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## **Creating a more liveable world – how to connect pluriverse and design thinking in development studies and activities in the age of the Entropocene**

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A fundamental rethinking and redefinition of the development idea has been needed for a long time. However, it has never been more urgent and necessary than today, at a time of growing inequality, increasing forms of exclusion, a crisis of social trust and misinformation, instability and security threats, and rapid climate change and environmental degradation. The current understanding of development, based on a colonial narrative, an ideology of economic growth and exploitation of the earth, should undergo a profound transformation, as should entire societies and economic systems (Escobar, 1995; Esteva, 2023; Hickel, 2021; Rist, 2008; Sachs, 1992). The following article presents a brief reflection on the necessity of change in the leading development discourse promoted by international institutions, such as the United Nations (UN), the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and other multilateral, bilateral partners and most of state institutions across the globe.

Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer announced in 2000 that we are living in the age of the Anthropocene – a time when the global environment is shaped by humans rather than being submissive to nature. People and their activity heavily alter land, oceans, rivers, the atmosphere, and wildlife (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000). *Homo sapiens*' impact on the planet, mainly destructive for other organisms living on the earth, but harmful also to humans, is the primary cause for the rec-

ognition of the Anthropocene. In addition, a Polish scholar, Ewa Bińczyk, refers to the Anthropocene as an age of Man, an epoch during which human activities influence the process of the geological evolution of the earth (2018). There are plenty of other publications on the Anthropocene from a variety of perspectives (Chakrabarty, 2009; Crist, 2013; Latour, 2017; Sayre, 2012) and debates on how the Anthropocene intersects with racism (Pulido, 2018; Baldwin & Erickson, 2020), colonialism (Simpson, 2020), extractivism, or the extinction of species, some of them questioning the disciplinary boundaries and well-established philosophies and political systems (Löwbrand, Mobjörk & Söder, 2020).

Nevertheless, the current level of problems humans create is even more than just humankind's impact on the planet. Therefore, the concept of the Entropocene (Stiegler, 2021, p. 11) is even better for describing the contemporary degree of destruction. The Entropocene is characterised by constant rapid and unpredictable change and crises. The ecological and social chaos and other entropies at all possible levels – social, political, economic, and environmental – are inseparable from the dominant model of social life based on unstoppable consumption, continuous pursuit of success, and economic growth. Meanwhile, as Stiegler, Krzykowski, and Toffeletto (2021, pp. 165–166) explain, most of the institutions we created within the United Nations system not only have limited the capacity of local authorities but led to situations when the recommended solutions became too abstract from the reality. Nation-states are encouraged to compete with one another and protect their interests rather than serve humanity in general. This disconnection of the international, national, and local institutions causes them to be powerless and unable to confront global problems. Thus, it is necessary to rethink how these institutions function in such a mode so that they adhere to locality. Their credibility is weakened when it comes to the challenges of either the Anthropocene or the Entropocene because they ignore people's interests.

Therefore, societies and economies, and the institutions they create, require radical transformation of their systems to break with the hegemony of such a model of development based on the policy of exploitation of the global South by the global North, the universality of capitalism (Hickel, 2021), as well as ignorance of local needs<sup>1</sup> (Cavalcanti, 2007) and system of knowledge. It is not just about decol-

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1 Cavalcanti (2007) presents an interesting case study of a goat-keeping project introduced in one of the northeast Brazilian rural towns as an example of conflicting development views. The project was a classic example of imposing an interventionist, ethnocentric, and modernist perception of development on the community of farmers, even to the extent of how they should work together.

onising the social imaginary,<sup>2</sup> as Serge Latouche (2015) put it, but understanding the causes and role of the ideology of economic growth, consumerism, and colonialism of power. We need to change how we see the world and take action to build a more democratic, equitable, and inclusive world. The solution is a matrix of alternatives to the dominant development discourse that will help liberate the world from the *homo oeconomicus* paradigm and stop the homogenisation of cultures. The organising principle of the world should be pluriversality, through which one can create a 'world that connects many worlds'. One such alternative is degrowth, which assumes moving away from economic growth and rebuilding the world economy so that it allows respect for human dignity.

Therefore, this article attempts to embed the idea of development within the discussion on the Anthropocene and the Entropocene. It investigates and synthesises the possibilities of creating a more liveable world by connecting the pluriverse approach with design thinking in development studies and activities. The primary assumption of the paper is that contemporary development requires a radical redefinition, redesign, and opening towards innovations and pluriversality. Development understood as prosperity based on democratisation and decentralisation of the economy, respect for cultural diversity, social equality, and respect for nature can bring about colossal societal changes. A more pluriversal approach and design thinking can be valuable tools to create a more liveable world. To prove the feasibility of this idea, I want to follow some research questions: 1) What are the reasons for the redefinition of the idea of development? 2) What are the alternatives to the current development discourse? 3) In what way can pluriversality and design thinking be helpful?

