



Original Article

THE ROLE OF THE CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN DETERMINING CORE-PERIPHERAL BOUNDARIES IN GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

H.I.G.C. Kumara^{1*}

Abstract

This study investigates the role of cultural diversity in shaping core-periphery boundaries in global development. Traditional development theories, such as Core-Periphery Dependency Theory and World-Systems Theory, emphasize economic and political determinants of inequality but largely overlook culture as a critical factor in development processes. Adopting a cultural-geographical perspective, this research highlights how cultural norms, values, belief systems, and social practices influence spatial organization, governance, and development outcomes. The study employs a qualitative descriptive analytical approach, using secondary data collected from academic journals, books, policy reports, and institutional publications. Four case studies Tristan da Cunha, Mingingo Island, North Sentinel Island, and Bhutan explain how cultural contexts shape human settlements, institutional structures, and resource management practices. Findings reveal that inherited or dominant cultural frameworks, such as British culture on Tristan da Cunha, can accelerate development according to Western-centric metrics, while indigenous or isolated societies, exemplified by North Sentinel Island, maintain ecological balance and social sustainability without following conventional development models. Bhutan demonstrates how Buddhist values and environmental ethics guide development priorities beyond mere economic growth. Comparative analysis indicates that development is not a universally linear process but is historically, socially, and culturally mediated. The research further argues that dominant global development paradigms, constructed by Western powers, reflect cultural biases that privilege certain worldviews and marginalize others. By integrating cultural diversity into core-periphery analysis, this study provides a more nuanced understanding of global inequalities and highlights alternative, culturally sensitive pathways to development. The findings contribute to development geography and cultural studies by emphasizing that sustainable development must account for local cultural identities, knowledge systems, and socio-spatial practices rather than relying solely on economic indicators.

Keywords: Cultural Diversity, Core-Peripheral Dependency Theory, Global Development, Human Geography, Development Inequalities, Cultural Geography

¹ Department of Geography,
Faculty of Humanities and
Social Sciences, University
of Ruhuna

***Corresponding Author:**
Prof H.I.G.C. Kumara
hickumara@geo.ruh.ac.lk



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1. INTRODUCTION

The economic development model presented through modernist ideology has been increasingly challenged over several decades. Capitalist economic development associated with modernity has long been shaped by profound inequalities in economic capacity, political influence, and access to resources, resulting in the global spread of economic disparity rather than economic development. Scholars across disciplines have attempted to explain these inequalities through theoretical frameworks that highlight the structural imbalances embedded within the global system. Among these frameworks, one of the most influential is the Core–Periphery Development Theory, which originates from World-Systems Theory developed in the 1970s. Pioneered primarily by sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein and further developed by John Friedmann, this approach provides a macro-level explanation of uneven development by positioning nations within a hierarchical global order (Cairó-i-Céspedes & Cívico, 2022; Ruvalcaba, 2024). By classifying countries as core, semi-periphery, and periphery, the theory offers critical insights into how historical, economic, and political processes shape global inequality.

It is evident that core states within modernity-based capitalism have built and sustained development through industrialization, urbanization, technological innovation, capital accumulation, and the maintenance of monopolistic control over global markets. Through political power, these countries have consolidated their commercial dominance by securing favorable trade relations, establishing strong state institutions, and shaping international economic and political rules to their advantage. In contrast, peripheral states have for a long time followed an unsuccessful trajectory in their pursuit of modernity.

Generally characterized by low levels of industrialization, these states sustain their economies through heavy dependence on the export of raw materials or low value-added goods and are continuously exposed to external economic pressures. Such nations often experience limited political autonomy and structural constraints that hinder sustainable development, thereby reinforcing their subordinate position within the global system (Kuran, 2024). Situated between these two extremes are semi-peripheral nations, which display characteristics of both core and peripheral states. These countries may demonstrate moderate industrialization and economic diversification, yet continue to experience dependency and inequality in their relations with core economies (Cairó-i-Céspedes & Cívico, 2022).

Dependency theory, which emerged from Latin American academic context and post-Marxist traditions, is closely associated with core–periphery dependency theory and world system theory. Scholars such as Raúl Prebisch and Andre Gunder Frank emphasized that underdevelopment in peripheral countries is not a stage preceding development, but rather a condition produced through unequal economic relations with developed nations (Islam, 2018). Dependency theorists argue that historical processes such as colonialism, unequal trade, and capital extraction have systematically constrained the development opportunities of developing countries while creating patterns of dependence that primarily benefit the core. From this perspective, global inequality is not accidental but is structurally embedded within the capitalist world economy.

This theory primarily emphasizes the economic and political dimensions of core–periphery relations, while its lack of in-depth attention to the global cultural context remains



a key limitation considered in this study (Wallerstein, 2004; Sheppard, 2016). The theory tends to overlook the possibility that cultural identity, values, knowledge systems, and human perceptions related to development may differ significantly from the ways in which modern Western development theories conceptualize them (Escobar, 1995; Pieterse, 2010). Culture is not merely a by-product of economic processes; rather, it functions as an active force that shapes social relations, spatial organization, and perceptions of development and modernity (Harvey, 1996; Massey, 2005).

In last few decades, human geographers have increasingly highlighted, through cultural geography, the importance of cultural power, representation, and meaning in shaping global inequalities (Anderson et al., 2019; Mitchell, 2000). Cultural processes play a decisive role in reinforcing core–periphery boundaries through mechanisms such as the circulation of global knowledge, linguistic dominance, media representations, and the privileging of certain lifestyles and worldviews (Said, 1978; Thussu, 2006). For example, cultural norms originating in core regions are often universalized as markers of progress, while local practices in peripheral regions are marginalized or devalued (Escobar, 1995). This cultural hierarchy can further strengthen economic dependency by shaping aspirations, consumption patterns, and development priorities within peripheral societies (Bourdieu, 1984; Tomlinson, 1999).

