



NJ: NUTA

Contours of Alternative Development: A Systematic Literature Review

Ratna Mani Nepal^{1*} and Rudra Prasad Bhattarai²

¹Center for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS), Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu

²Tri-Chandra Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu

*Email: ratna.nepal@cnas.tu.edu.np

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/nutaj.v11i1-2.77021>

Abstract

Alternative development (AD) emerged in the 1970s as a transformative development framework that challenged traditional growth models while prioritized people, sustainability, and grassroots participation. In these five decades, a multiple faces of alternative development emerged demonstrating shifts in its themes and agendas. Sometimes its voices coopted to mainstream development, some other times posturing itself as the mainstream. A considerable studies examined the evolution of AD, however, there is still a limited systematic understanding of its conceptualization, methodologies, and practices. This paper attempts to track the trajectory of AD before and after 2008 through systematic review of literature. The demarcation point 2008 means that due to global financial crisis global as well as national development paradigms shifted tremendously in this era. Therefore, a comparison of alternative development themes before and after 2008 could provide a general frame of analysis. A systematic literature review method was applied to investigate the evolution of AD, concentrating its shifts on conceptual, methodological, and programmatic aspects. The review adhered to strict protocols, including screening, data extraction, and quality assessment, to ensure methodological rigor and reliability. Peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and conference proceedings from 1970 to 2024 were analyzed to capture both historical and contemporary perspectives on AD. The findings indicate a notable shift in the field of AD, moving from grassroots models that prioritized equity and sustainability to more globally integrated frameworks that align with initiatives like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Before 2008, AD was marked by critiques of economic growth models, focusing on local empowerment and ecological balance. After 2008, AD has broadened its scope to tackle global issues such as climate resilience, technological innovation, and participatory governance, all while upholding its fundamental principles of inclusivity and sustainability. By merging historical and contemporary viewpoints, this study offers important insights into the development trajectory of AD and its significance in confronting modern issues like climate change, inequality, and resource depletion.

Keywords: alternative development, sustainability, grassroots participation, empowerment, ecological balance, systematic literature review

Introduction

The concept of development has changed significantly over the decades, influenced by shifting theoretical frameworks and global events. In the mid-20th century, development was mainly associated

with economic growth and industrialization (Nederveen Pieterse, 2010). The modernization theory of the 1950s broadened this view, connecting development to political and social modernization while stressing linear progress and the adoption of western values (Rist, 2008). By the 1980s, neoliberalism reinforced the emphasis on economic growth, promoting structural reforms, free markets, and deregulation as the main routes to development (Rabie, 2016). However, these approaches faced growing criticism for focusing on economic indicators at the expense of human well-being and environmental sustainability (Escobar, 1995; Rabie, 2016; Shiva, 1988). Significant events like the Stockholm Conference (1972) and the Cocoyoc Declaration (1974) also highlighted the environmental and social impacts of traditional development models, leading to the rise of alternative development (AD).

Alternative Development (AD) emerged as a response to mainstream paradigms, redefining development as a people-centered, inclusive, and sustainable process aimed at improving human well-being (Nederveen Pieterse, 2010; Friedmann, 1992). In contrast to traditional models, AD focused on grassroots participation, equity, and ecological sustainability, challenging the growth-centric narrative (Chambers, 2005; Korten, 1990). Scholars like Friedmann (1992), Korten (1990), and Chambers (2005) promoted strategies that tackled structural inequalities, empowered communities, and ecological imbalance. These concepts gained momentum with global initiatives such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which resonated with AD's fundamental principles of inclusivity, sustainability, and participatory governance (United Nations, 2015).

The year 2008 was a significant turning point in development thinking, especially regarding AD, as the financial crisis brought about major global changes. This crisis revealed the weaknesses of neoliberal economic models that had been prevalent in development discussions since the 1980s, showing their failure to tackle increasing inequalities, environmental harm, and social injustices (Harvey, 2005; Escobar, 2012). The downfall of key financial institutions and the resulting global recession led to widespread disappointment with market-driven development strategies, sparking a reassessment of development frameworks. Researchers and practitioners started to promote methods that emphasized sustainability, equity, and community resilience rather than just economic growth (Armitage et al., 2012; UN, 2015). Furthermore, this era brought to light new global challenges, such as the intensifying effects of climate change and resource shortages, which highlighted the shortcomings of traditional development models and reinforced the necessity for alternative strategies.

The period following 2008 marked a notable change in global policy focus, highlighted by the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 and the Paris Agreement on climate change. These efforts were closely tied to the concepts of Alternative Development (AD), which prioritize participatory governance, ecological sustainability, and social justice (UN, 2015; UNFCCC, 2015). Additionally, grassroots movements and civil society organizations gained traction during this time, pushing for decolonized development and questioning prevailing Western-centric models (Escobar, 2012; Martinez-Torres & Rosset, 2010). Consequently, the financial crisis of 2008 acted as a trigger for re-evaluating development, elevating AD from the periphery to a central position in global discussions as a credible alternative to neoliberal strategies. This shift was underscored by the intersection of economic, environmental, and social crises that transformed development thinking and practices, establishing 2008 as a pivotal moment in the advancement of AD.