### The need to redefine the idea of development

We are currently experiencing unprecedented, in frequency and strength, natural disasters caused by global warming, the source of which is mainly human activity directed at continuous economic growth and constant expansion of consumption. It should be emphasised that it is not the people themselves who are to blame here, but the system in which they live that forces them to constantly meet sometimes non-existent needs. Because of this, the earth's resources are depleting at an alarming rate, including the resources most essential to life, such as water.

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2 Latouche claims that growth, development, and progress are beliefs, imaginary significations, and economic founding categories. Therefore, abolishing or going beyond them is possible only through a change of the imaginary. To achieve a degrowth society means to decolonise our imaginary.

Droughts and water shortages have affected many regions in countries around the world in recent years – in 2022 in Europe this occurred in Italy, France, Portugal, Romania, and England (European Commission JRC, 2022). In Africa, the worst drought has again, after 40 years, affected a region particularly vulnerable to water shortages, the Horn of Africa. In August 2022, the UN's experts reported that in Ethiopia, Somalia, and parts of Kenya, between 19 to 36 million people experienced severe food security challenges, health vulnerabilities, and other problems due to the drought, which began in October 2020. The recent drought surpassed the previous one from 2010–2011 and 2016–2017 when it comes to severity and catastrophic consequences (UNFPA, 2022). In 2022, the drought also affected two of the world's major economic powers – the United States, where the western and central parts of the country, in particular, were facing water shortages (NOAA, 2023), and China, where record low water levels were observed in the Yangtze River, the country's longest and most economically important river, threatening the operation of hydroelectric power plants and energy supplies for both private consumers and large enterprises (Davidson, 2022).

Meanwhile, millions of people in other parts of the world experienced flood disasters. Thousands were left homeless in Sudan and South Sudan, where floods recur almost yearly (Zoni, 2023). In Pakistan, floods destroyed infrastructure and many crops, displacing millions (reliefweb, 2023). Droughts, floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes are weather conditions that are slowly becoming the 'new normal', with a host of problems for economies and communities, especially in regions vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Worthy of note here is that the countries still referred to as developing countries are currently paying the highest price for climate change, to which they themselves have contributed only a tiny percentage. Hence, in recent years, there have been voices from activists and politicians talking about the need to introduce a system of payment for 'loss and damage' which means costs already being incurred from climate-fuelled weather extremes or impacts or even 'climate reparations' to be paid by rich countries whose developed economies were and are responsible for producing most of the greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere (Abnett, 2022; Schonhardt, 2022).

Human activity has led to global warming, the straining of the planet's resources, and the destruction of many plant and animal species. Declining biodiversity is a problem that is just as important to the economy and, counterintuitively, also threatens humans and their activities. 'The planet is in the midst of a biodiversity and climate crisis... and we have a last chance to act... A nature-positive future needs transformative – game changing – shifts in how we produce, how we consume, how we govern, and what we finance' said Marco Lambertini,

the Director-General of WWF International in the conservation charity's Living Planet Report 2022 (cited in: Whiting, 2022). The importance of biodiversity for economies is also underlined by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Lead Author and the World Wildlife Fund's Global Forest Lead Scientist, Pablo Pacheco: 'Without wild species, our whole planet unravels. Billions of people rely on wild species for food, medicine, energy, and clean water. They are especially critical for the livelihoods of vulnerable people in rural areas, who depend on them for subsistence, income, and cultural needs. Our modern global economy increases the threats to biodiversity due to pressures from local demand and global trade' (Polcastro, 2022). The effects of extractivist policies (Czerny & Czerny, 2021), i.e., a development model based on the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources such as metals or energy resources, as well as the overexploitation of agricultural land and the clearing of forests, are already visible in many regions of the world in the form of a devastated landscape and massive environmental damage. Some scientists claim that the ongoing deforestation and degradation of nature will also contribute to the emergence of many new, unknown, or 'dormant' viruses, thus threatening the emergence of further pandemics or epidemics (Sarao, 2020). This is possible for at least two reasons – the disruption of the boundary between the human environment and wildlife (Vidal, 2020), and as a result of climate change and the melting of glaciers, which expose hitherto hidden deposits of land (Geddes, 2022). Destruction of the planet, therefore, cannot foster development. Without natural resources, even the world's largest economies will not be able to function. In a situation of constant health risks, societies will not be able to work in such a system as we have now.