When global development is examined through a cultural–geographical perspective, it becomes possible to identify cultural boundaries in addition to economic and political ones. This study seeks to critically examine development inequalities by foregrounding global culture, rather than treating culture as secondary to economic structures. Accordingly, the study aims to

investigate how cultural narratives, spatial identities, and symbolic power operate within the global system, as well as to analyze the historical forces that have shaped these dynamics. Such an approach not only enriches theoretical debates within development geography but also provides insight into how alternative pathways to development can be imagined beyond dominant core-centric models. By doing so, this research contributes to ongoing efforts to rethink development theory in more inclusive and spatially sensitive ways. By integrating cultural geography with core–periphery and dependency perspectives, the study emphasizes the need to move beyond purely economic explanations and to identify the complex cultural processes that sustain global inequalities. In an increasingly interconnected yet unequal world, this cultural turn will be crucial for understanding contemporary development challenges.

2. RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

This research mainly seeks to address the question: To what extent do cultural values, social norms, and historical contexts determine global development pathways, and how do these cultural factors challenge the structural explanations provided by core-peripheral dependency theories?

Accordingly, the aim of this study is to evaluate the role of culture as a fundamental determinant of development by analyzing diverse case studies, ranging from isolated sustainability models to state-led well-being approaches. Through this analysis, the study argues for the integration of cultural geography into global development policy frameworks.



3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The global spatial order is structured on the basis of cultural diversity, as cultural values, identities, and social norms shape how societies organize space and interact globally (Huntington, 1996; Massey, 2005). Culture plays a crucial role in shaping human behavior and patterns of thinking, influencing social practices, economic choices, and political decision-making (Geertz, 1973). Human development refers to qualitative changes in people’s lives, including improvements in well-being, capabilities, and freedoms rather than mere economic growth (Sen, 1999; UNDP, 2022). The core–periphery theory can be considered one of the most influential frameworks developed to analyze global inequalities in development (Frank, 1967; Wallerstein, 1974). This research paper primarily focuses on relationships among global structures, world-systems theory, cultural studies, economic geography, and development policy, emphasizing how power, culture, and space interact within the global system (Harvey, 2005; Peet & Hartwick, 2015).

As explained by the core–periphery framework rooted in world-systems theory, a group of highly developed “core” countries exercises economic and political dominance, while less developed “peripheral” states consequently remain marginalized (Wallerstein, 1974, 2004). Peripheral regions or countries are characterized, relative to core regions, by lower levels of economic complexity and technological capacity, as well as limited access to high-value global markets (Amin, 1976; Santos, 1970). This research paper aims to critically examine this theory from a human and cultural geographical perspective, highlighting the need to move beyond purely economic explanations of global inequality (Massey, 1994; Peet et al.,

2011). In this context, the following literature review is presented to identify existing gaps in knowledge necessary for conducting the research.

Core-Periphery Dependency Theory, World-Systems Theory, and Global Development

The core-periphery dependency theory was developed to explain uneven global development based on the ideas of Neo-Marxist thinkers such as Andre Gunder Frank and Paul Baran, while the world-systems theory formulated by Immanuel Wallerstein presents a closely related perspective (Baran, 1957; Frank, 1967; Wallerstein, 1974). The core–periphery dependency theory explains global development inequality by arguing that wealthy “core” countries dominate and exploit poor “peripheral” countries through unequal economic and political relationships, leading to development in the core and persistent underdevelopment, dependency, and structural marginalization in the periphery (Frank, 1967; Amin, 1976).

In a similar vein, world-systems theory explains the global economy as divided into core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral regions (Wallerstein, 1974, 2004). Core regions are associated with advanced industrialization, high capital flows, and dominance in international markets, whereas peripheral regions are characterized by low levels of industrialization and often depend on the export of raw materials or low-value production (Wallerstein, 2004; Chase-Dunn & Grimes, 1995). This hierarchical division is not fixed but historically contingent, shaped by colonial legacies, economic policies, and socio-political dynamics (Wallerstein, 1974; Peet & Hartwick, 2015). Although both core–periphery dependency theory and classical world-systems theory emphasize economic



and political relationships, they give limited attention to cultural factors, focusing primarily on political and economic contexts when analyzing development inequalities (Peet et al., 2011).

Cultural Diversity as a Dimension of Development

Cultural diversity refers to the variety of cultural expressions, identities, languages, and traditions within and between societies (Kymlicka, 1995; UNESCO, 2001). The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity recognizes cultural diversity as an essential factor in human development (UNESCO, 2001). Accordingly, cultural diversity is not merely a social attribute but a distinctive element that has shaped spatial patterns of diversity throughout human history and contributed creativity to the development process (Massey, 2005; Florida, 2014). Empirical studies have shown that cultural diversity is associated with economic outcomes, including innovation, productivity, and regional development (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2005; Ottaviano & Peri, 2006). In particular, within the field of cultural geography, numerous studies demonstrate that changes in human spatial organization are shaped by culture (Cosgrove, 1984; Anderson et al., 2003). For example, human behavior, social protection practices, social perceptions of gender, and cultural ways of thinking play a fundamental role in shaping political and economic contexts (Sen, 1999; Inglehart & Baker, 2000). In this sense, political and economic activities can be understood as being fundamentally rooted in human cultural backgrounds.