In recent years, the conversation around alternative development has evolved significantly, influenced by emerging challenges and opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic (2019–2023) revealed the vulnerabilities in global systems and highlighted the necessity for development models that are resilient, inclusive, and sustainable (UNDP, 2023; Hickel, 2023). It also brought to light the critical role of digital inclusion and technological innovation in tackling inequalities and improving participatory governance (World Bank, 2023; McCall et al., 2015). Additionally, the pressing issue of climate change has underscored the importance of ecological sustainability within development frameworks, as shown by the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report (2023) and the UNEP's Global Environment Outlook (2024). These reports stress the need for transformative strategies that weave together climate resilience, social equity, and economic democracy (IPCC, 2023; UNEP, 2024).

Recent academic work has also turned its attention to decolonizing development and elevating marginalized voices. Scholars like Battiste (2022) and Tuck and Yang (2023) critique shallow approaches to decolonization, advocating for meaningful change that prioritizes indigenous knowledge and practices. Likewise, grassroots movements such as Fridays for Future (2024) and Global Witness (2023) have been instrumental in pushing for climate justice and contesting exploitative development practices. These movements resonate with the core principles of alternative development (AD), which emphasize participatory governance, ecological sustainability, and social justice.

This systematic literature review aims to fill existing gaps by exploring the evolution of alternative development (AD) both prior to and following 2008. It specifically seeks to answer two main research questions: (1) What were the themes of alternative development thinking in the past, particularly up to 2008? and (2) What changes in themes in alternative development appeared in the post 2008 era? By combining historical and modern viewpoints, this study highlights the shift in AD from a theoretical critique of mainstream paradigms to a flexible framework that can tackle today's global challenges.

This review is important because it offers a thorough analysis of the development trajectory of AD, providing valuable insights into its ability to address current issues such as climate resilience, technological innovation, and socio-economic inequalities. By examining how AD principles can be implemented in various contexts, this study adds to the ongoing conversation about sustainable and equitable development, setting the stage for future research and policy initiatives.

Methodology

This study uses a systematic literature review approach to explore the thematic evolution and principles of Alternative Development (AD). The review aims to deliver a thorough and clear analysis of AD's historical and current contexts, emphasizing its conceptualization, methodologies, and applications both before and after 2008. The methodology is structured into four key subsections: review protocol, screening and selection, data extraction, and quality assessment. Each subsection follows established frameworks and best practices to maintain methodological rigor, reliability, and validity.

By organizing the review into sections such as review protocol, screening and selection, data extraction, and quality assessment, this study adopts a systematic and reproducible method, making it well-equipped to analyze the intricate and evolving nature of AD.

Review Protocol

Exclusion criteria were established to remove studies that merely mentioned AD or concentrated on unrelated development theories. For instance, literature that highlighted only economic growth models without considering social or environmental aspects was excluded. The search utilized databases such as Scopus, JSTOR, and Google Scholar, employing keywords like "alternative development," "people-centered development," "sustainable development," "grassroots participation," and "climate adaptation."

The screening process consisted of two stages: **Initial Screening:** Titles and abstracts were assessed to pinpoint studies pertinent to AD's core themes. **Full-Text Screening:** The complete texts of potentially relevant studies were examined to verify their alignment with the research objectives.

Screening and Selection

The screening and selection process was carried out in a systematic manner to guarantee the inclusion of high-quality and relevant studies. The initial search produced more than 100 publications, which were then screened by examining their titles and abstracts. After removing duplicates and irrelevant studies, we narrowed it down to a more focused set of 50 articles. These articles were further evaluated for relevance and quality, leading to the selection of 22 studies for detailed analysis. The chosen studies were divided into two timeframes: pre-2008 and post-2008, to enable a comparative analysis of the evolution of AD.

Title and Abstract Screening: Studies were excluded if they did not address the core principles of AD or if they focused on unrelated topics. **Full-Text Screening:** The remaining studies were assessed for their methodological rigor, relevance to AD, and the depth of their discussion on theoretical or practical frameworks. **Final Selection:** Emphasis was placed on studies published in reputable, peer-reviewed journals like *Development and Change* and *World Development*, along with influential academic books and conference proceedings.

This method ensured that the review was grounded in credible and scholarly sources, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings.