The recent global pandemic most likely resulted from such disorders. As for the socio-economic sphere, it was the Covid-19 pandemic that revealed and exacerbated existing problems and dividing lines in societies: national, racial, gender, and class. Even in the number one economy in the world, the United States, the effects of the pandemic proved more detrimental to those belonging to disadvantaged groups in American society, i.e., mainly black people (Gavin, 2021). The pandemic exposed a widespread divide along racial and class lines – black US citizens who live in so-called worse neighbourhoods with poor infrastructure and lower-paying, but more exposed workplaces were more likely to get sick and die from the coronavirus. Similar divisions were revealed in the case of the access to vaccines manufactured in countries of the global North, only a tiny fraction of which reached the developing countries (Alakiya, 2022; Tatar et al., 2022). Unequal access to health care or vaccinations, lockdown, and lack of prospects for recovery have had a negative impact on societies in many regions of the world.

This crisis coincided with the struggle for equal treatment and attempts to eliminate common discriminatory practices. The most prominent of the social movements, Black Lives Matter, managed to mobilise millions of people to take to the streets and participate in protests against unfair and discriminatory treatment of black people by police or law enforcement (Buchanan, Bui & Pater, 2020). These and other global protests are a call for transformational and structural change, for a struggle against racism, injustice, and social inequality, for the decolonisation of minds and actions, and to end the predatory economies and policies that promote exploitation (Miller & Mitchell, 2020). However, the need to break with the dominant narratives of development and social relations, often stemming from the colonial era, has clashed with forces seeking to undermine solidarity and collective resistance of individuals and whole societies. Cyber-propaganda or fake news contribute to undermining public trust, leading to the spread of populist and nationalist narratives (Cover, Haw & Thompson, 2022). There is an increase in voices calling for hatred and exclusion of so-called others simply because, or perhaps precisely because, they come from a foreign country and culture. There is a growing polarisation of views and actions – on the one hand, there is a part of society that demands change, but on the other hand, there are those who want to preserve the status quo and the dominant position in social and political life, usually at the expense of others.

Meanwhile, instead of solving all these problems, since Russia attacked Ukraine, the world, especially the economically developed part, has been focused on another war and rearmament. As a result of the criminal policies of Putin and his associates, we can speak of one of the greatest humanitarian and ecological tragedies in the Eastern European region, not to mention thousands of victims and millions of refugees (Roy, 2023). Instead of fighting climate change, we have another senseless war and environmental devastation due to warfare. Ukraine, which for many years has been the world's granary, is now an area where bombs are falling on grain crops. The consequences are being felt not only in Europe, which has faced an energy crisis due to the war, but also in more distant countries such as Africa, where the population frequently suffers from crop failure and water shortages. Obstructions to grain exports from Ukraine could further exacerbate famine and mortality, leading to indirect victims of the war (Yohannes-Kassahun, 2023). Similar situations of wasting human labour and land resources can be found in many parts of the world.

Moreover, the example of the war in Ukraine is a good illustration of how all the problems of the global world are interconnected – a war in one country, albeit a distant one, can exacerbate the problem of hunger in another part of the world, where famine has been caused by climate change due to human economic

activity. How, then should we talk about development in such crisis and tragic circumstances? How to manage development in times of entropies at all levels?

### **The insufficiency of the Sustainable Development Goals and the need for alternative ways of thinking about development**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), established as a continuation of the previous goals, the Millennium Development Goals, have been officially used since 2015. They serve as a reference for countries and nations in their efforts to raise socio-economic and living conditions. However, because of the global problems already mentioned, the question arises as to whether the SDGs formula is not based on flawed assumptions. This is especially true regarding the universality of economic growth, which was supposed to be both a driving force and a determinant of development. Growing social tensions, protests, activist actions, and the increasing involvement of societies in new, more local forms of cooperation indicate the need and necessity to answer the question about the essence of development – what is it and what does it constitutes? We already know that economic growth is not the best recipe for development. It is needed and can foster development, but it does not have to be a *sine qua non* condition. But what should it be?

The rhetoric of development, sometimes called developmentalism (Lie, 2015), has been adopted and has become part of national strategies in almost all countries. Each country has a plan, strategy, or development institution. Nevertheless, only some developing or underdeveloped countries can be called developed today. They continue to implement their development strategies based on the economic patterns of the North, often at enormous environmental and social costs. Therefore, the problem is not the lack of action but the idea of development as a linear, one-way, material and financial growth driven by commodification and capitalist markets (Kothari et al., 2018).

Over time, discourses and narratives related to development have entered various stages, and successive concepts have evolved. From debates on economic growth, representatives of international institutions and researchers on the problem moved on to discussions about social and human development and then on to sustainable development.

