

The neodevelopmentalist labyrinth. Back to heterodoxy for socio-environmental sustainability

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Abstract

In Argentina, there is a clear consensus between neoliberals and neodevelopmentalists regarding the increase of exports as the first step towards development, consolidating the political and economic power held by the exporting business elite and, at the same time, creating an unsustainable development path in socio-environmental terms. A labyrinth with no way out. This paper has set out to retrace this labyrinth, building bridges between different currents of economic heterodoxy that enable the construction of an exit. The powerful consolidation of neodevelopmentalism at the academic and political level in Argentina shows the relevance of this discussion, which transcends national boundaries to become a global development problem due to the elements at stake.

Keywords: export mandate; development; development problems; neoliberalism; neodevelopmentalism.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Argentina, 2020 began with the inauguration of the government of Alberto Fernández, who took office as head of a broadly progressive political front (Travela, 2022) in contrast to that of his predecessor, who implemented a neoliberal model, which ended in a severe crisis of external restriction and a general worsening of social conditions (Travela, 2020). Basically, there has been a succession of governments with opposing ideologies, representing the historical pendulum, using the famous concept expounded by Diamand (1983), which is so often repeated in Argentine history.

However, Cantamutto and Schorr (2022) point out the marked common ground between neoliberals and neodevelopmentalists in Argentina regarding the need to increase the level of exports as the first condition to be fulfilled in order to proceed along a path of development. For neoliberals, this means a country fully committed to the unrestricted mobility of capital and goods -primary resources for Argentina- with a State withdrawn from the economy. In contrast, for neodevelopmentalists, it means a country highly dependent on trade flows but with an industrial framework more tightly integrated into global value chains. Residually, the greater activity level will be reflected in higher income levels and, thus, automatically, in increased well-being for the population.

This common ground is far from sterile or anecdotal since it conceals the current transnationalized and financialized nature of the capital accumulation process, in which external restriction in Argentina has more to do with the drain of capital than industrial growth. This model of growth consolidates Argentina's position as a supplier of raw materials

for the global market, thus intensifying the outflow of foreign currency and external restriction and, contrary to the expectations of neodevelopmentalism, consolidating the economic and political power of the exporting corporate elite, associated with primary activities (Cantamutto and Schorr, 2022).

Likewise, Cantamutto and Schorr (2022) identify in neodevelopmentalism, or at least in referential economists in Argentina, the striking creation of a new development problem: socio-environmental activism and citizen mobilization that seeks, in any case, to participate in the dialogue on development. The analysis of their arguments, as will be shown in this paper, reflects not only the lack of knowledge regarding the current deterioration of the state of the environment and socio-environmental conflicts in the territory but also the denial of a fundamental aspect in development planning, which is the need to eliminate or reduce to a minimum the imbalances of economic and political power between the different participants in this process (Travela, 2022). Both aspects place neodevelopmentalism in a labyrinth with no exit.

In contrast to these ideas, and not without a long road ahead, post-developmentalism does not reduce the socio-environmental crisis strictly to climate change and greenhouse gas emissions, nor does it support the export mandate as a way out of the crisis that Argentina and humanity as a whole are experiencing.

Based on this framework, using a qualitative methodology based on the analysis of bibliographical information and documents, this paper aims to explain the labyrinth with no exit that consolidates the export mandate. This labyrinth has no exit because, to the extent that it seeks to export more in order to obtain resources to proceed with industrialization, it actually consolidates the political and economic power of the traditional participants who have historically sabotaged all attempts to transform the productive structure in Argentina. As far as this plan continues its course, it reinforces a sense of development that becomes an obstacle to socio-environmental sustainability.

To achieve this objective, indicators from Ecological Economics, such as the Ecological Footprint (EF) and land biocapacity (biocapacity), were used, as well as academic proposals originating from structuralism, post-developmentalism and cosmovisions such as Latin American Good Living.

Over and above the difficulties or debates surrounding this classification, according to Bona and Wainer (2021), neodevelopmentalist are understood to be those experiences linked to neo-structuralist thinking originating in the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), which reaffirms the need for a change in the region's primarized economic structure, albeit with greater efficiency and caution in the State's participation in the economy and safeguarding macroeconomic balances as an elementary convention, which were implemented in some of the region's countries (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay) with the rise at the beginning of the 21st century, of progressive governments critical of the Washington Consensus. This second aspect, linked to political management, requires that, in some instances, reference be made to statements or explanations made by leading economists related to these governments outside the academic sphere, which are nonetheless relevant since they are the organs of dissemination that they themselves choose and use for the construction of the political hegemony that will enable them to carry out their programs.

The powerful consolidation of neodevelopmentalism and the export mandate, as we will try to demonstrate, shows the relevance of this discussion, which, by its very content, transcends the strictly national sphere to become a problem of development both at the Latin American and global levels.

Thus, this paper is structured as follows. After this introduction, the second section presents a comparative analysis of the ways of introducing the environmental dimension given by economic orthodoxy and heterodoxy. This will

permit the introduction of ecological economics and political ecology in the following section in order to elaborate a comprehensive framework for addressing the socio-environmental crisis. The fourth section provides an in-depth analysis of the ways in which Argentine neodevelopment intends to address the socio-environmental problem and move towards development, consolidating a labyrinth with no exit, while the fifth section introduces guidelines for debating a post-developmental solution.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM VS. ECONOMIC PROBLEM?

