

Collective self-reliance: A portrait of a Yugoslav development strategy

Abstract

Collective self-reliance is an interesting, nowadays forgotten development strategy that was popular between the 1950s and 1970s, particularly among the newly independent states of the "Third World". It was widely discussed in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s by Yugoslav researchers, among others. This paper aims to examine Yugoslav ideas on collective self-reliance from a historical perspective on the basis of original works from the time. It presents a brief history of the idea and its resonance in the non-aligned world, contemporary criticism, as well as political, economic and spatial dimensions of the strategy and the means by which it aims to achieve the goal of an economically independent, sovereign "Third World region". A summary of basic contrasts between two interpretations of collective self-reliance is given to illustrate the specifics of the Yugoslav approach. This developed strategy serves as a theoretical impulse to reintroduce the ideas of south-south cooperation to the development discourse.

Keywords

Collective self-reliance • collective autocentrism • Third World region
• Yugoslavia

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Introduction

Development studies became an important interdisciplinary research field after World War II. The Cold War and the political division between the West and the Eastern Bloc created tensions between the main geopolitical powers of the time. This had important implications on development models proposed on both sides of the Iron Curtain as well as in the "rest of the world".

The aim of this paper is to refresh and present a development strategy that was created by Yugoslav researchers. This strategy was analysed on the basis of original contemporary Yugoslav works including books, articles in scientific journals, papers presented at conferences and working meetings, brochures and booklets of institutes and state bodies involved in development research. Although there are a few publications on the idea of self-reliance itself, the materials cited here are not easily accessible to the wider scientific community due to their age and the general lack of available translations. This paper gives a "photographic" insight into the body of Yugoslav theory that was still being developed in 1989, the year of publication of the most recent work analysed and only two years before the breakup of Yugoslavia and onset of the war which put an end to development research in the collapsing country.

The collective self-reliance strategy was an original concept for speeding up development in underdeveloped regions. It was particularly aimed at members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), of which Yugoslavia was one of the founders. Revisiting this concept today on the basis of these original Yugoslav works is an attempt to contribute to the ongoing discussion on methods of confronting problems of underdevelopment in a way that is not frequently encountered these days. The paper aims to contribute to the body of the history of European development thought in the 20th century.

The scientific approach of Yugoslav scientists working on the collective self-reliance strategy can be classified as either marxist or structuralist, with a strong notion of dependency theory. Important works on the strategy were published by Ljubiša Adamović (1979), Rikard Štajner (1989), Janez Stanovnik (1979), Dunja Pasizzzi-Ferenčić (1980) and Srđan Kerim (1983, 1985).

Model framework

The new geopolitical constellation and decolonisation of African and Asian countries that were plagued by economic and institutional deficiencies resulted in the need to work out ways of

improving the state of their economies and the living conditions of their populations.

Most of the development strategies in the post-war period clearly adhered to one of the two dominating political ideologies. Regardless of this opposition, an independent development concept designed within and for the community of non-aligned countries emerged – collective self-reliance. It was presented and discussed at NAM meetings and constituted an original attempt to define the future shape of the so-called New International Economic Order (NIEO).

In short, the collective self-reliance strategy can be understood as a scheme of political and economic concepts and goals aimed at changing the rapport of relative economic power and mutual dependence of subjects (states) on the international economic level (Kerim 1983, p. 224). Its final goal was to reshape the global economic order so that it reaches the stage conceptualised in the *Declaration for the Establishment of a New International Economic Order*. The *Declaration* was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly 1974 and it postulated new principles of *interdependence* and *interrelationship* for all subjects in international trade.

Interdependence (*međuzavisnost*) is the central axis of the Yugoslav self-reliance concept and the strategy itself is an attempt to draft the shortest possible route to achieving this goal. The strategy of collective self-reliance was part of the Yugoslav international policy of non-alignment and peaceful coexistence (*miroljubiva koegzistencija*), adopted as official doctrine at the Belgrade Conference 1961 (Vukov 2006, p. 68.) and is also referred to as the “collective autocratic development strategy” (*kolektivni autocratizam*). It postulates the reshaping of economic and technological cooperation between developing countries so that they gain more bargaining power in international trade. Intensifying mutual cooperation is a *sine qua non* of economic and political development in the Third World.

Apart from an economic dimension, the strategy had a strong social component based on an emphasis on the basic needs approach. The moment at which the strategy emerged gives the historical context in which the Third World sought to orient itself towards both the capitalist North as well as the socialist world. This positioning included not only political, but also economic measures, both closely interconnected and incorporated into the body of the model.

Since the *Declaration on Non-Alignment and Economic Progress* adopted during the Third Conference of Heads of State or Government of NAM 1970, self-reliance “became the main plank of the non-aligned countries and the movement’s principal contribution to the international development discussions” (Savant 1982, p. 197). The signatories to the Declaration committed themselves to mutual economic cooperation, increasing trade exchange among partner states, securing production increases in certain sectors with export potential to partner countries, promoting travel and tourism between them, exchanging technical know-how, simplifying information flows and working out a scheme of preferences in favour of primary commodities produced in the Third World.