The beginning of the debates on sustainable development was strongly influenced by the argument of the Roman Club about the need to ‘limit growth’ (*Limits to Growth*, 1972). Development experts and scientists repeated at many international conferences that there is a mismatch between ‘development and the environment’. The problem was further highlighted in the report *Our Common Future* (1987). However, neither the United Nations’ analyses nor the reports

of most countries contained a critique of the social and structural forces underlying the ecological crisis. Instead, the focus was on making economic growth and development 'sustainable and inclusive' through appropriate technologies, market mechanisms, and political reforms. The problem is that the idea of sustainable development has been swallowed up by capitalism and then stripped of its ecological content. Since the 1980s, neoliberal globalisation has taken control of everything. On the other hand, the UN focused on the 'poverty alleviation' program in developing countries without reflecting on the fact that its source was in the economies of the global North driven by the ideology of economic growth. It was even argued that less developed countries must first achieve a higher standard of living before they can allocate funds to environmental protection. This approach paved the way for the ecological modernist concept of the 'green economy' (Kothari et al., 2018).

Interestingly, a revised version of *Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update* was published at the beginning of the new century. The authors stated in it that:

*'(...) we are much more pessimistic about the global future than we were in 1972. It is a sad fact that humanity has largely squandered the past 30 years in futile debates and well-intentioned, but halfhearted, responses to the global ecological challenge. We do not have another 30 years to dither. Much will have to change if the ongoing overshoot is not to be followed by collapse during the twenty-first century'* (Meadows, Randers & Meadows, 2005, p. xvi).

Almost two decades have passed since then, and the futile debates continue. Researchers often put forward their theories and build development models in opposition to one another, hoping only their theories will be recognised as the right ones. But would it not be better if they tried to join forces and create entirely new, alternative approaches that consider multiple voices?

At the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012, the idea or ideology of sustainable development, already devoid of its essence (ecological content), was the primary approach used in multilateral discussions. The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) also published a report on the green economy (*Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication*, 2011), defining it as the economy leading to improved human well-being and social justice while reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcity. In line with the pro-growth policies of sustainability advocates, this report considers living forms of nature across the planet as 'natural capital' and 'critical economic assets'. In this way, the market commodification of life on earth (flora and fauna) was codified and legitimised. What kind of sustainability is left there, then?



The international model of ‘green capitalism’ presented in the declaration *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (The UN, 2015) does not sufficiently address the critical roots of the development problem itself (Kothari et al., 2019). It fails to explain how the structural roots of poverty, instability, and violence are historically grounded by state power, corporate monopolies, neo-colonialism, and patriarchal institutions. There is also no indication of the important role of direct, democratic governance and responsible decision-making. Despite already known biophysical limitations, this model still emphasises economic growth as a driving force for development (gross domestic product (GDP) is arbitrarily assumed as an indicator of progress). Economic globalisation is recognised as a key economic strategy. Modern science, in turn, is supposed to be a recipe for all problems. Culture, ethics, and spirituality are ignored and subordinated to economic forces, and indigenous knowledge is not considered. Unregulated consumerism is still allowed, with no chance of changing the global North and South disparity regarding pollution, waste and impact on climate change (Hickel, 2021).

This list of ‘shortcomings’ of the SDGs is, of course, longer. What is striking, however, is the hypocrisy or ignorance of the creators of this still valid version of the goals. Under the guise of sustainable development, we still have the same development model based on economic growth and constant consumption. The authors of the report entitled *Planetary Boundaries* clearly state that development, understood as economic growth, leads to the planet’s unsustainability or threatens its sustainability (Rockström et al., 2009). The SDGs are merely a semantic deception and should instead be called the Sustainable Survival Goals (Kothari et al., 2019, p. XIII). The most disturbing thing is that, again, thanks to international institutions and the SDG model, less developed countries fall into the mechanism of adapting their development to the vision promoted by the countries of the rich North.

For many decades, development has been seen mainly as economic growth, limited to increasing GDP, which has had little effect on improving the living standards of millions of people in many regions of the world. Development models based on economic growth did not consider local communities’ needs, nor did they include indigenous knowledge. They perpetuated the established patterns of operation and aligned the economies of less developed countries (the global South) with the international economic system, which mainly benefited developed countries (the global North). It was even believed that the South could only cope with the help or intervention of the countries of the North. Development perceived in this way fostered the persistence of unequal distribution of power and wealth, asymmetrical terms of trade, deepening injustice, and unreflective exploitation of

natural resources. This perception of development is an outgrowth of Escobar's highly critical thought from the 1990s, in which he argues that development is a mechanism to produce and manage the Third World (nowadays, we would say the global South), specifically to realise the promises announced by theorists and politicians in the 1950s. According to Escobar (1992; 1995), development is a kind of colonial reality that has not benefited societies but rather poverty, underdevelopment, exploitation, and oppression. Escobar argues that the development discourse is the most ethnocentric, technocratic approach, which treats people and cultures as abstract concepts or statistics that can be moved around in tables indicating progress. This perspective coincides with the views of some postcolonial scholars who maintain that intellectuals and development practitioners are involved in neocolonial knowledge production, which can lead to the marginalisation of developing societies (Sumner, 2008). Therefore, for at least the last three decades, development scholars (including Arturo Escobar, Gustavo Esteva, Serge Latouche, Majid Rahnema, Wolfgang Sachs, and Gilbert Rist) have called for a shift in the approach to development and resigning from a universalist vision, dominated by Western concepts. They have suggested moving to more pluralistic approaches that consider the importance of cultural differences and local solutions to development.