Even within the same country, differences in human behavior between rural and urban cultures influence how development opportunities are distributed and experienced

(Tacoli, 2012; Massey, 1994). Since cultural diversity affects economic and political diversity, unequal cultural contexts contribute to the operation of unequal economic and political models (Peet & Hartwick, 2015). This literature review indicates that such cultural dimensions are not adequately addressed by core-periphery dependency theory or classical world-systems theory, which primarily focus on economic and political structures (Wallerstein, 2004; Peet et al., 2011).

Cultural Diversity, Development Policies, and the Associated Institutional Structure

Culture is a factor that directly influences politics. In particular, elements such as religion, ethnicity, caste, and language are closely intertwined with political power (Almond & Verba, 1963; Horowitz, 1985). Human thinking is shaped primarily on the basis of culture, influencing values, perceptions, and behavioral patterns (Geertz, 1973). Accordingly, it is clear that culture influences political contexts and economic ideologies (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Research based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions and studies that examine cultural disparities within countries show that cultural diversity can enhance certain aspects of politics, such as participation and representation, while in some cases it can also increase political complexity and conflict (Hofstede, 2001; Lijphart, 1999). Depending on the nature of distinctive cultural characteristics in different societies, cultural diversity can give rise to either political stability or instability (Alesina et al., 2003).

On the other hand, while certain economic ideologies may be more easily absorbed by some cultures, they may not be compatible with others (North, 1990; Hall & Soskice, 2001). Furthermore, since culture also affects state institutional systems, the functioning of



such institutions in the process of development can produce diverse outcomes (Evans, 1995). These institutional outcomes, in turn, influence how countries or regions are perceived and integrated within global development structures and affect whether they assume more ‘core’ or ‘periphery’ roles within international systems (Wallerstein, 2004).

Cultural Production, Symbolic Hierarchies, and Global Differentiation

Beyond economic and political influence, cultural production itself contributes to the creation of symbolic hierarchies between the core and the periphery (Bourdieu, 1993; Wallerstein, 2004). Prior to the Industrial Revolution, when the world existed in a relatively isolated state, cultural identities could exist independently without being subordinated to one another (Braudel, 1984). However, in contemporary global society, there are no longer any isolated or fully autonomous cultures due to intensified global interconnectedness (Appadurai, 1996). In this context, dominant cultures extend not only their political and economic power but also their cultural hegemony over weaker cultures (Gramsci, 1971).

Antonio Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony provides a framework for explaining how, even within culturally diverse societies, the ideology of a dominant cultural group becomes normalized and widely accepted, effectively marginalizing alternative cultural perspectives (Gramsci, 1971; Lears, 1985). Research in cultural sociology argues that global cultural fields; such as art or media operate with their own core–periphery dynamics, wherein certain locations or traditions are recognized as “central” to cultural production while others remain peripheral (Bourdieu, 1993; Crane, 2014). These symbolic hierarchies influence global perceptions of value, innovation, and cultural

capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Therefore, cultural diversity contributes not only to material development outcomes but also to the symbolic power relations that underpin global hierarchies (Tomlinson, 1999). Regions possessing globally recognized cultural identities through media, the arts, or international networks can gain enhanced visibility and greater discursive capacity within the broader world system (Appadurai, 1996; Castells, 2010). In this context, development ideologies are constructed within dominant cultural frameworks that align with the cultural backgrounds of those in power (Escobar, 1995). Dominant development ideologies are often imposed upon cultures that are subordinated to hegemonic power, reinforcing global inequalities (Escobar, 1995; Wallerstein, 2004). How this cultural process influences development inequality remains a critical issue requiring in-depth examination.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on the use of secondary data to examine how cultural factors influence the determination of development space. Secondary data were gathered from academic journal articles, books, policy reports, institutional publications, and previously conducted empirical studies. The use of secondary sources enables the researcher to synthesize existing knowledge, identify theoretical perspectives, and compare findings across different geographical and socio-political contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Secondary data analysis is particularly appropriate for studies that seek to interpret social and cultural dynamics without conducting primary fieldwork (Johnston, 2017).

Three carefully selected four case studies were employed to examine how cultural values, traditions, belief systems, and social



institutions shape development planning and spatial organization. The case study approach allows for an in-depth exploration of complex social phenomena within their real-life contexts (Yin, 2018). By focusing on specific cases, the study highlights the interaction between cultural diversity and development processes in different spatial settings.

The data were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive analytical method. This approach emphasizes interpretation, thematic categorization, and contextual explanation rather than statistical measurement (Sandelowski, 2000). Relevant themes such as cultural identity, power relations, community participation, and spatial governance were identified and critically examined. Through comparative analysis of the selected cases, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how cultural determinants shape development trajectories and spatial outcomes.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Development as a Creation based on Cultural Norms

Development is often regarded as a process of social transformation based primarily on economic growth and technological advancement (Rostow, 1960). Although scholars have acknowledged that development is also connected to political structures and power relations, mainstream economic theories have paid limited attention to the idea that development itself is a cultural construction shaped by historically specific worldviews and epistemologies (Escobar, 1995). However, this research paper examines how the discourse of development, shaped by cultural norms, values, and belief systems, operates as a socially constructed process embedded in relations of knowledge and power (Escobar, 1995).

Traditional development theories often emphasize economic growth, industrialization, and modernization as universal pathways to progress (Rostow, 1960). If that is the case, why have many countries outside the Western politically dominant regions struggled to achieve sustained economic development? In response to this question, neo-Marxist scholars proposed the Core–Periphery Dependency Theory, which argues that development in peripheral regions is structurally constrained by global systems of economic dominance and subordination (Frank, 1967; Wallerstein, 1974). According to this perspective, global capitalism produces uneven development by systematically privileging core nations while marginalizing peripheral economies (Wallerstein, 1974). Although this analysis highlights political and economic dominance, it does not adequately address the role of cultural diversity and culturally specific understandings of development.

