operation of system
- **Nomic** – number, intricacy, and intertwining of laws and tendencies associated with system or ensemble of relations

Complexity and its Reduction 2

- The world is too complex to be fully intelligible from a single viewpoint & is also inexhaustible from multiple viewpoints
- It is essential to reduce complexity as basis for 'going on' in the world – whether in social action or theoretical inquiry
- If socio-economic development is our explanandum, we may reasonably begin with concepts for periodizing accumulation regimes in their embedded spatio-temporal complexity
- Analysis can and, eventually, must go beyond such concepts in order to introduce greater complexity & concreteness

Metatheoretical Convergence 1

Explanations should be adequate at level of meaning and material causation: hence focus on semiosis (“meaning-making”), on formal-institutional-strategic contexts of social action, and on emergent effects of social action and their recursive impact. Thematic synthesis papers 1 and 4 produce similar arguments.

- *TS1 - ASID*

- *Agency*
- *Structure*
- *Institutions*
- *Discourse*

- *TS2 - CHID*

- *Culture*
- *Hegemony*
- *Ideology*
- *Discourse*

The ASID Approach

- **Agency:** any type of *meaningful human behaviour*, individual or collective, that makes a major difference in natural and/or social worlds, either directly or through mediation of tools, machines, *dispositifs*, institutions, or other affordances.
- **Structure:** those moments of natural and/or social realities that, in short or medium run and in given spatial context, cannot be changed by a given agent
- **Institutions:** ‘socialised structure’, i.e., a relatively enduring set of structural constraints and opportunities that appear in form of an interconnected set of routines, conventions, rules, sanctioning mechanisms, and practices that govern more or less specific domains of action.
- **Discourse:** intersubjective production of meaning. Affects action (as meaningful behaviour) and is central to analysis of structure (which varies with identities, interests, horizons, strategies, and tactics of agents) and institutions (as ‘socialized structure’).

The CHID Approach

- **Culture:** relatively fluid ensemble of beliefs, values, and practices that both shape and reflect lived experience plus the material affordances and artefacts that make social life possible.
- **Hegemony:** social domination based on consent backed by force that integrates identities, interests, emotions, and values of key sectors of subordinate classes and other subaltern groups in light of shifting circumstances and new forms of resistance.
- **Ideology:** ensemble of beliefs, values, and practices that express ideal and material interests of specific social forces in the guise of 'general interests'. Has a crucial role in reproducing and/or transforming domination. Also provides political, intellectual and moral direction but is typically contradictory and conflictual, opening space for resistance, social alternatives, concrete utopias.
- **Discourse:** the semiotic substratum, medium, and product of culture and is crucial in remaking subjectivities, identities, and affordance of everyday life

Metatheoretical Convergence 2

- Identify potential contributions and limitations of *form analysis* for concrete geographical-historical research and agree on advantages in this context of *institutional analysis* and *narrative policy analysis* (TSP 1, 2, 4)
- Agree on *middle range concepts* drawn from *regulation approach*, *relational state theory*, and *critical semiotic analysis* as useful, commensurable tools for study of socio-economic development (TSP 3, 4)
- Take *reproduction*, *regulation*, and *governance* as key *entrypoints* for more detailed study of how *accumulation* is articulated with, and embedded in, *broader economic and social formations* (TSP 2, 3)

Metatheoretical Convergence 3

- Semiosis is relevant to all aspects of the research in terms of economic, political & social imaginaries – including alternatives and concrete utopias (TSP 1, 4, 5)
- Spatiality – connections among political territory, place, scale, & network – affects hegemonic, dominant, subaltern, and alternative projects and tendencies (TSP 1, 3, 4, 5)
- Governance and meta-governance (i.e., managing balance among modes of governance – exchange, hierarchy, network, solidarity) are key concepts for analyzing coordination of complex interdependence despite contradictions, dilemmas, crisis-tendencies and tendency to governance fail (TSP 2, 3)

Territory, Place, Scale, Network

	Principle of socio-spatial structuration	Associated Patterning of socio-spatial relations
Territory	Bordering, bounding, parcellization, enclosure	Construction of inside/outside divides and key role of the 'outside' in structuring the 'inside'
Place	Proximity, spatial embedding, areal differentiation	Construction of spatial divisions of labor; differentiation of social relations horizontally among 'core' vs. 'peripheral' places
Scale	Hierarchization, vertical differentiation	Construction of scalar divisions of labor; differentiation of relations vertically among dominant, nodal and marginal scales
Network	Interconnection, rhizomatic or transversal differentiation	Connecting nodes to build networks; differentiation of nodes in topological networks

Metatheoretical Convergence 4

- While it is tempting to adopt a totalizing approach to socio-economic development, there are also struggles over *ways to organize social life* that would supersede its subjection to the ‘profit-oriented, market-mediated’ logic of capital relation in a more integrated world market (TSP 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
- Hence explanatory logic of capital accumulation is limited because of resistance to that logic and/or demand for other logics of societal organization (TSP 2, 3, 4, 5)
- This creates space for study of actually existing alternatives and the search for concrete utopias (TSP 5)
- The General Set of Themes and Concepts comes next ...

Agency-structure-institution-discourse-culture-ideology-hegemony

Socio-economic development

Historical specificity of capitalism and its articulation with, and embedding in, broader economic and social formations

Form analysis

**Institutional
analysis**

**Strategic-Relational
Analysis**

Socio-Spatiality

**Periodization & spatio-
temporal fixes**

**Conjunctural Analysis &
Emblematic Moments**

**Accumulation
regimes**

**Modes of growth &
their Regulation**

**Governance &
Metagovernance**

**From political economy to moral economy – current alternatives
and concrete utopias**

DEMOLOGOS

The question of agency

- ... is crucial for DEMOLOGOS on four grounds
 - **Meta-theoretical:** explanations should be adequate at the level of social meaning as well as material causation
 - **Empirical:** the case studies must identify the actions of real actors in specific conjunctures as well as the structurally-inscribed constraints on the pursuit of their declared aims and the realization of their ideal and material interests,
 - **Normative:** DEMOLOGOS is concerned with critique as well as description and explanation – especially with critiques developed by subaltern forces and social movements
 - **Alternative:** we aim to feed our research into alternative imaginaries, social innovation, and practical alternatives

Areas for Further Work

- The shift to middle-range analyses has led to neglect of key contradictions of capitalism, crisis-tendencies, and the political ecological dimensions of the cases
- Given focus on scalar articulation and a case-study specific privileging of 1-2 scales, a relative neglect of more complex socio-spatial and intertemporal relations identified in TSPs
- The ABC paper on spatial development analysis & macro-economic growth is insufficiently integrated into TSP 2 and TSP 3, making it hard to integrate these topics coherently into case methodology
- Tendency to substitute narrative policy analysis for more critical semiotic analysis
- Politics is often treated gesturally due to the relative neglect of state-theoretical issues in TSPs

Plans for publication & future research

- All theoretical papers are on accessible on DEMOLOGOS website
- A tightly edited collection of ABC papers is under review by University of Georgia Press
- Moulaert and Jessop are preparing a grand synthesis of the synthesis papers in the light of the application of the overall schema in the case studies
- The final meta-synthesis will also be utilized in the final revision of the case studies
- Further suggestions are welcome!

**Thanks for your attention
And thanks to Erik!**

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