These statements are still valid. A number of new and escalation of already existing problems mean that there are also voices calling for the so-called decolonisation and 'de-racialisation' of development, as well as a departure from the imperative of economic growth, which is the crucial idea of capitalism and which has a colonial character at its core (Hickel, 2021; Jackson, 2009). Experts call for the reconstruction of the rules of the global economy and resignation from treating capitalism as the most critical measure of progress. They call for a reconstruction of the ontological foundations, i.e., a change in the system of thinking and narration in relation to various issues, including the perception of nature (man as a part of nature; the need to protect biodiversity), the importance of work (striving for greater balance), and gender equality (equal treatment of women and recognising their role in development). They also postulate the return to old values and traditions (using indigenous knowledge).

### The importance of pluriversality

For years, the international community was convinced that the world needed universality and a single concept of development, promoted by international organisations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, as well as almost every state in the world. The problem with these institutions is that they are fundamentally undemocratic, and their vision

of the world is based on the duality of the world. Their model of development or development strategies and plans embedded in the Western world were often recommended to developing countries without deeper reflection and adaptation to local conditions. Over the years, this universal vision of the world has not been successful. The world consists of various cultures and ways of living, not to mention different geographical conditions. Therefore, it needs pluriversity and openness to diverse concepts of the common good and prosperity.

The French philosopher Bruno Latour (2004) chooses ‘pluriversum’ over ‘universum’ as there is no universal structure that would fit everything and allow the totality of being to live in eternal peace. He talks about new actors and spokespeople whose voices were not heard before and who will allow things and non-humans to speak. They will construct the new collective. Latour points to political ecology that would give voice to things in negotiating the common good. In other words, democracy can be extended to animals and all of nature. Democracy should mean a more cosmopolitan character so that the common good becomes as broad as possible.

The Argentinian semiotician and researcher of coloniality<sup>3</sup> and decoloniality,<sup>4</sup> Walter Mignolo explains that pluritopic hermeneutics (that assumes no main frame or unified tradition at all) is needed because we are dealing with various meanings, not a universality. In Western thought, hermeneutics refers to reflecting on the meaning and interpretation of a particular concept within one cosmology, Western cosmology. So, what if there are two or more cosmologies, Mignolo (2018) asks. After all, every civilisation known to us is based on the universality of its cosmology. In that case, the understanding of development will be different in the Western view and in the African or Asian ones. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that Western ideas and development schemes actually caused more harm than good, as they were implemented without reflection on local cosmology and the understanding of the world and interpersonal relations.

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- 3 Coloniality describes the colonial matrix of power; it serves as the basis and justification for the exploitation of the world and its resources by the European system of domination; it is the core of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, nationalism, and modernity. In comparison, colonialism is the ideology that has ruled the thinking of Western countries since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It functioned through racialised hierarchies, including systems of knowledge and culture centered on Europe.
  - 4 Decoloniality attempts to understand the permanence of colonial systems, not only in the form of colonial heritage but also in how the world is organised. Decolonialism is supposed to bring liberation from the matrix of colonial power. It is a continuous and evolving process, not just anti-colonialism or a reaction to colonialism. Decolonialism and decolonial thinking emphasise the importance of a pluriversal system of knowledge and thought, or in other words, coexisting, multiple systems of knowledge.

In his reflections on universality, Mignolo (2018) takes even a greater critique of Western thought and practice, claiming that the ‘universalisation of universality’ in the West was part of an imperial project. Scholars who study the origins of the idea of development often point to its colonial character and its sources in the imperial policy of the colonising states. The views, and thus colonial relations, influenced not only the shape of the colonised and colonising countries’ societies, but also the development of economic relations and world capitalism. Development based on economic growth is the most significant project of modern capitalism. As Hickel emphasises, the development of capitalism and the industrial revolution in Europe did not come out of nowhere; they became possible thanks to the goods produced by slaves in areas plundered from colonised peoples and then processed in factories by European peasants, who were forcibly deprived of access to the land through enclosures which were the internal colonisation process (Hickel, 2021, p. 82).