Modern human geographers argue that human spatial organization is deeply shaped by cultural characteristics, social meanings, and power relations embedded within space (Massey, 2005; Amin, 2013). Contemporary human geography further emphasizes that space is socially produced through cultural practices, identity formations, and institutional arrangements (Soja, 2010). Accordingly, geographical spaces differ according to cultural diversity, reflecting variations in values, belief systems, and collective identities. Likewise, development or human social progress is defined in accordance with culturally specific understandings of well-being and social organization (Escobar, 2018).

Development goals, the prioritization of those goals, resource allocation, and the structuring of social institutions are shaped by cultural norms and historically situated worldviews (Ferguson, 2015). In this context, definitions



constructed by politically dominant cultures often become universalized through systems of power, authority, and consent, reflecting processes of cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971/2011; Harvey, 2014). This relationship can therefore be understood as one between autonomy and hegemony, where subordinate cultures may internalize dominant development narratives. Accordingly, the concept of development and its associated discourses can be interpreted as constructions emerging from culturally specific social practices and epistemologies (Escobar, 2018).

Ideologies of development are also aligned with time and space. Early modernization theorists defined development as a linear progression toward Western industrial models (Rostow, 1960). However, later cultural geographers and critical development scholars criticized such perspectives for neglecting cultural diversity and universalizing Western assumptions of progress (Appadurai, 2013; Escobar, 2018). In contrast, contemporary cultural geography argues that development outcomes are spatially shaped by local traditions, social institutions, and collective identities (Amin, 2013). For example, norms related to family structure, gender roles, authority, and community participation influence how development policies are designed and implemented (Kabeer, 2012). Societies with strong communal traditions may prioritize collective welfare and participatory governance, whereas individualistic and market-centered systems often emphasize material growth and individual economic achievement (Harvey, 2014).

Moreover, geographers who adopt environmental perspectives argue that spatial and environmental conditions significantly influence cultural norms and the trajectory of development (Diamond, 1997; Harvey, 2014). Changes in environmental conditions often

reshape human thought, cultural patterns, and knowledge systems, demonstrating the dynamic relationship between nature and society (Harvey, 2014). Accordingly, land-use patterns, urban planning, and resource management are shaped not only by ecological constraints but also by religious customs and indigenous environmental knowledge systems (Ostrom, 1990; Escobar, 2018).

In this context, Escobar (1995) argues that dominant Western development discourse is culturally framed and grounded in Western epistemology, often marginalizing alternative knowledge systems and local worldviews. Thus, countries and regions labeled as “underdeveloped” from Western perspectives may reflect different cultural conceptions of well-being, sustainability, and collective life within their own socio-cultural contexts (Escobar, 2018). The role of cultural diversity is also inadequately captured by rigid global human development indicators such as GDP-based measurements (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2020). Education systems, health practices, and gender relations are deeply shaped by social expectations, ethical norms, and culturally embedded values (Kabeer, 2012). Amartya Sen’s (1999) capability approach emphasizes that development should expand people’s substantive freedoms in ways that are meaningful within their cultural contexts. This perspective recognizes that well-being cannot be reduced to income alone but must also incorporate social recognition, participation, and human dignity (Sen, 1999).

Another important phenomenon is that cultural norms are not static; they evolve through interactions with globalization, technological advancement, and political transformation (Appadurai, 2013). Cultural resistance movements can reshape development agendas, just as development interventions themselves



can transform cultural practices (Escobar, 2018). Therefore, sustainable development requires culturally sensitive and participatory policies that respect diversity while promoting equality and social justice (United Nations, 2015). Ignoring cultural contexts may result in policy failure, social conflict, or environmental degradation.

5.2. Human Culture, Space and Development: Case Studies

This section aims to examine, through several case studies, how changes in culture influence development and the transformation of human geographical space.

Case Study 01: Tristan da Cunha is the most remote inhabited island in the world

Located in the South Atlantic Ocean, Tristan da Cunha is widely recognized as the most remote inhabited island in the world (Tristan da Cunha Government, 2023; United Nations, 2022). Despite its isolation, it was first permanently settled in the early nineteenth century by individuals of predominantly British and other European origin (Tristan da Cunha Government, 2023). Some of the earliest arrivals were Europeans who had been shipwrecked and later settled on the island (Royle, 2001). English culture has had a significant influence on the development of settlement on the island (Picture 01 and 02). The traditions, language, systems of governance, and social practices brought by English settlers have shaped the way the Tristan da Cunha community continues to live, work, and organize itself today (Royle, 2001; Tristan da Cunha Government, 2023). Although geographically distant from England, the island has gradually adopted characteristics of British human geographical organization.

English became the primary language of communication, helping to unify the small population and enabling residents to interact easily in daily life (Tristan da Cunha Government, 2023). Language has also enabled the island to maintain administrative and political connections with the United Kingdom, which provides governance oversight as a British Overseas Territory (UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office [FCDO], 2023). The establishment of a formal school system based on Western education has ensured the transmission of Western knowledge systems to younger generations (Royle, 2001). Governance in Tristan da Cunha is strongly influenced by British political traditions. The island operates under a locally elected Island Council and an Administrator appointed by the UK government, reflecting the Westminster parliamentary tradition (FCDO, 2023; Tristan da Cunha Government, 2023). Decisions regarding fisheries, infrastructure, and social regulation are made collectively, reflecting principles of democratic participation and rule of law. These governance structures have contributed to the effective management of limited resources and the sustainable survival of the settlement (Glass & Green, 2021).