Neoclassical economics considers the economic process to be a continuous circuit between production and consumption. In other words, it is a self-sustaining mechanical process, unaware of the physical aspects of productive activity, which is considered within an environment-free isolated system (Van Hauwer-Meiren, 1999).

Within this trend, the key element for dealing with environmental deterioration is the concept of externality. The production process has involuntary effects that are not accounted for and incorporated into prices, thus generating an erroneous allocation (Van Hauwermeiren, 1999) and which, if sustained over time, may lead to the excessive extraction and depletion of a specific resource, the contamination or destruction of an ecosystem, the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, among others. The correction of the price system, more sustainable consumer preferences and improvements in production processes will gradually correct this problem.

Among the differences between economic orthodoxy and heterodoxy, Lavoie (2007) points out that while neoclassical economics focuses on exchange, heterodoxy focuses on the production process. "Production in neoclassical economics is a form of indirect exchange between individual consumer agents, later called producers" (p. 26). On the other hand, heterodoxy, based on classical economics and its concern for the causes of progress by focusing on the production process, places the question of reproduction at the forefront.

As we will try to show, this aspect is central to addressing the environmental problem. The viability of ecosystems, adequate levels of atmospheric ozone, the quality of soil, air and water, etc., are contemplated in the Marxian category as "external physical conditions", defined by Marx as one of the three conditions of capitalist production. On the one hand, "labor power", possessed by working people, is defined as the "personal conditions of production" while, on the other hand, "the communal, general conditions of social production" complete these three conditions of capitalist production in which the concepts of space and social environment are implicit (O'Connor, 2002).

Starosta and Caligaris (2017) argue that the requirements of the total capital of society to safeguard the conditions of its own reproduction clash with its concrete realization through the private actions of individual capitals, which, under the pressure of competition and the pursuit of extraordinary profits, downgrade, for example, the qualities of workers in the progression of automation and mechanization.

When Cantamutto and Schorr (2022) warn that the export mandate consolidates the political and economic power of the Argentine exporting elite and that this deepens the economic structure based on comparative advantages, it can be concluded that "the communal, general conditions of social production" are being taken into consideration (and downgraded). For his part, Travela (2022) highlights this problem and its implications for the concrete possibilities of development planning in Argentina.

Furthermore, taking into consideration the adverse effects of this productive specialization on "external physical conditions", correctly described by Cantamutto and Schorr (2022), the degradation of the conditions of capitalist production is observed in the three Marxian categories indicated by O'Connor (2002).

However, the central idea here is that it is not the development that clashes with environmental conservation since this is required; instead, it is the concrete actions of individual capitals that threaten the conditions of capitalist production and, thus, their own reproduction, the reproduction of the economy as a whole and life in general on the planet.

In short, Althusser (1974) affirms that, in order to exist, every social formation, while producing, must reproduce the conditions of its own production, which synthesizes a solid heterodox position that we seek to explain in this section.

In contrast, neodevelopmentalism distances itself from this approach and, at least on this issue, seems to return to the neoclassical tradition in which the environment is not part of the production conditions but something external, which can be dispensed with. For this reason, its conservation becomes a variable that can be adjusted depending on the search for a certain level of competitiveness or volume of exports. It is only within this paradigm that it can be considered that destroying the environment and the planet's conditions for life does not also mean destroying the conditions for production and social reproduction. For his part, Bielschowsky (2009), analyzing the emergence of the environmental problem on the agenda in the 1970s, states that "the 'tension' between global socio-economic development and environmental conservation would acquire at that time the basic features with which the institutions and specialists who debate environmental issues around the world still operate" (p. 188). It is precisely this view that needs to be modified in order to escape from the labyrinth in which neodevelopmentalism and its export mandate find themselves. Here, we present the first major contribution of this paper to neodevelopmentalist literature.

In order to resume a heterodox approach to the environmental issue, we must abandon the idea of climate change as the only problem to be solved and start working based on the biophysical limits that the planet imposes on the continuous expansion of production.

To speak of planetary boundaries is not to talk in the abstract. The concept of biocapacity makes it possible to quantify the existing biologically productive area available, capable of regenerating natural resources and absorbing carbon and waste and allows comparison with the EF. This will be discussed in the following section.

3. SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS AND THE ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT

Humans' demand for the Earth's capacity to provide renewable resources and ecological services has doubled over the past 50 years (Global Footprint Network, n.d.). The above is measured in terms of the EF, a system of indicators whose underlying context is precisely the recognition that the Earth has a limited amount of biological production to sustain life on it (Lin *et al.*, 2018).

Although numerous methodologies coexist whereby it is possible to calculate the EF (Gareis and Ferraro, 2019), based on the availability of data for this paper, the method used by Global Footprint Network was selected based on the application initiated by a team of researchers led by Mathis Wackernagel (Lin *et al.*, 2018).

In summary, the EF allows for the analysis of consumption patterns and considers six categories of demand:

Cropland: area of land needed to produce food and fiber;

Grazing lands: area of pastureland for raising livestock;

Fishing grounds: marine and inland water ecosystems needed to sustain the capture of fish and aquaculture;

Forest products: forested area needed to supply fuels, pulp, and wood products;

Urbanized land: biologically productive areas used to build transportation, housing and industrial infrastructure; and

Carbon footprint: demand for forest needed for carbon sequestration, excluding what is absorbed by the ocean.

It is then compared to the natural area that exists to satisfy it, which is defined as the Earth's biocapacity (World Wildlife Fund [WWF], 2016).

According to Lin *et al.* (2018), the harvest flow or waste production is taken, quantified in mass by time and translated into global hectares to calculate the EF.