Meanwhile, as Mignolo (2018) underlines, what is universal can only be pluriversal, multiple. Our reality consists of many coexisting worlds. However, pluriversality (multiplicity) does not mean cultural relativism, which assumes objectivity and refrains from value judgments. Multiplicity is a mixture of different cosmologies that exist separately and are entangled in the narrative of modernity, which is only a way of imposing universality. This is not to say that everything modern is destructive, and all traditions are adequate (Kothari, 2018). On the contrary, the feminist or human rights movements that are part of the narrative of modernity are a liberating force for millions of people. The problem lies rather in the cultural practices and institutions that constitute modernity as a worldview portraying the individual as independent of the collective and further emphasising private property, free markets, political liberalism, secularism, and representative democracy. While they are not a threat in themselves, the problem is that the narrative of modernity assumes that only such an approach can ensure progress. Modernity imposes a universal vision of interpersonal and interstate relations.

Moreover, according to Mignolo (2018), any universality is imperial in nature. Pluriversality is based on dialogue and the idea of living together despite differences. Multiplicity exists independently of states or corporations and is a product of a global political society – people who can associate and organise around a specific project that has no place in the politics of states or large corporations. This is similar to the case of civil society or the actions of activists for equality and elimination of racial or gender discrimination. Translating this into international relations, the world becomes multipolar. With the appearance of more emerging powers, it is difficult to talk about unipolarity and the dominance of a superpower in the form of the United States. The world, also in the political and economic sphere,

is becoming increasingly complex and multidimensional due to the complexity of economic ties, migration, information, and technology flows. All this means that we also need new, more diverse models of development or completely alternative ways of thinking about development to build a better world.

### Degrowth or green growth? Or Post-growth?

According to the authors of the new version of the development dictionary (*Pluriverse. A Post-development Dictionary*), the idea of ‘development as progress’ must be deconstructed to open the way for alternative approaches based on respect for Planet Earth. The dominant Western model of development is a homogenising construct because it has been adopted by people in many parts of the world. The authors of the dictionary, therefore, propose a broad term, post-development, which encompasses various critiques and lifestyles (Kothari et al., 2019, p. XVII). In their publication, they discuss existing approaches that have been adapted to new challenges and those completely new, unknown, and perhaps revolutionary, taking into account the voices of people from the global South. They focus on those whose assumptions refer to human emancipation ‘within nature’ (Kothari et al. 2019, pp. XVIII–XXIX). These transformative alternatives also include values that, to a certain degree, undermine the existing socio-economic system, values rooted in the logic of relationality, according to which everything is related to everything else. In this way, they create a vision of societies that adhere to such values as pluriversality and diversity, autonomy and self-sufficiency, solidarity and openness, respect for nature and recognition of its rights, interdependence, inclusiveness, justice, lack of hierarchy, ecological sustainability, and peace and non-aggression.

There are many alternative approaches to development. I will mention only some of them to move on to the two currently receiving the most attention and are at odds with each other. So, they would be doughnut economy (Raworth, 2021), circular economy, ecomodernism, neoextractivism, smart cities, transhumanism, or the idea of conviviality which is the basis for building communities that enable each person to live creatively with the help of technologies and institutions that they control. It is also worth mentioning concepts that are even more transformative in their messages, such as the International Tribunal for the Rights of Nature or Debt Arbitration (Kothari et al., 2019). Some of these concepts, such as the Rights of Nature, but also other transformative ideas (e.g., cooperatives, ‘more-than-human’ management, education for the future) that can be useful in times of crises, especially climate change ones, are described in more details in the recently published, in Poland, book by Jasikowska and Pałasz (2022).

When it comes to the two opposing visions of development, these are green growth (and green economy) and degrowth. Green growth is a critical element in achieving sustainable development ideal – it is intended to protect the environment on the one hand and enable economic growth on the other. This approach makes the concept more attractive to politicians and other decision-makers than traditional approaches to environmental protection, often perceived as a factor in slowing down the economy.

As emphasised by UNEP, the green economy assumes such goals as the low-emission production process, resource efficiency, green investments, technological innovations, recycling, green professions, poverty reduction, and social inclusion. This approach to development is promoted by both UN agencies and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which mainly includes developed countries. In 2011, the OECD presented the *Green Growth Strategy*, which points to innovation as a method of decoupling economic growth from the depletion of natural capital. The European Union is also moving in a similar direction, which has created a plan for sustainable economic growth that promotes ecology but is still based on market economy. The approach and the idea of sustainable development is one of the main slogans of the SDGs. However, as in the case of the former, we are dealing with an oxymoron used to legitimise international politics by combining two completely different and contradictory interests and strategies for economic growth and nature protection (Kothari et al., 2019, p. 57).