The island's economy further reflects British influence. Fishing, particularly for Tristan rock lobster remains the primary source of income (Tristan da Cunha Government, 2023; Glass & Green, 2021). While small in scale, systems of organization, regulation, and export trade follow formalized British administrative and capitalist models. Agricultural and gardening practices introduced by early settlers continue to shape food production, reflecting European farming traditions adapted to island conditions (Royle, 2001). English cultural traditions, including religious observances, community gatherings, and shared celebrations continue to structure

social life. These practices reinforce community cohesion and collective identity (Royle, 2001). Even as modern technology and external influences expand, British cultural foundations remain central to the island's social organization and decision-making processes (Glass & Green, 2021).

At present, Tristan da Cunha displays several characteristics commonly associated with developed European regions, particularly in its land-use organization, environmental management systems, and conservation practices (Glass & Green, 2021; Tristan da Cunha Government, 2023). Its structured settlement layout, regulated fisheries, and protected environmental zones demonstrate governance mechanisms comparable to European sustainability frameworks. How did the island achieve a level of modern European-style development within approximately 150 years? This transformation can be explained through a modern cultural geographical perspective, which emphasizes the role of cultural values, knowledge systems, and inherited institutional traditions in shaping spatial development (Agnew & Livingstone, 2019; Gregory et al., 2023).

Picture 01: Similarity of the primary settlement between old Angelo Saxon house and old house of the Tristan da Cunha



Key: 01 - Old Angelo Saxon house
02 - Old house of the Tristan da Cunha

Picture 02: Present view of settlements of the Tristan da Cunha



Source: Wanderlust magazine, 2026

Although the settlers arrived in isolation and under unexpected circumstances, their cultural mindset remained closely connected to Europe. They carried with them worldviews shaped by modernity, industrial rationality, and structured governance traditions rooted in British society (Royle, 2018). These cultural orientations influenced patterns of settlement planning, economic organization, and institutional governance. Accordingly, their inherited cultural frameworks enabled them to move relatively quickly toward a form of development aligned with European models of modernization and sustainability (Glass & Green, 2021). From a cultural geographical standpoint, spatial organization is not culturally neutral but reflects embedded value systems and social norms (Gregory et al., 2023). If a group representing a non-European cultural background had instead settled on this island, the resulting human geographical space



would likely have reflected different land-use systems, governance arrangements, and environmental ethics shaped by that cultural worldview (Escobar, 2018). This case study therefore illustrates that development cannot be understood solely through economic growth or political institutions; rather, it is deeply rooted in cultural foundations that shape how societies conceptualize progress, sustainability, and collective well-being (Agnew & Livingstone, 2019; Escobar, 2018).

Case Study 02: Human settlement of the Migingo Island in Lake Victoria in Africa

As a clear example of how cultural background plays a significant role in shaping human settlements and development, the settlement associated with Migingo Island in Lake Victoria in Africa can be considered. Lake Victoria, which is shared by Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, is the largest lake in Africa, and millions of people live around it (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2022). Their geographical space has been shaped by a political and economic background built upon their own distinctive culture (Briggs & Sharp, 2021).

By adapting to the environment, the communities around Lake Victoria mainly sustain their livelihoods through a fishing-based economy (FAO, 2022). Located about two miles from the mainland, Migingo Island is inhabited by people from Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania (Omara, 2020). This island, originally a natural ecosystem, has had its spatial organization shaped by the cultural mindset and traditional knowledge of its inhabitants (Briggs & Sharp, 2021). It is entirely different from the settlement pattern of Tristan da Cunha, which developed under a distinct colonial and European cultural framework (Glass & Storey, 2021). Fishing is not only an economic activity but also a cultural tradition passed down from

generation to generation (Geheb & Binns, 2020). The complex human relationships associated with this tradition can also be observed on the island.

In addition, the political culture of the African mainland, particularly the original regions from which the island's inhabitants migrated, has also influenced development on the island. The dispute between Kenya and Uganda over Migingo Island clearly demonstrates how national identity and territorial control can affect settlement organization, security presence, and taxation systems (Khadiagala, 2021). The conflict between the two countries over sovereignty of the island shows that development is not shaped only by environmental and economic factors, but also by political dynamics (Boone, 2022). Issues related to border demarcation, administrative authority, and the collection of taxes have directly influenced the daily lives of the island's residents (Khadiagala, 2021). The presence of security forces from both nations at different times reflects how geopolitical tensions shape the spatial and social organization of the settlement. Furthermore, political problems existing in the two mainland countries and the conflicts that arise from them are frequently reflected on the island (Boone, 2022). Tensions between authorities, uncertainty over governance, and competing claims of ownership contribute to instability within the community. Thus, the development pattern of Migingo Island cannot be understood solely through economic or cultural perspectives; it must also be examined in relation to broader regional political structures and interstate relations.

Initially, fishermen from Kenya and Uganda migrated to the island in search of better income opportunities (Omara, 2020). As fishing communities, their cultural background encouraged them to adapt quickly



to limited space and harsh living conditions. Houses are built very close to each other, demonstrating how an economic culture can shape land-use patterns within a very small area (Geheb & Binns, 2020). Problems commonly seen on the mainland such as poverty, conflict, corruption, unclean conditions, diseases, administrative weaknesses, and drug-related issues can similarly be observed on the island (Boone, 2022). Environmental pollution and a lack of concern for environmental protection are also key characteristics of the settlement (FAO, 2022).