An equivalence factor (EQF) is used for each type of land use, which is the ratio of the average global productivity of a given land type divided by the average global productivity of the productive areas of the entire planet. This makes it possible to compare the land used for a given product category with the worldwide average, given the marked differences in productivity across the planet. For each country, the EF of production (EFp) for a single footprint category is calculated by calculating the sum of all products in that footprint category (e.g., rice, wheat, corn, etc., for cropland). A country's total EFp is the sum of the EF of all product categories combined. A country's consumption EF is estimated by calculating the EF of everything produced within its territory, then adding the EF incorporated into imports and subtracting the EF incorporated into exports (Lin *et al.*, 2018).

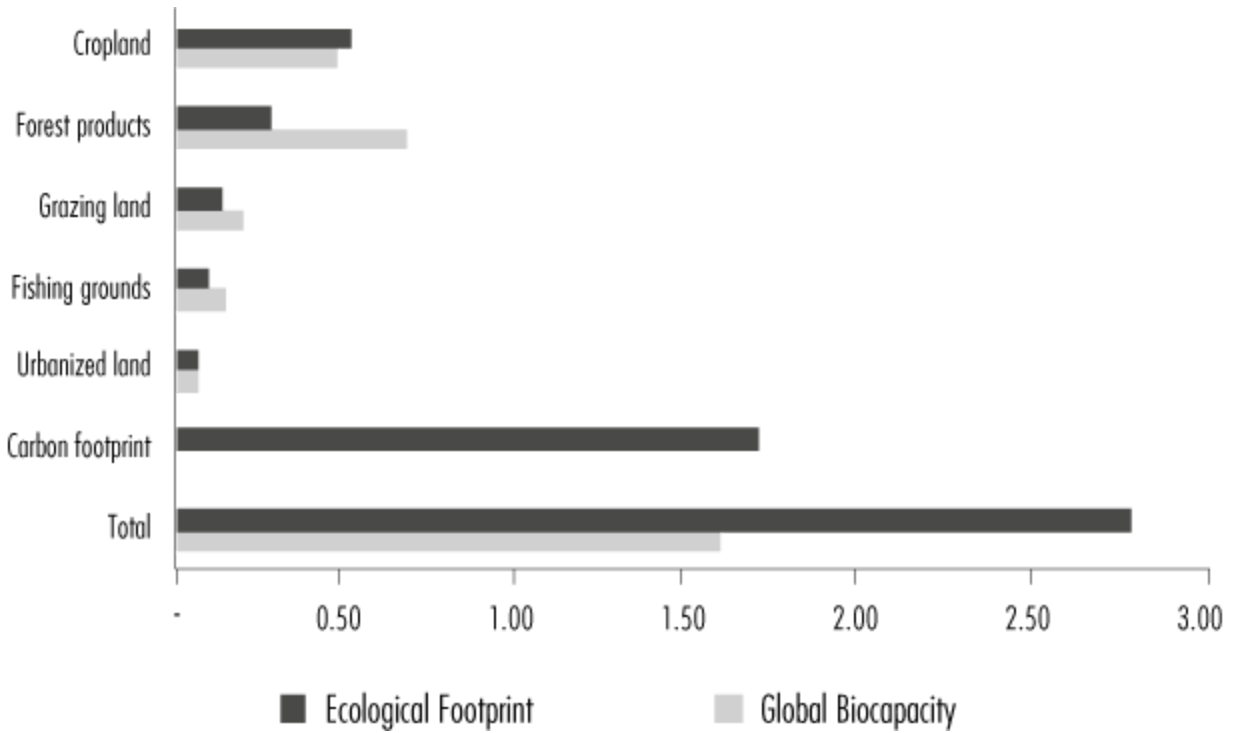
Biocapacity, as noted above, is a measure of the existing biologically productive area capable of absorbing carbon dioxide and regenerating natural resources in the form of food, fiber and wood. It is calculated by considering five EF categories: cropland, grazing land, fishing grounds, forest products and developed land. Together, they satisfy human demand under the EF categories as the forested area under the forest products category absorbs carbon. Biocapacity can change each year due to climate, ecosystem management, variations in soil conditions and agricultural inputs (WWF, 2016).

Following Lin *et al.* (2018), similar to the EF, biocapacity can be measured in global hectares (gha) on any scale.

On a global level, by 2018, with an available per capita biocapacity of 1.58 gha, EF per capita was 2.77 gha; in other words, more was consumed than the planet could regenerate. However, across the globe, the levels of EF per capita are inconsistent.