Economic declaration, adopted by the Fifth NAM Summit in Colombo in 1976, formulates the ideological basis of collective autocracy: maximising of the use of one’s own economic potential for internal advantages through one’s very own local resources, actively shaping conditions for and pursuing the principles of NIEO, intensifying cooperation between the peripheral countries and promoting their solidarity and integration against the “imperialist” (globalised) economic pressure from the “centre” (Pavlič 1985, p. 25). UNCTAD Secretary General Gamani Corea called this one of the promising development strategies, along with the integrated programme for commodities (Varghese 1991, p. 160).

In 1979 the Group of 77 adopted the *Arusha Programme for Collective Self-Reliance and Framework for Negotiations*, defining mutual economic cooperation of developing countries as a *sine qua non* for eventual establishment of NIEO (Kerim 1983, p. 148). The *Arusha Programme* is an action plan that drafts a *global system of trade preferences among developing countries* (GSTP) and was adopted in New Delhi in 1985 as the *Declaration on the Global System of Trade Preferences*.

Understanding development

The research on autocratic development used the term *development* in a much broader sense than one defined only by GNP growth. Great importance was attached to structural systemic changes that lead to breaking the dependency of the periphery on the centre. Dependency (*zavisnost*) is characterised by linking the economies of developing states to those of developed states in a submissive, conditioning manner whereby decisions about development are directly dependent on processes occurring in the economies of the centre (Espinoza 1977, p. 8). The internal sector structure of national economies is a function of their capability to conform to the world’s capitalist system. This submissive position means that in practice, the developing countries “depend on others” rather than “depend on their own resources and efforts” as postulated by the collective self-reliance strategy.

The main paths of autocratic development were defined by Kerim (1983, p. 31) and include:

1. Strengthening the internal market and stimulating domestic demand. Once this is accomplished, the external dependency will decrease, *ceteris paribus*. This could mean a move to development projects and foreign trade policies that may not seem optimal in a static cost calculation but on a macro scale, they turn out to be more accurate than projects that fulfil conditions of micro-rentability thanks to powerful external effects generated by growing domestic demand;
2. Diversification of the economy structure (introducing new sectors and branches), changes in export structure, import of *know-how* and technology transfers between developing countries;
3. Modifications to general price structures, which are themselves determined by the situation on the world market and the international division of labour. Underrepresentation of agricultural goods from poorer countries is very common but should not discourage them from developing their agricultural sector, especially with regard to the availability of unused land resources;

4. Maximising the use of local resources. Most frequently, the available resources are land and agricultural cultures that are not profitable in terms of global trade and are subject to large oscillations in prices. To tackle this problem, investments in manufacturing industry are advised, as manufactured goods are usually sold at higher prices;

5. "Endogenous industrialisation" or "autonomous industrialisation for the people", oriented principally towards the domestic market that increases agricultural productivity. This would lead to income growth of the majority of the (rural) population and provide durable employment, what neither import-substitution nor industrialisation oriented towards external markets were able to achieve (Kerim 1985, p. 110).

The assumption here is that formulating the goals in an endogenous manner will adjust the whole development process to local cultures, traditions and specific economic patterns etc. The main obstacles to development are the accumulation structure, the state of the agricultural sector, export structure and condition of human capital (labour). All of these factors are, to a greater or lesser extent, "internal" and this is why the postulated reorientation of policy towards domestic market reforms and greater independence in managing one's own resources seems more plausible than inducing development from the outside through aid projects. Aid controlled by aid providers all too often leads to the emergence of "dual economies" and technology enclaves from which profits are transferred directly to foreign investors or license holders. According to the Yugoslav strategy, economic independence and utilisation of locally abundant resources, taking into account their uncompetitiveness on the global level, together with greater focus on regional solidarity are the only rational strategies for breaking down the permanent crisis of the Third World.

Regional solidarity is a response to the economic and social challenges of the globalising world. Tight regional cooperation, establishing joint institutions and production companies and regulatory measures are seen as means of remaining independent while engaging in regional and international projects that benefit the respective economies at the same time. The still-existing Caribbean CARICOM is largely based on the above-mentioned principles.

Power of trade vs. power of the poor

Collective self-reliance puts great emphasis on developing greater solidarity and multilateral trade cooperation within the developing world. It underlines the need to increase direct trade exchange between both the countries of the South and the developed North along with internal reforms, increasing productivity, increasing the profitability of utilisation of local resources and developing cooperation schemes that benefit other partners from the South. Authors who contributed to the modelling of this strategy called their orientation "normativist" as opposed to the "dissociativists" who, following Senghaas (1977), Amin (1978) and Galtung (1977a), postulated a break with any kind of political and economic cooperation of unequal character. The normativists' position that is characteristic for Yugoslav works is highly trade-oriented and its premises do not exclude countries other than NAM members from mutual economic interactions and trade. What is more, it sees itself

as a means of achieving NIEO and hopes for a more comprehensive cooperation based on principles of justice and solidarity, both between the developing and the developed countries.

Table 1 illustrates the basic differences in the normativists' and dissociativists' approaches to collective self-reliance.