Table no. 1 below showcases important scholarly works that have played a crucial role in shaping the theory and practice of Alternative Development (AD). It features foundational texts, critical evaluations, and modern viewpoints that cover development theory, environmental governance, participatory methods, and critiques of post-development. The chosen works emphasize themes like grassroots involvement, local agency, sustainability, decolonization, and critiques of neoliberal development models. Citation metrics from SCOPUS and Google Scholar demonstrate the impact and significance of these works in both academic and policy-making contexts, highlighting the extensive discussions around alternative development approaches. This table provides a concise overview of the selection process for articles, including essential details such as citations, summary, and relevance to alternative development theory.

Data Extraction

Data extraction was carried out in a systematic manner to collect and synthesize relevant information across various dimensions. The extraction of data concentrated on essential themes, methodologies, and findings associated with AD. A uniform template was employed to document details like the author(s), publication year, title, journal or proceedings, domain, citations, and a summary of the

study's contributions. This approach guaranteed consistency and helped in recognizing patterns and trends throughout the literature. The following key elements were gathered:

Bibliographic Details: Information such as author names, publication year, journal, and publisher was noted for citation and reference management. **Study Type:** Studies were categorized as qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods to identify methodological trends. **Key Themes and Findings:** Thematic insights and primary findings were extracted to highlight recurring patterns and relationships. **Context and Focus:** Geographical areas and policy frameworks were recorded to place findings within specific socio-political and economic contexts. **Theoretical Frameworks:** Theoretical perspectives, including empowerment (Friedmann, 1992) and sustainable livelihoods (Scoones, 2015), were documented to illustrate conceptual connections.

Table 1 Review Summary of the Texts on Alternative Development

Authors	Year	Title	Journal or Proceedings	Domain of the Journal or Proceedings	Citations in SCOPUS	Citations in Google Scholar	Summary
Schumacher, E.F.	1973	Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered	Book	Sustainable Development, Economics	N/A	25,000+	Advocated for small-scale, people-centered development, challenging large-scale industrialization and growth-centric models.
Chambers, R.	1983	Rural Development: Putting the Last First	Book	Participatory Development, Rural Development	900	1,800	Promoted participatory methods to empower marginalized communities, challenging top-down development approaches.
Shiva, V.	1988	Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development	Zed Books	Environmental Studies, Feminist Theory	1,500+	8,000+	Highlighted the interconnectedness of ecology, feminism, and development, emphasizing sustainability and social justice.
Friedmann, J.	1992	Empowerment: The Politics of Alternative Development	Blackwell Publishing	Development Theory, Political Economy	1,200	2,500	Advocated for grassroots participation, local agency, and self-reliance, shaping AD's emphasis on empowerment and decentralized governance.
Escobar, A.	1995	Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World	Princeton University Press	Post-Development Theory, Cultural Studies	2,300	4,500	Critiqued mainstream development paradigms, advocating for local knowledge and cultural diversity as central to alternative development.
Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W.	2012	Decolonization is Not a Metaphor	Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society	Decolonization, Indigenous Studies	1,800	3,500	Critiqued superficial uses of decolonization, advocating for the return of land and sovereignty to Indigenous peoples, resonating with AD's focus on local agency and cultural sensitivity.
Armitage, D., et al.	2012	Adaptive Co-Management: Collaboration, Learning, and Multi-Level Governance	UBC Press	Environmental Governance, Resource Management	1,300	2,500	Explored adaptive co-management as a strategy for addressing socio-ecological challenges, combining local knowledge with scientific insights to enhance resilience and sustainability.

Raworth, K.	2017	Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist	Book	Sustainable Economics, Development Studies	2,000+	10,000+	Proposed a holistic economic model balancing social and ecological boundaries, resonating with AD's focus on sustainable livelihoods and equity.
Stiglitz, J.	2019	People, Power, and Profits: Progressive Capitalism for an Age of Discontent	Book	Political Economy, Development Economics	N/A	2,000+	Critiqued neoliberal capitalism and advocated for inclusive, equitable development models to address global crises like inequality and climate change.
Escobar, A.	2020	Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible	Duke University Press	Decolonial Studies, Political Ecology	800	1,500	Advocated for decolonial approaches to development, emphasizing pluriversality and the inclusion of indigenous knowledge systems.
Battiste, M.	2022	Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit	Book	Indigenous Studies, Education	N/A	1,200	Highlighted the importance of indigenous knowledge and decolonization in development practices, aligning with AD's focus on cultural sensitivity and local empowerment.
Hickel, J.	2023	Less is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World	Book	Degrowth, Sustainable Development	N/A	3,000+	Advocated for degrowth as a solution to ecological and social crises, aligning with AD's focus on sustainability and equity.
World Bank	2023	Digital Innovations for Participatory Development	World Bank Reports	Digital Inclusion, Development Policy	500+	2,000+	Explored the role of digital tools like participatory mapping and e-governance in empowering marginalized communities and enhancing participatory development.
Fridays for Future	2024	Global Climate Strike Report	Fridays for Future Publications	Climate Activism, Youth Engagement	N/A	N/A	Documented the impact of youth-led climate strikes in shaping global development priorities and advocating for climate resilience.
Shapiro-Garza, E., et al.	2025	Beyond Market Logics: Payments for Ecosystem Services as Alternative Development Practices in the Global South	Development and Change	Development Studies, Ecosystem Services	N/A	N/A	Critiqued market-based approaches to development, advocating for Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) as a more equitable and sustainable alternative.