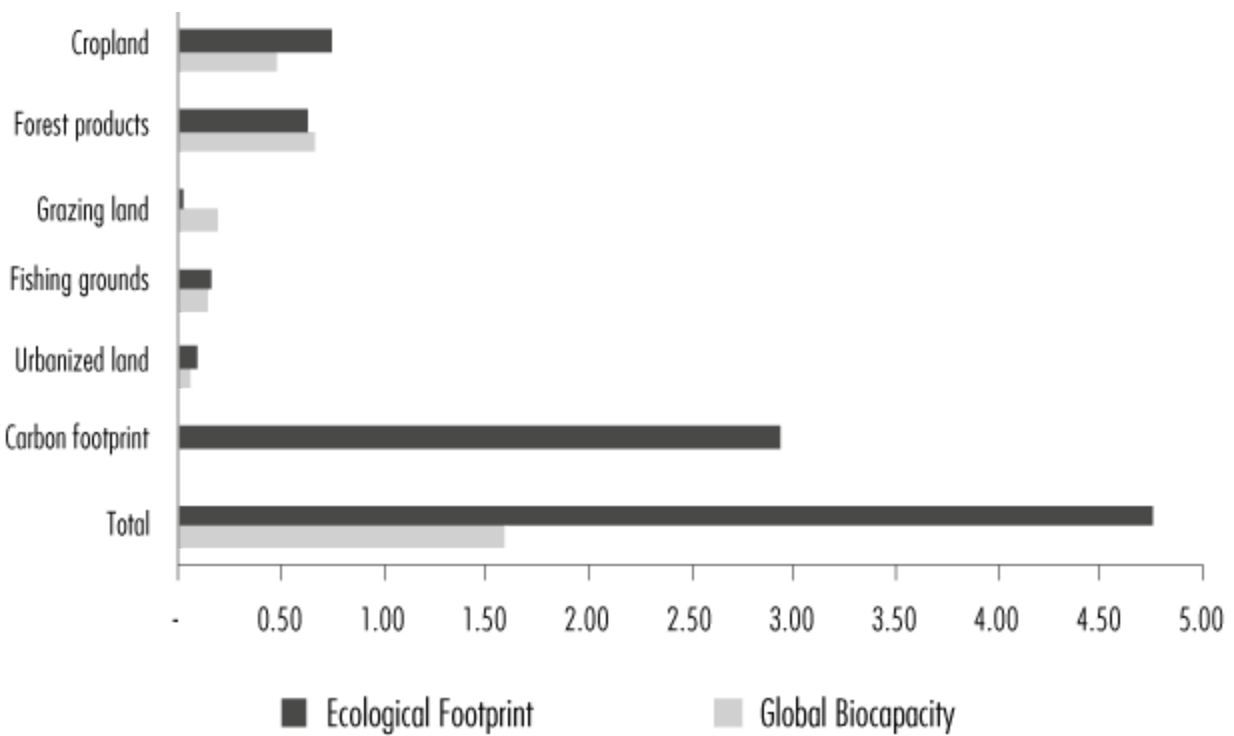
The following figures show the total EF per capita worldwide (see Figure 1), at the average level of European countries (see Figure 2) and for Argentina and compare it with the biocapacity per capita worldwide (see Figure 3). The open EF per category and the biocapacity corresponding to each of them can also be observed.

Figure 1. Global EF per capita and global biocapacity per capita



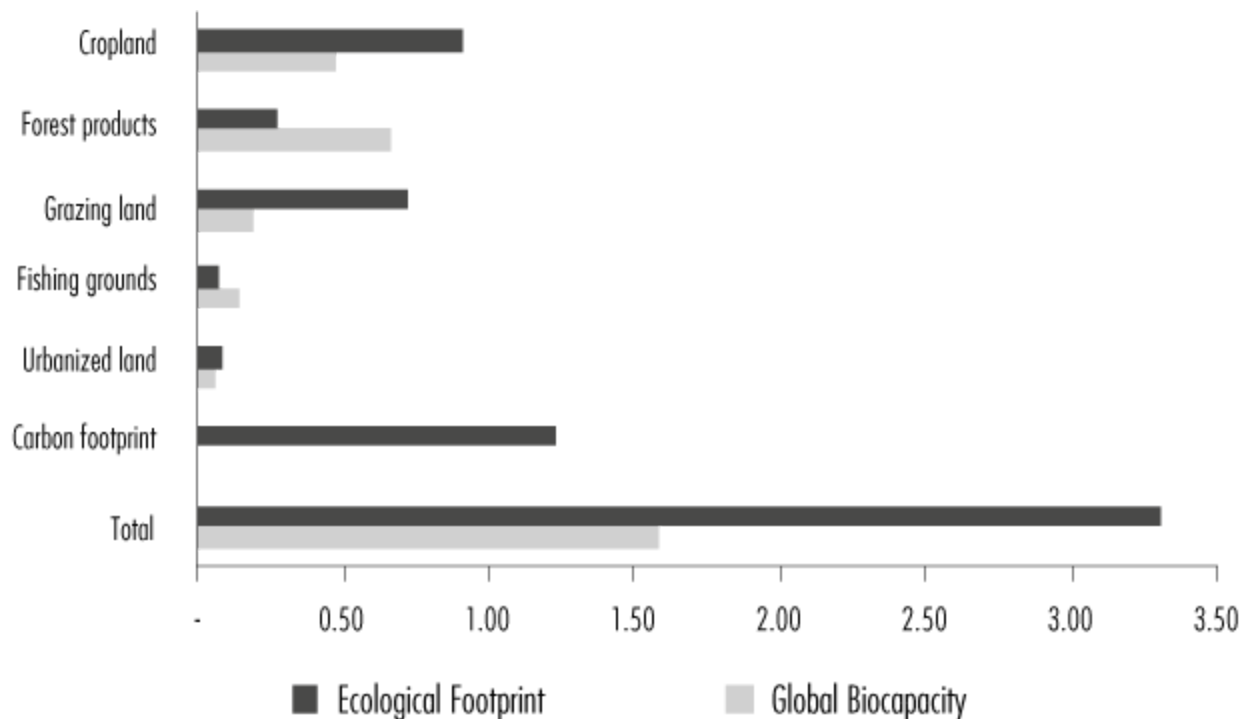
Source: Compiled by the author based on the Global Footprint Network (s.f.)