Degrowth promoted, for instance, by Jason Hickel, one of the leading researchers of this approach, assumes a departure from development based on economic growth and promotes the transformation of socio-economic relations. Hickel (2021) says directly that capitalism and the constant pursuit of economic growth are the main barriers to the very idea of development in the countries of the South. Degrowth proposes to reduce the energy demand and rebuild the world economy in such a way that it allows respect for human dignity. Only when we limit our needs will we be able to stay within planetary boundaries and free the world from the problem of poverty. Focusing on people, not profits, will benefit the earth. Among the proposed solutions, shortening the working week, providing basic services and infrastructure for all, and redistributing income are worth mentioning. Interestingly, degrowth is actually supposed to be more about the countries of the North than the South. The North is responsible for most of the problems in terms of development. Degrowth is, therefore, about bringing global justice.

It is also noteworthy (although it is a topic for further and more extensive reflection) that apart from these mainstream ideas, there are plenty of local value systems, traditions, and approaches to development. Adopting a pluriversal approach to development would mean including all of them in development dis-

cussions. Indigenous solutions and initiatives are usually based on traditional understandings of development and local self-governance initiatives – from the South African philosophical system of Ubuntu (meaning ‘I am because we are’) and Rwandan Agaciro (meaning ‘dignity’ and ‘self-respect’), through Indian Swaraj (a kind of self-governance) to Latin American Sumac Kawsay (the idea of a good life). Moreover, these are just a few examples, and some concepts and approaches may not even be known or researched. However, the scope of this article does not leave space for discussing these concepts in more detail.

### Design thinking and development

The last part of this brief reflection on contemporary development should concentrate on the issues of incorporating and employing the ideas from the design field into development studies and activities. In his well-known book *Designs for the Pluriverse*, Escobar (2018) presents critical voices on capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy existing in our social life. He suggests looking at many contemporary problems from another perspective and using design, for example, the Transition Design Framework. This framework is based on a heuristic model related to four different but connected areas. It is envisioned for a longer time period and incorporates the ideas of sustainable futures. Creating visions of and for transitions should focus on tools and methods for facilitating discussion about alternative futures (including scenario development, forecasting, and speculative design) rather than a ready strategy to use. What seems to be the most important is that the design should be in relation to the transformation of everyday life (Escobar, 2028, p. 154). The design process should be adjusted to the needs of ordinary people who struggle with everyday challenges.

The importance of design in many spheres related to development was also recognised by the United Nations a number of years ago. In 2009, UNEP published its *Designs for Sustainability: A Step-by-Step Approach*. The manual was intended to help designers and industry by providing support to those looking to further their understanding of the field. The guidelines cover three design approaches: redesigning existing products, radical sustainable product innovation, and new product development. These approaches would be needed to change consumer behaviours so that they start more seriously considering real environmental and social concerns – not only focusing on the price, convenience, and quality in their purchasing decisions.

One of the newest Polish publications also discusses the issue of (re)designing the future. The authors and editors (Żarnowska & Michna, 2020) perceive the design of a new, better future in terms of the duty of contemporary scholars. They



also discuss the possibility of designing social changes with the help of varieties of speculative fiction. In particular, the authors analyse the concept of (re)design by Bruno Latour (2020) when he asks questions about what we are willing to resign from, and what we are willing to break with at a time of worldwide crisis.

### **Conclusion – what should development be? How can we save the planet? How can we build a liveable world?**

We can talk about a paradox or even a collapse of the idea of development. Development based on economic growth was supposed to bring salvation from economic and social problems. On the other hand, sustainable development was meant to lead to everyone benefiting equally from the benefits of Planet Earth and better living conditions. Meanwhile, even sustainable development presupposes continuous economic growth, and no one mentions its limitation. Hence, this continuous development based on economic growth in any form leads us to a civilisational and planetary catastrophe – depletion of natural resources, destruction of the environment, further climate change, and consequently, socio-economic problems, and deterioration of the quality of life. A higher standard of living, better transport, and unlimited access to goods from other parts of the world increases the demand for energy and natural resources. In the near future, we may even be afraid of conflict over resources, including the most essential ones, such as water. The question should be asked, do we want such a vision of the world?

Finding a recipe for development will require enormous efforts, both on the part of individuals and entire communities or nations. Above all, it will also require a better understanding of the multiple, spatially, and temporally differentiated development models and strategies that have proven successful. This is a challenge in the form of transformation of fundamental policies and practices, ways of thinking and behaviour, the use of innovation and creativity, scientific approaches, technological improvements, as well as the use of cultural and intellectual heritage or artistic sensibility. Scientists, politicians, activists, and ordinary people face a challenge that should allow them to create new approaches, concepts, and methods of action that facilitate recovery from crises and lead to the creation of new structures and systems of socio-economic relations.

