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Marx, Weber, and development sociology: Beyond the impasse

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Abstract

This paper follows from David Booth's (1985) article in *World Development* in which he identifies underlying metatheoretical problems in Marxist-influenced development sociology which have led to the current impasse in the field. These problems include a commitment to demonstrating the "necessity" of economic and social patterns, system teleology, and functionalism. We suggest that the impasse in development sociology can be overcome through the incorporation of the Weberian tradition. It is important, however, that the version of Weber which is to be appropriated in a restructuring of development theory is not the orthodox tradition, which has the same metatheoretical problems as those of Marxist-influenced development sociology. We argue that the literature in political sociology referred to as the "neo-Weberian" (and sometimes as the "left-Weberian" tradition) which includes a diversity of work by Karl Polanyi, Barrington Moore and, more recently, Charles Tilly, Anthony Giddens, John Gaventa, Claus Offe, Pierre Bourdieu, Paul Willis and others "is particularly relevant to the impasse in development sociology. These theorists overcome

particularly relevant to the impasse in development sociology. These theorists overcome the problems of reifying "ideal types" and formal theorizing by using theory in dialogue with empirical evidence. Finally, we suggest that sociological development theory has lagged in incorporating the Weberian tradition because of a perceived lack of praxis in this approach. We argue instead that the neo-Weberian approach, because it deals with power relations in the context of class, the state, cultural interpretation, and so on, can lead to realistic strategies for the empowerment of the less powerful.



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