Figure 2. European EF per capita and global biocapacity per capita



Source: Compiled by the author based on the Global Footprint Network (s.f.)

Figure 3. Argentine EF per capita and global biocapacity per capita



Source: Compiled by the author based on the Global Footprint Network (s.f.)

The reported information is more than relevant since, as Fazio (2018) argues, it is only in the short term that trees can be cut down faster than they mature, that more fish can be caught than the ocean can restore, or that more carbon can be emitted into the atmosphere than forests and oceans can absorb. In the medium and long term, this leads to the degradation of ecosystem services and the planet's capacity to restore conditions for production and social reproduction.

This excess demand on the planet in recent decades has significantly deteriorated the environment. which is why CEPAL (2016) points out that what is at risk is nothing less than the survival of the human species -and other species- as a result of the deterioration of the environment.

Nevertheless, this level of EF has been reached with millions of people living in poverty and a high concentration of wealth, and thus material consumption, in just a few countries. This represents a significant challenge: to prevail over time while guaranteeing human rights for humanity as a whole and not excluding social models ("development" according to the neodesarrollista vision) that require sustaining the vast majorities in poverty. As can be seen in Figure 2, which takes the average EF per capita in Europe,¹ if humanity as a whole were to achieve these consumption levels, the growth of global EF would accelerate the harmful effects of the socio-environmental crisis. And even more so if they reach the levels of the United States or Canada, as well as countries such as Argentina (see Figure 3), where per capita consumption is the equivalent of two planets Earth, even with the existing levels of poverty; together with the aggravating factor that the highest level of extreme weather events, food and energy shortages, are generally always felt by those with the lowest incomes.

Even though the highest component of the EF is the carbon footprint, at a global level, year after year, the biocapacity to produce food and fiber and to extract elements for the construction of urban infrastructure is exceeded

and, taking the European average as a reference, the existence of marine ecosystems is also exceeded and forested areas are at their limit.

It is worth emphasizing the importance of limiting human pressures on the environment to a safe level for key Earth system processes and the functioning and resilience of global ecosystems set this limit. Although, throughout history, different societies have had diverse perceptions of these limits (WWF, 2016), as Unceta Satrustegui (2009) argues, the Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment made it possible to break down the majority of the limits that had historically conditioned humanity's productive capacity, "cutting the umbilical cord that originally linked the notion of production to the physical world, elevating the carousel of the economic system above the contingencies derived from nature" (p. 5).

Thus, if the world population as a whole achieves development, which is understood as achieving the standard of living, physiognomy and idiosyncrasy of high-income countries (Graña and Piqué, 2017), the chances of the prevalence of human life on the planet are reduced. The North American level of EF per capita may not be required, but even so, the European average, which is much lower, remains a problem. For this reason, we present Figure 2, which breaks down the European level of EF per capita since their lifestyles and consumption are aspirational for middle- and low-income countries but impossible to achieve for humanity as a whole.

Meanwhile, reducing greenhouse gas emissions is far from solving the problem since other EF categories exceed the limits. In this respect, as warned by Carpintero and Nieto (2021), the electric car requires six times more inputs of materials and minerals than a conventional one. Suppose the only goal is to reduce the carbon footprint. In that case, this may be a solution under the unrealistic assumption that there is enough renewable energy to power the entire vehicle fleet. Still, if the goal is to push the EF to safe limits, it would seem to be just a waste of valuable time.

4. ARGENTINE NEODEVELOPMENTISM UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

The hierarchization established when pointing out that the state of the environment restricts the means to achieve social equity, which, in turn, limits the means to achieve personal satisfaction (Hidalgo-Capitán *et al.*, 2019), does not intend to opt for a conservationist approach that seeks to sustain the majorities in poverty in order to protect the environment. On the contrary, it aims to demonstrate the inherent relationship between them. This is an elementary condition to avoid succumbing to false solutions. The deterioration of the environment leads to the destruction of capital, the interruption of the reproduction process of economic activity and, thus, the reduction of livelihoods.

However, there are still approaches that present the deterioration of the environment and the prevalence of poverty as two separate problems in which there would be a certain amount of choice. For example, Möhle and Schteingart (2021, March 13) point out that:

The debate between developmentalists and environmentalists often focuses on the limitations of each approach. Developmentalists usually criticize the prohibitionist bias in many environmental demands, while environmentalists point out the underestimation of the environmental variable that developmentalists tend to make. This is not a specific Argentine issue but a global debate that can be reduced to the following questions: "How are you going to generate employment and improve the quality of life of most of the population?" "How do you plan to tackle climate change and the destruction of nature?"

This approach provides evidence of the belief that people's quality of life can be improved by opting for activities that, at the same time, deteriorate the very physical support where life and production occur. Another belief is declaring a far-away territory as a sacrificial zone for development, promising to safeguard the environment in a closer area. The integrality of ecosystems does not make this option viable.

Apart from the fact that the cited authors proclaim the intention of building bridges between neodevelopmentalism and generic environmentalism more intricately linked to the neoclassical vision of the environmental problem than to heterodoxy, the aim of the proposal is simply to sustain the exporting mandate. In the same article, they point out: "On the one hand, then, we find that the world is going through an unprecedented environmental crisis where climate change and the deterioration of nature threaten the human species. On the other hand, it is well known that Argentina needs to increase production and exports to reduce poverty and create quality employment".