This timeline showcases the development of Alternative Development (AD) concepts, starting from initial critiques of GDP-focused growth, through participatory rural development and empowerment, and progressing towards themes of decolonization, adaptive governance, sustainability, and modern views on digital and climate justice.

This organized approach allowed for a thorough synthesis of the literature, leading to a deeper understanding of AD's evolution and applications.

Results

This study investigates the evolution of alternative development by thoroughly analyzing academic articles and key themes from two distinct periods: before and after 2008. The findings are structured into three main sections to clarify the shifts and continuities in the discourse surrounding alternative development.

In Section 3.1, a comprehensive overview of the reviewed articles is presented, detailing the scope, methodologies, and geographical focus of the literature. This section lays the groundwork for understanding the context and variety of perspectives within the field. Section 3.2 explores the dimensions and key themes of alternative development leading up to 2008. During this time, the discourse was largely influenced by issues such as poverty alleviation, sustainable livelihoods, and the involvement of local communities in development processes. The analysis emphasizes how these themes were tackled and the challenges encountered in implementing alternative development strategies during this period. Section 3.3 looks at the changes in alternative development after 2008, pinpointing emerging themes and shifts in focus. Following 2008, the field saw an increased emphasis on climate change, globalization, and the incorporation of technology in development practices. This section also investigates how earlier themes evolved and how new challenges and opportunities shaped the direction of alternative development.

Collectively, these sections offer a detailed understanding of how alternative development has adjusted to evolving global contexts, providing insights into its past, present, and future trajectories.

Description of the Articles

This section offers an overview of the significant literature and scholarly contributions that shape the understanding of Alternative Development (AD) both prior to and following 2008. The articles examined cover a variety of fields, including development studies, environmental science, and socio-political analysis, providing a well-rounded view of the evolution of AD principles and practices.

Dimensions of Alternative Development Until 2008

Alternative Development (AD) emerged as a revolutionary approach to development, challenging traditional models that primarily emphasized economic growth and industrialization. The shift towards a more human-centered approach in development emerged as a significant outcome of Alternative Development (AD). Early critiques from scholars like Dudley Seers (1969) and E.F. Schumacher (1973) challenged the heavy reliance on GDP as the sole indicator of progress, advocating for a broader perspective that addressed issues such as poverty, inequality, and unemployment. Seers argued that development should focus on improving the quality of life rather than merely increasing economic output. Similarly, Schumacher's influential book, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (1973), underscored the importance of small-scale, people-oriented development. These ideas were

Sustainability became a core element of AD after the publication of the Brundtland Report in 1987, which defined sustainable development as the capacity to meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. Vandana Shiva (1988) stressed the importance of indigenous knowledge and ecological practices in achieving sustainability. In her book, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*, Shiva highlighted the deep connections between social and environmental justice, arguing that ecological damage often disproportionately affects marginalized communities.

Institutions and grassroots movements have played a vital role in implementing the principles of Alternative Development (AD). Arturo Escobar (1995), in his book *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, critiqued the Western-centric view of mainstream development and advocated for culturally sensitive and pluralistic approaches that honor local knowledge systems.



NUTA JOURNAL, 11 (1 & 2), 2024 : ISSN: 2616 - 017x

Key Themes in Alternative Development Until 2008

Human-Centered Development and Human Flourishing

A significant shift in Alternative Development (AD) was the emphasis on human-centered approaches that prioritized well-being over simple economic growth. Scholars like Dudley Seers (1969) pointed out the drawbacks of focusing solely on GDP, arguing that development should tackle issues like poverty, inequality, and unemployment. E.F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* (1973) advocated for small-scale, people-oriented development. These concepts were further supported by international declarations such as the Cocoyoc Declaration (1974) and the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment (1972), both of which underscored the importance of social equity and meeting basic human needs.

Environmental Sustainability and Ecological Balance

Environmental sustainability emerged as a central theme in alternative development (AD), especially following the Brundtland Report in 1987, which articulated sustainable development as the ability to meet current needs without jeopardizing the future. Vandana Shiva, in 1988, highlighted the importance of incorporating indigenous knowledge and ecological practices into development, pointing out that environmental degradation often has a greater impact on marginalized communities. Her book, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*, underscored the connection between social justice and environmental sustainability.