This region demonstrates how human culture, economic practices, and political values shape spatial organization and settlement patterns (Escobar, 2012; Harvey, 2005). Accordingly, it can be argued that both the people of African origin who settled Migingo Island in Lake Victoria and the people who settled Tristan da Cunha created new social and spatial formations based on their own cultural mindsets (Picture: 03). Cultural geography scholars emphasize that development is not merely economic growth but a culturally embedded process shaped by worldview and social practice (Massey, 2005; Sachs, 2010). Thus, cultural difference becomes a strong factor determining the form and nature of development.

In the case of Migingo Island, integration into global fishing markets, particularly the Nile perch trade illustrates uneven incorporation into global capitalism (Medard & Wilson, 2015). Peripheral communities often experience partial modernization, where access to certain elements such as biomedical knowledge increases life expectancy, while structural economic transformation remains limited (McMichael, 2017). Improvements in Western medical access across sub-Saharan Africa significantly reduced mortality rates

during the late twentieth century (World Bank, 2023). However, without parallel structural economic change, rapid population growth can intensify pressure on fragile ecosystems such as Lake Victoria (Kolding et al., 2014). This reflects broader dependency patterns in which peripheral regions remain structurally constrained within the global capitalist system (Frank, 1967; Wallerstein, 2004).

Picture 03: View of Human Settlement of the Migingo Island in Lake Victoria in Africa



Source: Loon, 2026

Through colonialism, modernity and the capitalist economic model were introduced into peripheral societies, reshaping demographic balances and transforming traditional institutions (Rodney, 1972; McMichael, 2017). While modernization reduced mortality, it did not always generate equitable industrial development, resulting in



persistent structural inequalities. Contemporary development challenges in countries such as China, India, Brazil, and Bangladesh demonstrate varied trajectories of integration into global capitalism, each shaped by distinct cultural and political-economic contexts (Arrighi, 2007; World Bank, 2023). These cases illustrate that development outcomes are historically and culturally mediated rather than universally linear.

Case study 03: The story of the North Sentinel Island community

The story of the North Sentinel Island community (Picture 04), located in the Bay of Bengal, adds a new dimension to discussions about human existence, development, and environmental harmony in the modern world (Survival International, 2023; United Nations, 2022). The Sentinelese people, who are part of the wider Andaman Islands group administered by India, have lived in near-complete isolation for thousands of years (Government of India, 2023). Anthropological scholarship suggests that their continued isolation provides a rare case of long-term small-scale societal sustainability within a limited ecological space (Suzman, 2017). Their way of life demonstrates how a small human society can survive without modern technology or large-scale environmental transformation.

The Sentinelese are believed to follow a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, depending on fishing, hunting small animals, and gathering forest resources for survival (Pandya, 2010; Survival International, 2023). They have not adopted agricultural intensification, industrial production, or urban development pathways associated with modernity. Rather than transforming the landscape through extractive development, they rely on naturally available island resources. Their tools, such as bows,

arrows, and spears, are made from locally available materials. Anthropological research on hunter-gatherer societies shows that such subsistence systems often maintain ecological balance through limited extraction and deep environmental knowledge (Suzman, 2017).

What makes their story particularly remarkable is their consistent rejection of outside contact. The Sentinelese have resisted interaction with outsiders, and the Indian government legally protects their isolation through exclusion zones (Government of India, 2023). This isolation has preserved their cultural systems and protected the island's ecosystem. In contrast to many regions where development has led to deforestation, pollution, and biodiversity loss (IPBES, 2019), North Sentinel Island remains largely ecologically intact. The long-term maintenance of a small population within ecological limits reflects principles related to environmental carrying capacity (United Nations, 2022). However, their isolation raises significant ethical and political questions. Contemporary development discourse often promotes integration into national and global systems (Escobar, 2012; Sachs, 2010). Yet the Sentinelese challenge the assumption that all societies must follow a single developmental trajectory. Their existence reinforces the argument that development is not a universal model but a culturally constructed process (McMichael, 2017). In a rapidly globalizing world, they represent an exceptional case of cultural resilience and environmental sustainability. Their story highlights the possibility of maintaining a distinct cultural identity while living in close ecological harmony.

The story associated with North Sentinel Island demonstrates cultural dimensions and related development perspectives that differ significantly from the human-geographical

global connections seen in Mingo Island and Tristan da Cunha (McDuie-Ra, 2020; Glass & Storey, 2021). It clearly shows that development is something that flows together with ideologies constructed by humans and embedded within particular historical and cultural contexts (Escobar, 2018). There is no absolute truth or universal agreement about what its correct form should be. At present, the discourse of sustainable development has been widely proposed as a dominant global model of development, emphasizing balance among economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions (United Nations, 2023).

Picture 04: The North Sentinel Island and Human Community



Source: Srivastav, 2026

The inhabitants of North Sentinel Island have followed a completely separate path for thousands of years, without adopting the measures taken by broader human civilization in pursuit of what is considered a “better life” (Survival International, 2022). Even without awareness of the contemporary discourse of sustainable development, they appear to have achieved a way of life that reflects similar principles of ecological balance and limited resource use (Redclift, 2021). Their continued reliance on hunting, gathering, and small-scale subsistence practices suggests a long-term adaptation to their island ecosystem (Pandya, 2020).