At the same time, those who support the export mandate usually respond to arguments such as those presented herein by stating that they are proposals serving imperialism, the right wing, when not even financed by them. In this respect, Scaletta (2022, January 16) points out: "false environmentalism has nothing of the 'left' in the traditional sense of the term; on the contrary, it is functional imperialistic thinking insofar as it effectively consolidates the current economic structure". Meanwhile, Crespo (2021, May 3) states that "another variant of naïve progressivism within the government coalition is radical environmentalism, a movement lacking scientific rigor, irresponsible in social and political matters, unconcerned with production and apathetic with regard to any economic restriction".

However, instead of environmentalism, those who seem unconcerned about production and the very reproduction of economic activities are the neodevelopmentalists who, at all costs, support the export mandate without practically any problem or scientific precision regarding the limits to the growth of economic activity imposed by the fact that these activities are carried out on a planet with limited territory and natural elements, either in terms of their stock or natural rate of renewal that does not reach the levels that the economy as a whole needs to continue with its expansive footprint. Although Crespo (2021, May 3) notes with regard to environmentalism that "another outstanding characteristic of these groups is their total disregard for the laws of nature", it is precisely the neodevelopmentalists who, besides not paying attention to the natural renewal rate of each element of nature, are also ignoring the integrality of ecosystems that do not recognize political boundaries created by human beings.

When Scaletta (2022, January 16) presents, as an excuse, that Argentina emits a mere 0.6 to 0.9% of global greenhouse gas emissions, it is strange that he does not stop for a moment to consider that there are almost 200 countries in the world and that Argentina is a country with a population of just under 50 million inhabitants, while there are nearly 8 billion people in the world. Indeed, Argentina's carbon footprint represents 2% of the global carbon footprint (Global Footprint Network, n.d.), but this number is not essential to him in the argument. Scaletta (2022, January 16) defines an agenda that has nothing to do with the problem of carbon emissions as a 'false ecological agenda' in order to promote extractivism in Argentina and the export mandate, and this is precisely what we need to discuss: it is not just about the carbon footprint. Paradoxically, in the same article, Scaletta presents himself as the bearer of the true environmentalist vision: "true environmentalism contains an integrating vision", he points out, when in fact he gives a biased vision focused only on climate change and the carbon footprint.

It may also be said that Argentina, or any other country, is not responsible for what happens in other countries and that, in any case, another type of supranational institutionality is needed to make any action effective. However, this does not imply that development studies should remain stagnant based on the assumption that 8 billion people can have the EF per capita found in high-income countries. Among other things, this is why this discussion transcends

the Argentine sphere. It is worth noting that another of the precepts which, according to Lavoie (2007), differentiates a heterodox economist from an orthodox one is the adoption of realistic hypotheses vs. the methodological instrumentalism adopted by neoclassical theory.

This criticism regarding the abandonment of realistic hypotheses by neodevelopmentalism also applies to the lack of problematization of the asymmetries of political and economic power that consolidate the export mandate and, thus, limit the possibilities of different development.

This paper takes data developed by "the empire" that may indicate neodevelopmentalism. However, it is used to argue the need to take the redistribution of wealth not as a variable dependent on the growth of exports but as the only option and fundamental condition to devise alternatives to the hegemonic sense of development and a future possibility. Bearing in mind that, unlike the neodevelopment approach, the export mandate does not lead to industrialization and "national liberation", what is being consolidated is precisely the place that globalization has given Argentina within the international division of labor.

In this respect, the financialized and transnationalized nature of today's predominant accumulation logic configures a type of external restriction that is no longer mainly associated with the expansion of the industrial sector (beyond the fact that foreign currency is logically required). Instead, it is embodied in a process of capital outflow that is amplified and strengthened at the same time as the political and economic power of Argentina's exporting elite is consolidated (Cantamutto and Schorr, 2022). In other words, an increased volume of primary exports translates into increased political power for the concentrated participants, who find it increasingly difficult to impose exchange controls and any wealth redistribution mechanism.

In turn, the supposed idealization that Scaletta erroneously points out in environmentalists for pre-capitalist forms (De la Calle, 2021, May 14) can at least be equated with the idealization that neodevelopmentalism makes of the capacity of the State to control and command large transnational capitals, concealing the difficulties, due to the asymmetry of power, that the nation States of peripheral countries have for this task. In this respect, in consultation with De la Calle (2021, May 14), Scaletta points out that "it is the States that have to include adequate regulation and surveillance so that this care becomes effective" (n.p.) and environmentalism, he continues, is based on the belief that the State lacks the power and efficiency to control any activity. Regarding environmentalism, Crespo (2021, May 3) states that "these groups are not content with demanding clear regulations and strict inspections, which is clearly reasonable. They promote preventive prohibition as a general rule". Möhle and Schteingart (2021, March 13) point out that, in order to address sustainable development, a better State is necessary and that, in the face of the distrust of environmentalism, progress must be made by improving state capacities. Thus, neo-institutionalism incorporates the extractivist trademark of Latin American history without any contradiction whatsoever.

The answer to these points does not stem strictly from political ecology or post-developmental academic but from Latin American structuralism, which, with a greater degree of realism and knowledge of development planning, clearly explains the following:

Prohibitionism should not be considered an irrational position of an extremist environmental group. On the contrary, it should be understood as the consequence of the lack of social credibility in relation to the capacity of public control over corporate power. Those who make sincere proposals to advance a development agenda with an environmental perspective should not overlook this reality (Asiain, 2021, July 11).