Empowerment and Grassroots Participation

Empowerment and grassroots participation were also vital aspects of AD. John Friedmann, in his 1992 work *Empowerment: The Politics of Alternative Development*, emphasized the necessity of local involvement, self-reliance, and equitable resource distribution. David Korten, in *Getting to the 21st Century: Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda* (1990), focused on the significance of community-driven development. Robert Chambers, in *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (1983), introduced participatory methods aimed at elevating the voices of marginalized groups to ensure that development processes are inclusive and equitable.

Critiques and Challenges to Mainstream Development Paradigms

Despite its achievements, AD encountered obstacles in achieving broad acceptance. Discussions revolved around whether AD should be incorporated into mainstream development or retain its unique identity. Scholars such as Pieterse (1998) advocated for integration to enhance mainstream strategies, while Sachs (1992) argued that AD's true strength was in its capacity to question established paradigms. The emergence of globalization in the 1990s and early 2000s complicated matters; although it promoted knowledge sharing and advocacy, it also resulted in resource exploitation and the marginalization of local communities.

Cultural Sensitivity and Local Knowledge Systems

AD placed a strong emphasis on cultural sensitivity and the importance of local knowledge systems. Arturo Escobar (1995), in his work *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, critiqued the Western-centric focus of traditional development paradigms and called

Key Themes in Alternative Development After 2008

Resilience Theory and Adaptive Co-Management

The global financial crisis and the environmental challenges that followed, such as climate change, have highlighted the critical role of resilience in development frameworks. Resilience theory, which focuses on how systems can adapt and flourish despite shocks, has become fundamental to Adaptive Development (AD). Researchers like Armitage et al. (2012) have pointed out how adaptive co-management can enhance community resilience, especially regarding climate change and resource scarcity. This method emphasizes local knowledge, participatory decision-making, and adaptable governance structures, which align with AD's focus on inclusivity and sustainability. Ostrom (2009) emphasized the importance of decentralized, community-driven resource management systems, which have become fundamental to adaptive management practices.

De-colonial Perspectives and Indigenous Knowledge

Since the 2008 crisis, there has been an increasing acknowledgment of the necessity to decolonize development and amplify marginalized voices. Decolonial perspectives question the prevalence of Western-centric models and promote the integration of indigenous knowledge and practices into development (Battiste, 2022; Tuck & Yang, 2023). Scholars such as Escobar (2012) and Gudynas (2011) argue that AD should transcend Eurocentric frameworks to incorporate a variety of epistemologies and worldviews. This transformation is reflected in the emergence of movements advocating for food sovereignty, land rights, and cultural preservation, particularly in Latin America and other regions of the Global South (Martinez-Torres & Rosset, 2010).

Grassroots Activism and Social Movements

Grassroots activism has been crucial in shaping Alternative Development (AD) since 2008. Movements like Fridays for Future (2024) and La Vía Campesina have rallied communities to advocate for climate justice, food sovereignty, and fair development (Global Witness, 2023; Martinez-Torres & Rosset, 2010). These movements resonate with AD's core values of participatory governance and social justice, pushing back against top-down development approaches and promoting solutions that emerge from the community. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the significance of grassroots efforts in tackling inequalities and fostering community resilience (UNDP, 2023).

Digital Innovations and Participatory Governance

The use of digital tools and technologies has revolutionized development practices, fostering increased participation and inclusivity. Innovations like participatory mapping, e-governance, and digital platforms have empowered communities to take part in decision-making and hold institutions accountable (McCall et al., 2015; World Bank, 2023). These tools have also helped scale up AD initiatives, enabling the sharing of best practices and the formation of global networks. Nonetheless, issues such as digital divides and power imbalances need to be addressed to ensure fair access and meaningful impact (Orozco & Franks, 2019).

The emergence of digital innovations has significantly changed participatory governance, broadening the scope and effectiveness of Alternative Development (AD). Tools such as e-governance, participatory mapping, and various digital platforms have improved community involvement, transparency, and accountability, making development efforts more inclusive and scalable. These

technologies facilitate knowledge-sharing, foster global connections, and allow for real-time participation, enhancing the adaptability of AD. Nevertheless, issues like digital divides, data privacy concerns, and power imbalances need to be tackled to guarantee fair access and meaningful engagement, ensuring that technology does not exacerbate existing inequalities. This transition highlights the increasing importance of digital transformation in shaping future strategies for AD.

Addressing Intersectional Inequalities

Recent research has emphasized the necessity of tackling intersectional inequalities in development, acknowledging the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental issues. Scholars like Fraser (2024) and Davis (2023) have pointed out the shortcomings of traditional models in meeting the needs of marginalized groups, such as women, indigenous populations, and the urban poor. AD's commitment to equity and inclusivity offers a framework for addressing these disparities, highlighting the significance of participatory methods and community-driven solutions.

