

Special issue editors: Martin Cerny, Sophie Gleitsmann, Lilian Pungas, Arman Spéth

What about the Second World? (Post-)Development lessons from the Global East

The hitherto hegemonic Western model of capitalist development is undergoing profound turbulence. It has been challenged both from the outside (most prominently from China and Russia) and from within (most notably by national conservatism and the far right). This development path to date is not only incapable to address the current polycrisis but it also falls short on its initial promise to guarantee economic prosperity (Jackson 2009). These turbulences may open the door to a variety of post-development futures – overcoming the ‘development’ paradigm and radically challenging the very concept of ‘development’ itself (Rahnema/Bawtree 1997). One way or another, an adequate response to the polycrisis will require resilient economic and societal models that can function during times of crisis and respond flexibly to them. The question remains as to whether inspiration can be drawn from past and present experiences, and whether the search for new futures overlooks some key ones.

Lessons from the so-called ‘Second World’ – the diverse post-Soviet/ post-socialist world – can be particularly instructive in this regard, both in a positive sense (rich real-world examples of solidarity-based subsistence economies, community resilience, or manifold different forms of political engagement) and in a negative sense (f.i. many of these practices are carried out of necessity-driven practices, the ‘change fatigue’ (Mau 2019) – a lack of trust in institutions – or against a backdrop of oligarchisation). Yet, despite a recent surge of academic output and worldly attention to its politics and culture (Trubina et al. 2020), this semi-peripheral Second World – which is neither periphery such as the “Third world”, nor centre like the ‘First World’ – seems still absent in academic and political spaces (Tlostanova 2015). Martin Müller (2020) has coined the term Global East – an analytical category for this diverse post-socialist world as an epistemic (not geographical) space – and argued that this liminal space in-between North and South has been systematically and epistemically excluded, neglected, ignored or overlooked. A space as a ‘void’ in the structure of global knowledge production, in which the Global South has a symbolic right to postcolonialism and the Global North to postmodernism, the Global East however remains without sufficient theoretical lenses with which to grasp its experiences, be it post-socialist or post-Soviet (Kravtsova 2022; Sovova et al. 2025). Engaging with the Global East is not only a matter of epistemic inclusivity but also an (too-often-neglected) opportunity to learn from a diverse region with a history of dramatic socio-economic transformation, following the collapse of the Soviet/ socialist development model.

Therefore, this special issue seeks to contribute to the emancipation of knowledge from the Global East and the visibility of a space too often overlooked. We ask whether there are knowledge, skills, and experiences in the Global East from which development studies and sustainability scholarship can learn or build upon. Furthermore, we hope to refine the concept of development and enrich the post-development theory and practice. Above all, we seek to identify alternatives that contribute to a transformation toward a more inclusive, sustainable, and democratic path, although perhaps not always intentionally – as the ‘quiet sustainability’ concept elucidates (Smith/Jehlička 2013). Finally, it seeks to sketch out how this can contribute to resilience and transformative potential in the context of today’s polycrisis.

We welcome papers that focus on the following topics *and* regions:

- all post-soviet countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Mongolia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Russia), Southern Europe/Balkan, and Central/Eastern Europe
- aims to overcome and counteract on the Western model of capitalist development, the idea of progress, or the 'catching-up' narrative
- critical assessment of (post-)colonialism/ imperialism or post-socialist developments
- decolonization processes, decoupling from Russia and/or other influences, on all societal levels
- Diverse and Community Economies (DCE) and Political Ecology
- In all of this, we invite submissions with a particular focus on gender/ feminist aspects, for instance in relation to subsistence and the role of unpaid labour.

Timeline

We invite authors from any discipline to send an abstract (maximum 300 words) including title, author(s), and institutional affiliation to sophie.gleitsmann@mattersburgerkreis.at by **September 30th, 2026**. We welcome both academic as well as non-academic contributions. By mid/end of October, 2026 we will invite authors to write their texts, and will inform all others about our decision. The deadline for the submission of full articles (35,000 characters, including spaces) is **January 31, 2027**. The special issue will be published in print and online in autumn 2027.

Guidelines

Please submit abstracts and full papers in **English or German**. Further information for potential authors as well as our formal guidelines, please see [here](#). For any questions regarding the procedures of publication, please contact sophie.gleitsmann@mattersburgerkreis.at.

References

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