Several important aspects of this paper emerge from this idea raised by Asiain (2021, July 11). First, the importance of history. It suffices only to mention the numerous cyanide solution spills carried out by the Barrick Gold company in the last 10 years (Fernandez and Travela, 2017, March 15). Suppose part of the population does not trust the control capacity of the Argentine State. In that case, it is not because of some anti-capitalist or anti-development propaganda but rather because of all the past events.

Likewise, although Scaletta (2022, January 16) opposes the participation of this sector, Asiain's idea suggests inviting all sectors of society to the debate to build a development agenda. Travela (2022) addresses the conflict that arose in December 2019 regarding the modification of a law that enabled mega-mining in the province of Mendoza, Argentina, in which he identifies how sectors within Argentine politics still consider that the planning of a country's development is the exclusive task of a minister of production and their economic team in a ministerial office, turning their backs on the community. The anger of neodevelopmentalism at the refusal of a large part of society towards its extractivist mega-projects is not only surprising but also its passivity in the face of the power that sustaining the export mandate generates in sectors historically opposed to a change in Argentina's economic structure.

Concerning the latter, Cantamutto and Schorr (2021) state: "How neodevelopmentalism hopes to convince the de facto powers bequeathed by neoliberalism, through consensus, that the best thing is for them to moderate their pretensions and allow themselves to lose structural power, is a mystery. And as long as they fail to do so, the country's possibilities of development will remain trapped in constant vetoes" (p. 27).

Similar conclusions were reached by Travela (2022) when analyzing the contradictions between Alberto Fernández's government platform and the decisions taken by the government once in power. If campaign contributions from concentrated participants are required to win elections or specific support is needed to govern, it seems difficult not to fall into dependency skepticism.

However, as Cantamutto and Schorr (2021) state, although the way in which development crystallizes in a given territory does not depend solely on the will of a ruler and their political force, the ideas that they themselves defend are part of the dispute of meanings necessary for generating and sustaining public policies that can modify the path. Therefore, if the State does indeed have the tools to build hegemony, hope is not lost.

5. A FIRST STEP TOWARDS CONSTRUCTING A POST-DEVELOPMENTALIST EXIT

From the 1940s onwards, due to various socio-political factors, there was a boom in development studies and the consolidation of the Political Economy of Development as a sub-discipline (Hidalgo-Capitán, 2011). Since then, there has been competition between different schools or currents of thought trying to assert their positions. Suppose the problem to be solved is the reduction and subsequent eradication of poverty without exceeding the critical EF thresholds supported by the planet. In that case, only the Islamist and alternative schools discuss the meaning of development, proposing a concept different from the mere infinite generation of wealth. This change in the idea of progress, no longer associated with unlimited and superfluous material consumption but based on the development of human potentialities and adaptation to existing biocapacity, is the key to escaping the labyrinth. The rest of the schools, with different strategies, participants or key variables, support the hegemonic conception of development.

Given the limitation of the Islamic school of thought due to its religious nature to the Islamic sphere, it is interesting to continue, for the purposes of this paper, with the alternative school which, beyond its fragmentary character, gathers the dialogue between post-developmentalism, the Good Life, political ecology, ecological economics and alter-

globalization, among others (Hidalgo-Capitán, 2011), enabling us to glimpse ways out of the labyrinth of the export mandate.

This paper presented elements of ecological economics such as the EF and biocapacity, a critique of development, the conception of such development as the adaptation to biocapacity and the integral conception of environmental degradation of political ecology. This dialogue between currents that make up the alternative school of thought cannot be in-depth due to its scope. Still, it is possible to affirm that contradiction does not exist between its various parts and that it makes progress concerning creating a more than interesting corpus for the conception of alternatives to development. From here, we will move on to post-developmentalism and the Good Life, which focus on the question of development.

As Unceta Satrustegui (2009) points out, post-developmentalism includes the contributions of important authors such as Sachs (1981), Escobar (1996), Rist (2002) and Latouche (2007), among others. It is not the purpose of this paper to review each of these contributions, but it is worth noting that post-developmentalism proposes, among other things, the rethinking of the conception of development, reversing the relationship between ends and means that has guided the discussion over the years. The automatic relationship between growth and welfare (or exports and progress) that made growth the central point of reference of the strategy and left in the background (concealing or directly ignoring) the vital needs and interests of people and the demands derived from a limited resource base is transformed by a sense of development or social objective, which makes it a variable dependent on the planet's biocapacity on a level with the EF, forming a cap on the level of extraction of natural elements and possible economic activity to be carried out, and from there, seeks to establish the distribution mechanisms of the social surplus generated, via the market or administratively, in order to achieve a society in which people can emerge from material poverty without putting at risk the prevalence of human life. This new sense of development, ignored by neoliberalism and neodevelopmentalism, is the post-developmental way out of the export mandate labyrinth.

At this point in the paper, it is hoped that the reader will not consider this objective more utopian than the neodevelopmentalist objective that humanity as a whole should achieve development via the export mandate without becoming extinct along the way. If this reality is denied, then there is no room for debate. The criticism of Western life patterns brought about by post-developmentalism and the proposed changes based on distinct aspects when considering -and evaluating- welfare necessarily conclude in a reduction of the level of the EF—an aspect to be considered below.

Based on the Good Life as a worldview and rejecting the idea of sustainable development as a framework for public policies, Hidalgo-Capitán *et al.* (2019) elaborated a series of goals entitled "Objectives of the Good Life" (OGL) ² in which they aim to ensure "that public policies are oriented towards the implementation of ways of life in harmony with all beings in nature, with all human beings and with oneself" (p. 9).