Climate Resilience and Ecological Sustainability

The period since 2008 has marked a significant transformation for Alternative Development, evolving from a theoretical critique of mainstream paradigms into a dynamic framework that effectively addresses contemporary global challenges. The incorporation of resilience theory, decolonial perspectives, grassroots activism, and digital innovations has revitalized AD, enhancing its relevance and impact in confronting crisis like climate change, inequality, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Global policy shifts, including the SDGs and the Paris Agreement, have further solidified AD's principles, providing a clear pathway for sustainable and equitable development.

Nonetheless, challenges persist, particularly in tackling power dynamics, resource limitations, and digital divides. Future research and practice should prioritize scaling up AD initiatives, ensuring inclusivity, and addressing intersectional inequalities. By learning from past experiences and seizing emerging opportunities, AD can continue to be a viable alternative to traditional development models, offering hope for a more just and sustainable future.

Discussion

This section critically analyzes the study's findings, placing them within the context of existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and the changing landscape of alternative development (AD).

Comparison of Pre-2008 and Post-2008 Alternative Development (AD)

Table 2: *Alternative Development Before and After 2008*

Aspect	Before 2008	After 2008
Primary Focus	Critique of mainstream development models (e.g., neoliberalism, modernization).	Addressing global crises (e.g., financial collapse, climate change, inequality) Stiglitz (2019) and Hickel (2023); IPCC (2023) and UNEP (2024); UNDP (2023) and Raworth (2017).
Theoretical Basis	Rooted in critiques of growth-centric models (Escobar, 1995; Shiva, 1988).	Emphasizes resilience, sustainability, and decolonial approaches (Escobar, 2020; Kothari et al., 2019).
Key Principles	Grassroots participation, equity, ecological sustainability (Friedmann, 1992).	Climate resilience, participatory governance, digital inclusion (UNDP, 2023; IPCC, 2023).
Global Influences	Stockholm Conference (1972), Cocolyoc Declaration (1974).	Paris Agreement (2015), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015; UN, 2023).
Grassroots Movements	Emergence of movements like La Via Campesina (Martinez-Torres & Rosset, 2010).	Expansion of grassroots activism (e.g., climate strikes, food sovereignty) (Global Witness, 2023; Fridays for Future, 2024).
Climate Change Focus	Limited emphasis on climate adaptation.	Central focus on climate resilience and adaptive co-management (IPCC, 2023; UNEP, 2024).
Technological Role	Minimal integration of technology in participatory development.	Digital innovations (e.g., participatory mapping, e-governance) (World Bank, 2023; UNDP, 2024).
Decolonial Approaches	Early critiques of Western-centric models (Escobar, 1995).	Strong emphasis on decolonizing development and indigenous knowledge (Battiste, 2022; Tuck & Yang, 2023).
Policy Frameworks	Limited global policy alignment with AD principles.	Alignment with SDGs and Paris Agreement (UN, 2015; UN, 2023).
Challenges	Theoretical critiques lacked practical application.	Scalability, power dynamics, and resource constraints (Orozco & Franks, 2019; Hickel, 2023).
Economic Focus	Critique of neoliberal economic policies (Harvey, 2005).	Focus on sustainable livelihoods and economic democracy (Raworth, 2017; UNDP, 2024).
Social Equity	Emphasis on structural inequalities (Friedmann, 1992).	Greater focus on intersectional inequalities and marginalized voices (Davis, 2023; Fraser, 2024).

Table above offers a comparative analysis of Alternative Development (AD) before and after 2008, emphasizing the changes in focus, theoretical foundations, principles, and global influences that have

shaped its progress. Before 2008, AD was marked by critiques of mainstream development models, such as neoliberalism and modernization, which often prioritized economic growth over human well-being and ecological sustainability.

The evolution of Alternative Development (AD) up to 2008 established a new approach that prioritized human well-being, environmental sustainability, and local empowerment. In contrast to traditional development models, AD challenged the emphasis on economic growth and industrialization, advocating for a more comprehensive view of development. The fundamental principles of AD—human flourishing, sustainability, and empowerment—played a crucial role in redirecting global development strategies towards more inclusive and equitable practices. Influential scholars and international initiatives significantly shaped these principles, promoting local empowerment, ecological sustainability, and social equity (Seers, 1969; Schumacher, 1973; Shiva, 1988).

Scholars such as Dudley Seers (1969) and E.F. Schumacher (1973) criticized the heavy reliance on GDP as a development measure, calling for broader indicators that focus on human well-being rather than just economic output. Seers' perspective on development as a means to enhance quality of life aligns closely with AD's focus on promoting human flourishing instead of merely economic metrics. Likewise, Schumacher's advocacy for small-scale, people-centered development encapsulated AD's critique of large-scale industrialization. This critique was further supported by international frameworks like the Cocoyoc Declaration (1974) and the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment (1972), which highlighted the importance of addressing poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation through a people-centered lens. These foundational concepts helped to mold AD into a framework that aims to improve the lives of individuals and communities while maintaining ecological balance.