The United Nations, after finally acknowledging global entropies, proposes the return to human development,<sup>5</sup> but one embedded more in nature and adopting a more environmentally responsible approach:

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5 The human development approach focuses on expanding the richness of human life rather than expanding the economy in which people live. It is intended to lead to the creation of



*‘(...)in the context of the Anthropocene, it is essential to do away with stark distinctions between people and Planet. Earth system approaches increasingly point to our interconnectedness as socioecological systems, a notion highly relevant to the Anthropocene. Human development aligns well with such thinking. It has always been about breaking down silos and making connections. How could a development perspective centred on human possibility be otherwise? Every one of us moves in and out of social, economic and environmental spaces. (...) It is the lens centred on any individual’s experience, rather than institutional structures organised in terms of sectors, that allows the human development approach to break free from disciplinary and sectoral shackles. It aims to be development as seen through any of our own eyes.’ (UNDP, 2020, p. 8).*

Perhaps modern development should be understood as ‘a redesigned prosperity’ – a concept promoted in the research of Henrietta Moore and her colleague (Moore & Mintchev, 2021). They talk about the need to challenge the structural features of the economy and the ideals it was constructed on. They also point to the need to refer to innovative ideas and new practices in dealing with the problems of inequality in novel ways. In their view, a redesigned prosperity is about the relationship between individual lives, in other words individuals – their quality, aspirations, and goals – along with the systems and constraints in which they are rooted. They claim that the pursuit of ever-increasing growth is not sustainable in the context of the planet’s limited resources, nor does it provide us with the right paths to meet contemporary pressing challenges. Therefore, a redefinition of development into prosperity can allow us to be more attentive to the real needs of people – among others, good quality livelihoods and public services, a healthy environment, and a political system in which everyone’s voice would be heard.

Development should allow everyone to live in such a way as to meet their needs and implement plans, but at the same time, take care of the well-being of others. It should be prosperity based on democratisation and decentralisation of the economy, respect for cultural diversity, social equality, and respect for nature. It should be understood as prosperity that takes into account the voices of marginalised communities, excluded from the general economic system, and at the same time having practical, indigenous knowledge based on what nature gives, but in such a way as not to destroy it. Only then is it possible to avoid this worse vision of the future.

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fair opportunities and choices for all people. The concept was established by the economist Mahbub Ul Haq (1992) and is rooted in Amartya Sen’s work on human capabilities (Sen, 1984).

In conclusion, I would like to repeat the words of Ryszard Vorbrich, a Polish anthropologist and researcher of African societies: as long as there is a global system of polarised development that allows countries to be divided into rich and poor, ‘developed’ and ‘developing’, societies (and cultures) of the ‘periphery’, a global, asymmetric system of social relations will persist, in which one imposes on the other ways of life, models of development, and cultural patterns. ‘Global’ and ‘local’ people, donors and beneficiaries, people of power and those subject to its influence, anthropologists (researchers) and natives (‘subjects’ of research) will stand opposite each other. Dialogue between them requires both sides to be ready to – at least partially – undermine their own values without negating their identity (Vorbrich, 2009, p. 49).

And finally, I would also like to refer to the dream that Jason Hickel presented in his well-known book. The dream is about returning to Eswatini, where the author of *Less is More* grew up as a child. He writes about a vision of a world in which everyone would like to live, a world in which the principles of democracy are respected, incomes are shared fairly, and the differences between rich and poor countries have been eliminated. People would work less, be happier and healthier, and feel a sense of life, but also understand how much they are connected to the rest of life on earth. It is a vision of a world where the tropical forests of the Amazon, Congo, and Indonesia are being revived, rivers finally have clean water, whole ecosystems are revived, and the climate is back on track. All this is due to the fact that once people gave up following the idea of development, they got more by giving up some things (Hickel, 2021, pp. 58–59). The world requires more such visions, and for this, we need to be more open to different approaches, we need to design our decisions and the future in a better way.

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## Abstract

This article reflects on the necessity of change in the leading development discourse promoted by international institutions, including the United Nations and each state, separately. The contemporary ecological and social crises, the omnipresent entropies at all possible levels – social, political, economic, and environmental – are inseparable from the model of social life that has become dominant over the past few centuries. They require radical transformations of socio-economic systems to break with the hegemony of economic growth based on the policy of exploitation of the global South by the global North, imposing solutions inadequate to local needs and the universality of capitalism. It is not just about decolonising the social imaginary, as Serge Latouche put it, but understanding the causes and role of the ideology of economic growth, consumerism, and colonialism of power. We need to change how we see the world

and take action to build a more democratic, fair, and inclusive world. Therefore, this article investigates the possibilities of creating a more liveable world by connecting the pluriverse approach with design thinking in development studies and activities. Contemporary development should be understood as prosperity based on democratisation and decentralisation of the economy, respect for cultural diversity, social equality, and respect for nature. A more pluriversal approach and design thinking may help choose the right strategy.