For the purposes of this paper, it is interesting to point out the promotion of local production as one of the specific objectives to be pursued. Within a series of mutually reinforcing transformations, the promotion of the circular economy, the reduction of extractions of elements from nature and thus, the promotion of a sustainable economy stand out; in addition to the promotion of local commerce, simple living and the promotion of local production as a means to reduce poverty levels and social inequity.

According to Hidalgo-Capitán *et al.* (2019), the existence of local production generates the emergence in the territory of "networks of producers, consumers, entrepreneurs and workers that dynamize local economies and contribute to

reducing poverty levels and social inequality, both locally and nationally" (p. 32). Based on local trade, and therefore on the corresponding market regulations to protect it from international competition, local production is smaller in scale (compared to global value chains), requires less capital investment, prioritizes local inputs and generates fewer carbon emissions by shortening transportation times, among other benefits, such as the need for less foreign exchange for imports or the flow of royalties abroad, etc.

In other words, the promotion of local production, if analyzed from a national point of view, is nothing more than the substitution of imports. In this respect, in Argentina, Cassini and Schorr (2022) identify, for example, imports with substitution potential for a current value of US\$ 6,248 million, representing, by 2021, 18.34% of manufacturing imports. In general terms, aside from some products, the automotive industry stands out, among other things, due to a methodological issue since the study analyzed intra-industry trade. However, the authors point out that there may be other potential products that have not been identified because they do not participate in international trade or because of a question of classifications and they call for further research on "fine tuning" to find these potentialities.

On this point, it is essential to analyze how the increase in domestic production due to import substitution would impact the different components of the EF. For this paper, the study by Cassini and Schorr (2002) is considered a step forward since it allows us to put on the table for discussion a way forward that is not based on the export mandate and that can be made compatible, if so desired, with a post-developmental framework.

So, how can a post-developmental framework be built for the region's economies, with the specificities of each one? What political agreements are necessary to carry out a project of this magnitude? Is it enough to abandon the export mandate? What goods can be produced locally and no longer imported? To what extent can the scale of production in each sector be reduced without making the national economy as a whole unviable? These are some of the many questions that remain to be answered, and each one opens up a possible line of research.

One way to build a post-development framework for each economy in the region could be to plan, based on sustainable per capita biocapacity at the global level, the economic activities to be carried out in the territory -and their level of output- that guarantee a minimum per capita material content level floor for the population to develop a life with full rights and a ceiling on the level of the EF per capita that is possible to achieve. This implies, per se, the abandonment of the export mandate. In other words, exports and wealth generation are not rejected, but they take a back seat to the search for socio-environmental sustainability of development.

In addition, the inherited economic structure, productivity level and labor attributes in each territory must be considered. This sets the framework for the necessary political agreements, which are generally broad and exceedingly difficult to specify since they affect the current profitability of the most powerful participants in each territory.

However, as explained above, these difficulties cannot be translated into inaction in the search for these agreements or transformations and much less into almost unquestioningly granting greater economic and political power to concentrated participants, as is the case with the export mandate.

Post-developmentalism does not escape these questions and recognizes the difficulty of this undertaking. Still, the most important thing is that whatever the degree of difficulty or feasibility, this does not make the neodevelopmentalist export mandate any less utopian as a path towards a higher level of welfare for society.

In this respect, we can affirm that, based on the recognition of the biophysical limits of the planet, levels of the EF and its different components, any consideration of the problem of development becomes more realistic and, therefore, post-developmentalism is at least one step ahead of neodevelopmentalism.

6. FINAL THOUGHTS

Although most of the fundamentals of neodevelopmentalism differ from neoclassical theory, the strong similarity in the approach to the environmental problem and the export mandate means that it is a generator of major problems for development. The state-of-the-art shows that the limitations contained in this approach, raised in this article, deserve, at least, to be discussed. In fact, many of these marked limitations are ignored by many development theorists who, being intensely focused on solving traditional development problems, for example, the external constraint for Argentina, have neglected the issue of the basic conditions of production and the reproduction of economic activities over time.

However, it is fair to mention that, just like neoliberalism, mainly in its most liberal aspect, it is opposed to limits or curtailment of freedoms of any kind and to any attempt by the State to influence the tastes and preferences of the population (Dobson, 1999) if planning and limits in the field of production are required to solve the socio-environmental crisis, among other things, due to the level of the EF. Neodevelopmentalism presents fertile spaces for discussion, which are not found in neoliberalism.

In this respect, if both currents (neoliberals and neodevelopmentalists) find themselves in the same labyrinth, the discussion presented in this paper can help neodevelopmentalism to find the way out that post-developmentalism proposes to build, not without challenging work ahead, and with the goal of building alternatives to socially and environmentally viable development.

Hidalgo-Capitán (2011) states that, at a global level, neo-institutionalism is destined to become the new orthodoxy in the Political Economy of Development. At least in Argentina, it can be affirmed that this is happening since, as has been shown, both neoliberals and neodevelopmentalists propose to deepen extractivism with improved state capacities. In this respect, the extractivist nature of the economies of the Latin American region and their insertion with low value added in the global market highlights the relevant international nature of this debate, as well as the worldwide improvement of biocapacity, the integrality of ecosystems and irregular distribution throughout the planet of the different natural elements that make up the material wellbeing of society. The magnitude of this problem demands intellectual effort and dialogue between economic heterodoxy and breaking out of this labyrinth may be the first step.

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¹ In other words, not only to those with a higher EF.

² For the sake of brevity, we will not discuss each of them in detail.