Sustainability has become a key principle of Alternative Development (AD), particularly following the publication of the Brundtland Report in 1987, which introduced the idea of sustainable development. Vandana Shiva's work in 1988 further enriched this discussion by emphasizing the strong links between social justice and environmental sustainability. Her critique highlights how ecological damage often impacts marginalized communities more severely, reinforcing AD's dedication to tackling both social and environmental issues. By embracing sustainability, AD has positioned itself as a compelling alternative to conventional development, especially in light of increasing ecological concerns. The focus on sustainability within AD goes beyond environmental preservation; it also aims to ensure that development is fair and meets the needs of the most vulnerable populations.

Empowerment and grassroots participation have become essential tenets of AD, drawing from the insights of John Friedmann (1992) and David Korten (1990). Both scholars stressed the importance of local involvement and self-sufficiency, arguing that communities should lead their own development initiatives. This perspective aligns with AD's goal of decentralizing decision-making in development and amplifying the voices of marginalized groups. Robert Chambers (1983) introduced participatory development approaches, highlighting the need to prioritize the most disadvantaged communities in development efforts. These concepts have been put into practice through various institutional initiatives and grassroots movements, such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and La Via Campesina, which advocate for local empowerment and food sovereignty.

After the 2008 global financial crisis, the importance of Alternative Development (AD) became much clearer as the limitations of market-driven development models were revealed. This era signified

a vital transition towards understanding development as a complex process that includes not just economic growth, but also social justice, ecological balance, and participatory governance. Researchers and practitioners started to focus on resilience, climate justice, and the necessity for more inclusive governance frameworks (Armitage et al., 2012; UN, 2015). The incorporation of climate resilience into AD strategies, especially through the Paris Agreement (2015), underscored the significance of local-level climate adaptation in achieving sustainability. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), introduced in 2015, offered a global framework that resonated with AD's fundamental principles, linking to goals such as poverty reduction (SDG 1), sustainable urban development (SDG 11), and climate action (SDG 13).

One of the most notable changes in AD since 2008 has been the embrace of resilience and adaptive co-management as key strategies. With environmental uncertainties and climate change becoming more urgent, adaptive co-management has surfaced as an essential method for tackling socio-ecological issues. This approach merges local knowledge with scientific insights, boosting resilience and allowing communities to manage resources sustainably (Armitage et al., 2012). This transition aligns with the principles of polycentric governance, which supports decentralized, community-driven resource management systems (Ostrom, 2010). Such methods challenge conventional top-down, technocratic models, highlighting the importance of local agency and self-determination.

The decolonization of development has also gained prominence in AD since 2008. Scholars like Escobar (2012) have criticized traditional development practices for reinforcing colonial legacies and sidelining indigenous knowledge systems. This decolonial shift has encouraged more culturally aware and locally-driven development practices, which are now central to AD. Moving away from uniform, one-size-fits-all approaches, AD increasingly values local knowledge and practices, making it more inclusive and adaptable to various contexts (Becerra & Chaves, 2014; Gudynas, 2011).

The period following the 2008 financial crisis marked a significant shift for AD, as the crisis revealed the shortcomings of market-driven approaches and highlighted the necessity of addressing interconnected global issues such as climate change, inequality, and financial instability. The Paris Agreement (2015) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established a global framework that aligned with AD's principles, focusing on climate resilience, participatory governance, and digital inclusion. The incorporation of resilience and adaptive co-management became vital to AD strategies, empowering communities to confront socio-ecological challenges through localized, participatory approaches (Armitage et al., 2012; IPCC, 2023). Furthermore, the decolonization of development gained traction, with scholars like Escobar (2012) and Battiste (2022) advocating for the integration of indigenous knowledge systems and culturally sensitive practices.

Even with these advancements, there are still challenges in applying AD principles on a larger scale, managing power dynamics, and dealing with resource constraints (Hickel, 2023; Orozco & Franks, 2019). However, AD is evolving into a powerful approach to development, focusing on equity, sustainability, and local empowerment as we confront global crises.

Conclusion

The systematic literature review on the evolution of Alternative Development (AD) highlights a significant transformation from its initial critiques of conventional development models to its current status as a holistic framework for tackling global issues. Prior to 2008, AD was mainly defined by its

focus on grassroots involvement, fairness, and ecological sustainability, which challenged the growth-oriented approaches of traditional development. Influential scholars such as Seers, Schumacher, Friedmann, and Shiva laid the foundation for AD by promoting human-centered development, sustainability, and local empowerment. These ideas were further reinforced by international efforts like the Stockholm Conference and the Brundtland Report, which underscored the importance of social equity and environmental justice.