As members of the *Homo sapiens sapiens* species, what are their cultural patterns? What do they understand by “development”? What do they define as progress? These questions do not have definite answers due to their sustained isolation and the ethical restrictions on contact (McDuie-Ra, 2020). However, their continued existence creates space to critically re-examine modern liberal capitalist and Eurocentric development discourses and ideologies (Escobar, 2018; Redclift, 2021). In this sense, North Sentinel Island challenges dominant assumptions that integration into global economic systems is the only path toward human advancement, instead highlighting the plurality of development pathways shaped by culture, environment, and power relations.

Case study 04: Development discourse from the Bhutan perspective

Bhutan’s development process clearly demonstrates how culture and geography strongly influence national progress (Picture 05). Unlike many countries that measure development mainly through economic growth, Bhutan has followed a unique path shaped by its Buddhist values and mountainous environment (World Bank, 2020). Geographically, Bhutan is a small,



landlocked country located in the eastern Himalayas between India and China (World Bank, 2020). Most of the country consists of high mountains, deep valleys, and forests and this isolated geographical location makes the state distinctive. Bhutan's rugged terrain supports a relatively small population scattered across remote valleys (World Bank, 2020). The country's isolation has historically protected it from strong foreign influences and severe environmental degradation

Today, the country uses its fast-flowing rivers to develop hydropower, which has become one of the main sources of national income, and its constitution mandates that at least 60% of the land must remain under forest cover (GKToday, 2025; World Bank, 2020). In this way, Bhutan's physical geography has encouraged a development model that promotes sustainable use of natural resources (GKToday, 2025). Culturally, Bhutan has been strongly influenced by Buddhism, and religious values emphasizing harmony and respect for nature are central to national identity (MDPI, 2013). These cultural values have shaped state policies and national goals. Rather than focusing solely on Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Bhutan introduced the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) in the early 1970s under King Jigme Singye Wangchuck (Bhutan Foundation, n.d.; World Bank, 2020). Development in Bhutan is guided through four pillars: sustainable and equitable development, environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and good governance (World Bank, 2020).

Bhutan is also recognised as a carbon-negative country, absorbing more carbon dioxide than it emits (GKToday, 2025; Geographical, 2025). Furthermore, Bhutan manages globalization carefully. Television and the internet were only introduced in 1999, reflecting the country's cautious approach to

modernity (RAOnline, 2025). To protect culture and the environment, the government regulates tourism through a “high value, low impact” policy aimed at sustainability and cultural preservation (Bhutan & Co., 2024). By integrating selectively with the global economy, Bhutan demonstrates a model where cultural identity is prioritised over rapid modernization. Overall, Bhutan's development process is shaped not purely by economic considerations but by cultural and geographic factors. Its mountainous terrain supports environmental conservation, while Buddhist philosophy guides a people-centered development model. Bhutan demonstrates that, instead of merely replicating Western industrial models, it is possible to pursue alternative development paths grounded in indigenous cultural values and geographic realities (World Bank, 2020).

Bhutan has, to some extent, moved away from the mainstream global development flow and works according to its own unique development plan centered on Gross National Happiness (GNH) (Ura et al., 2012; World Bank, 2023). According to dominant Western measurement standards such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Bhutan is classified as a developing country (World Bank, 2023). However, rather than strictly following those measurements, Bhutan adopts a development policy closely connected to cultural values, Buddhist philosophy, and environmental management (Ura et al., 2012; Brooks, 2013). This path of development aligns with contemporary sustainable development discourse, particularly in its emphasis on environmental conservation, social well-being, and long-term sustainability (United Nations, 2015; World Bank, 2023).

Because Bhutan is a small and geographically isolated Himalayan country, its culture has historically experienced limited direct



confrontation with dominant global cultures (Brooks, 2013).

Picture 05: Unique View of Bhutan and Culture



Source: Jacada, 2026

The pressures and structural constraints imposed by dominant global economic systems have therefore been comparatively moderate. In Bhutan, education and health services are provided free of charge by the state as part of its welfare-oriented governance model (World Bank, 2023). Many other basic human rights and social protections are also supported through government policy frameworks. Most importantly, individual happiness and collective well-being are regarded as central indicators of development through the GNH Index (Ura et al., 2012). This case study demonstrates that there is no single universal path to development; instead,

multiple development trajectories exist, shaped by distinct cultural contexts and value systems (Escobar, 2011; Sachs, 2010). In some cases, culturally grounded development approaches may prove more effective and sustainable than dominant growth-centered development ideologies (United Nations, 2015).

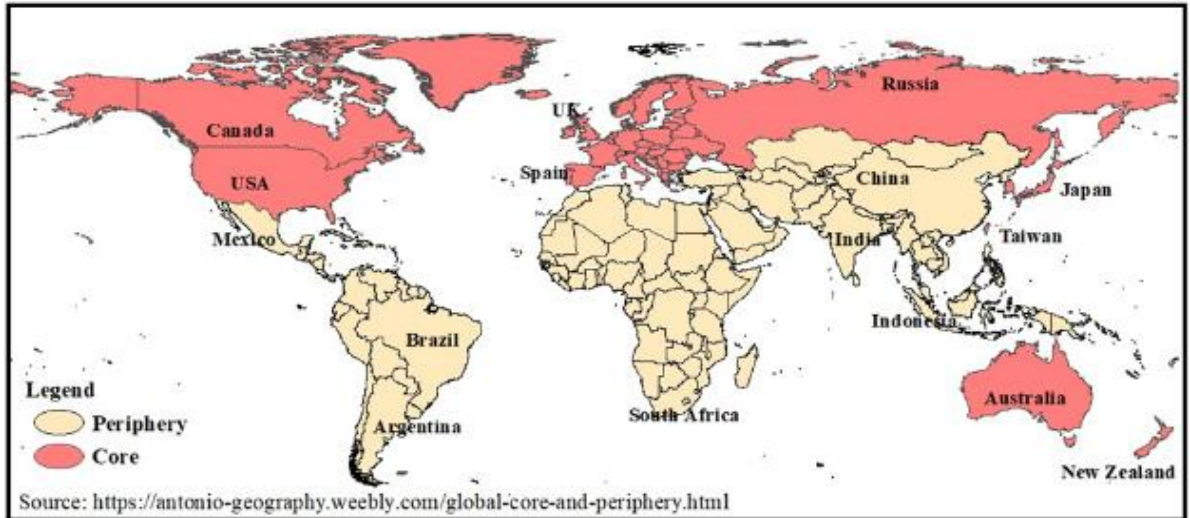
6. THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