After 2008, AD has adapted to confront modern global challenges, including climate change, resource depletion, and socio-economic disparities. The incorporation of climate resilience, adaptive co-management, and decolonial viewpoints has expanded AD's reach, making it more inclusive and responsive to various contexts. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement have further aligned global development priorities with AD's fundamental principles, stressing participatory governance, ecological sustainability, and social justice.

Despite its progress, AD continues to grapple with challenges related to scalability, power dynamics, and resource limitations. The struggle to preserve AD's distinct identity while integrating its principles into mainstream development frameworks remains a significant concern. Moreover, the digital divide and fair access to technological advancements present considerable obstacles to achieving inclusive participatory development.

References

- Armitage, D., Berkes, F., & Doubleday, N. (2012). *Adaptive co-management: Collaboration, learning, and multi-level governance*. UBC Press.
- Battiste, M. (2022). *Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spirit*. UBC Press.
- Brundtland Report (1987). *Our common future*. World Commission on Environment and Development.
- Chambers, R. (1983). *Rural development: Putting the last first*. Longman.
- Chambers, R. (2005). *Ideas for development*. Earthscan Publications.
- Cocoyoc Declaration. (1974). *UNEP/UNCTAD Symposium on Patterns of Resource Use, Environment, and Development Strategies*.
- Davis, A. (2023). Intersectional inequalities in development. *Journal of Social Justice*, 15(3), 45–60.
- Escobar, A. (1995). *Encountering development: The making and unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton University Press.
- Escobar, A. (2012). *Encountering development: The making and unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton University Press.
- Escobar, A. (2020). *Pluriversal politics: The real and the possible*. Duke University Press.
- Fraser, N. (2024). *Crisis of care: On the social-reproductive contradictions of contemporary capitalism*. Verso Books.
- Fraser, N. (2024). *Justice in a globalized world*. Polity Press.
- Fridays for Future. (2024). *Global climate strike report*. Fridays for Future Publications.
- Friedmann, J. (1992). *Empowerment: The politics of alternative development*. Blackwell.
- Global Witness. (2023). *Annual report on environmental activism*. Global Witness Publications.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.
- Hickel, J. (2023). *Less is more: How degrowth will save the world*. Penguin Books.

- IFDA. (2015). *Building blocks for alternative development strategies*. International Foundation for Development Alternatives.
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). (2023). *Climate change 2023: Synthesis report*. IPCC.
- International Foundation for Development Alternatives. (1980). *Building blocks for alternative development strategies: A progress from the Third System Project*. Geneva: IFDA Dossier.
- Korten, D. C. (1990). *Getting to the 21st century: Voluntary action and the global agenda*. Kumarian Press.
- Martinez-Torres, M. E., & Rosset, P. M. (2010). La Via Campesina: The birth and evolution of a transnational social movement. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 37(1), 149–175.
- McCall, M. K., Dunn, C. E., & Smith, D. A. (2015). Geo-information tools for participatory spatial planning: Fulfilling the criteria for ‘good’ governance? *Geoforum*, 62, 156–168.
- Nederveen Pieterse, J. (2001). *Development theory: Deconstructions/reconstructions*. Sage Publications.
- Ostrom, E. (2009). A polycentric approach for coping with climate change. *Policy Research Working Paper*, 5095. World Bank.
- Pieterse, J. N. (1998). My paradigm or yours? Alternative development, post-development, reflexive development. *Development and Change*, 29(2), 343–373.
- Rabie, M. (2016). Meaning of Development. In: *A Theory of Sustainable Sociocultural and Economic Development*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-57952-2_2
- Raworth, K. (2017). *Doughnut economics: Seven ways to think like a 21st-century economist*. Chelsea Green Publishing.
- Sachs, W. (1992). *The development dictionary: A guide to knowledge as power*. Zed Books.
- Schumacher, E. F. (1973). *Small is beautiful: Economics as if people mattered*. Harper & Row.
- Scoones, I. (2015). *Sustainable Livelihoods and Rural Development*. Rugby, UK: Practical Action Publishing.
- Seers, D. (1969). The meaning of development. *International Development Review*, 11(4), 2–6.
- Shapiro-Garza, E., McElwee, P., Van Hecken, G., & Corbera, E. (2025). Beyond market logics: Payments for ecosystem services as alternative development practices in the Global South. *Development and Change*, 0(0), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12546>
- Shiva, V. (1988). *Staying alive: Women, ecology, and development*. Zed Books.
- Stiglitz, J. (2019). *People, power, and profits: Progressive capitalism for an age of discontent*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. (1972). *United Nations*.
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 1–40.
- UN. (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. United Nations Publications.
- UNFCCC. (2015). *Paris Agreement*. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2023). *Human Development Report 2023*. UNDP.
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). (2024). *Global Environment Outlook 2024*. UNEP.
- World Bank. (2023). *World Development Report 2023*. World Bank.