The two main development models operating in the contemporary world as capitalist and Marxist development models that have been strongly influenced, either directly or indirectly, by the dialectical theory of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (Hegel, 1977/1807; Pinkard, 2000). Modernity itself developed within this philosophical framework, particularly through the idea of historical progress driven by contradiction and resolution (Taylor, 1975). According to Hegel, human civilization progresses in a dialectical manner often summarized as thesis, antithesis, and synthesis through which history unfolds toward higher stages of freedom and rationality (Hegel, 1977-1807). From this perspective, the world moves from one historical epoch to another in a progressive direction.

In *The End of History and the Last Man*, Francis Fukuyama (1992) argued that this historical process culminates in the universalization of liberal democracy, marking what he described as the endpoint of ideological evolution and political-economic development. However, contemporary global challenges including rapid population growth, environmental degradation, climate change, persistent poverty, and the failure to fully achieve sustainable development goals have raised serious doubts about linear and universalist development ideologies (United Nations, 2023; World Bank, 2023). These crises suggest that dominant development

paradigms are facing structural limitations.

Map No. 01: Spatial Locations of the Core- peripheral Countries



In *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Samuel P. Huntington (1996) strongly criticized Fukuyama’s thesis, arguing that post–Cold War global conflicts would be driven primarily by cultural and civilizational differences rather than ideological convergence. Supporting this perspective, cultural geographers emphasize that global development processes are deeply shaped by cultural diversity, value systems, and spatial identities rather than purely economic or political factors (Agnew, 2011; Escobar, 2011). From this viewpoint, development is not a singular linear process but a culturally embedded and contested phenomenon.

At present, rapid population growth and unsustainable overconsumption have weakened the credibility of dominant global development ideologies (United Nations, 2023; World Bank, 2023). At the same time, the validity of the discourse associated with modernity has also declined (Escobar, 2011;

Sachs, 2010). The alarming rise of conflicts and wars in different parts of the world is also linked to these underlying causes (Huntington, 1996; United Nations, 2023). It is evident that many of these global human crises are rooted not merely in political and economic factors, but also in cultural conflicts (Agnew, 2011; Escobar, 2011).

The core–periphery dependency theory (see Map no: 01), which questions the validity of modernity-based development models, primarily focuses on economic and political factors (Frank, 1967; Cardoso & Faletto, 1979). However, it largely overlooks cultural diversity as a key reason for the incompatibility between dominant development models and many societies (Escobar, 2011; Agnew, 2011). For this reason, the core–periphery dependency theory can be considered incomplete. The fact that most geographical regions representing Western Caucasian dominant cultures and holding global power are identified as



“developed” countries can be used to illustrate this argument (World Bank, 2023). This situation can be explained by the fact that dominant development ideologies were constructed by these same powers (Escobar, 2011). Therefore, these development paradigms naturally align with their own cultural backgrounds. For example, countries predominantly associated with the Anglo-Saxon world such as; the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand are all classified as developed countries according to dominant development frameworks (World Bank, 2023; United Nations, 2023). There are only a few developed countries without European/Caucasian dominance, such as Japan, South Korea, and Singapore (World Bank, 2023). It can be reasonably argued that in these countries as well, their cultural transformation and close historical and economic relationships with Western powers have contributed significantly to their development, particularly when measured according to dominant global development indicators (Sachs, 2010; Escobar, 2011).

7. CONCLUSION

The findings of this research underscore that culture is a fundamental, yet often overlooked, determinant of global development. While economic and political frameworks, such as Core-Periphery Dependency Theory and World-Systems Theory, provide valuable explanations for structural inequalities, they insufficiently address the ways cultural values, social norms, and historical experiences shape development pathways. The comparative case studies illustrate this clearly: Tristan da Cunha’s European-influenced settlement patterns, Mingingo Island’s adaptation to environmental and socio-political conditions, North Sentinel Island’s long-term sustainability without modern interventions,

and Bhutan’s culturally guided Gross National Happiness model each reflect how human behavior and cultural perspectives shape spatial organization, governance, and economic activity. These cases collectively reveal that development is not a uniform process; rather, it is contextually constructed, culturally mediated, and historically contingent. Dominant Western development paradigms, often measured through GDP or industrial indicators, risk marginalizing alternative forms of social progress that prioritize well-being, ecological balance, and community cohesion. Recognizing cultural diversity allows scholars and policymakers to understand why development interventions succeed in some regions and fail in others.

The research highlights the necessity of integrating cultural geography into global development discourse, emphasizing that development strategies must align with local values, traditions, and knowledge systems. By foregrounding culture, development can move beyond one-size-fits-all economic approaches and foster more inclusive, sustainable, and equitable outcomes. Ultimately, culture is not merely a backdrop for development but a driving force that shapes how societies conceptualize progress, interact with resources, and maintain social and ecological resilience in an interconnected world.

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