Table 1. The basic differences between the Normative and Dissociative approaches to collective self-reliance

	Component of the strategy:	Dissociativist	Normativist
1.	Embracing the idea of local, regional and international self-reliance	+	+
2.	Embracing the postulates of NIEO	—	+
3.	Maximising agricultural productivity	+	+
4.	Industrialisation and new technologies; technology transfers	+ / —	+
5.	Orientation towards strengthening trade with both developing, developed and socialist countries	—	+
6.	Central economic planning	+	—
7.	Self-sufficiency in food	+	—
8.	Increase in unconditional aid	—	+
9.	Basic-needs approach	+	+

The general priorities of mutual cooperation and support were defined as follows: realisation of the principles of NIEO; increasing the economic potential of respective countries; creating a basis for joint production and economic complementarity on a regional and global level; promoting direct cooperation to eliminate mediators from the developed world (Todorović 1985, p. 117); undertaking collective efforts towards the creation of a new regional division of labour between developing countries (Adamović 1979, p. 18).

As the strategy did not imply any strict prejudging of particular national policies, self-reliance was not necessarily understood to be possible only in a centrally planned economy. The strategy did emphasise the need for a strong regulative policy and the role of the state in devising macroeconomic policy and controlling available resources. However, the extreme heterogeneity of the non-aligned countries in terms of their economic development objectives and other characteristics, such as territory, population, availability of resources etc., did not allow for the creation of any specific recipe for policies regarding the functioning of the market.

Nonetheless, the particular Yugoslav experiences proved that the state cannot replace the role of the market (Svetličić & Rojec, cited in Štajner 1991).

Three spatial dimensions of self-reliance

All authors agree on distinguishing three levels of self-reliance: local, national and regional (Galtung 1977a, p. 7). This division implies the direction of postulated changes: from reforms in national economies, through their integration and cooperation on a regional plane ("Third World region") to eventual establishment of NIEO on a global plane.

Local self-reliance refers clearly to the greater utilisation of available resources in a defined geographic space. "Development" is seen not only as an economic indicator, it also combines social structures, institutions and general *public welfare* (Stanovnik 1979, p. 103). National self-reliance means full national control over resources and sovereign economic policy, including control of domestic prices. Regional self-reliance implies the development of a joint production basis and cooperation system that is open to any interested country (Kerim 1985, p. 117), trade preferences for other developing partners – "linking periphery to periphery" – and horizontal cooperation. This could even lead to intensification of overall world trade exchange because of trade cooperation between geographical neighbours who had often had no economic relations at all up to this point (Galtung 1977a, p. 7). Active economic and political cooperation between developing states would create new opportunities for restructuring the system of global economic relations (Pastizzi-Ferenčić 1980, p. 3).

Satisfaction of basic needs

Collective autocentrism postulated the strengthening of mutual economic cooperation and internal economic reforms in each country to create a quasi self-sufficient region and eventually, a global economy based on NIEO. Every country was free to join the "Third World cooperation region" in compliance with the principles of non-alignment. In spite of differences in the local economic, climatic and social characteristics of the joining countries, a common denominator of this policy was the satisfaction of the population's basic needs (Kerim 1983, p. 49).

A system of basic human needs assessment was developed in order to evaluate the development progress of the region. The system was inspired by Marx and his differentiation between basic physiologic needs, needs that arise from traditions and customs and social needs (Štajner 1976, p. 249). The system was planned as a counterbalance to other basic needs theories that arose in the 1980s (World Bank, OECD) and concentrated mostly on biological aspects (e.g. minimum calorie intake, minimum health care or clothing). Collective autocentrism emphasised particularly the need for creative and productive work that could only be met in a democratic, politically and economically independent society. The postulated decentralisation of decision-making was based on Yugoslav experiences with workers' self-management (*samoupravljanje*). Social needs should be fulfilled in a dynamic process that progressed from dependence, through self-reliance to eventual global interdependence.

Tables 2 and 3 illustrate the concept of basic needs and the means of their fulfilment.

Table 2. The concept of basic human needs

Principles:	Elements:	
	A. Psychosocial:	B. Biophysiological:
Autonomy	Creativity	Nourishment
Equality	Identity	Shelter
Solidarity	Autonomy	Health care
Parity	Cooperation	Communication
Participation	Participation	Education
Cooperation (interdependence)	Authenticity	Occupation

Source: Kerim 1983, p.54.

Table 3. Meeting needs in the collective self-reliance strategy

Principles:	Elements:
Sovereignty	Sovereign control over national resources
Independence	Priority of production to fulfill the basic needs of the population
Solidarity	Adjusting technology to the social and cultural structure of society
Equality	Creativity and mass participation in economic management
	Vertical and horizontal solidarity (local and regional self-reliance)
	Selective participation in the international division of labour

Source: Kerim 1983, p.54.

Instruments of economic cooperation

Collective self-reliance was a complex approach to economic cooperation of the developing world (Kerim 1983, p. 71). The short-term objective was to strengthen its bargaining power on a global level, while the long-term goal included deep structural changes in national economies and in the world system that were based on concentrating on one's own resources and efforts (Štajner 1989, p. 100).

The key issue in achieving NIEO is the establishment of a system of trade preferences on a global level. It should be introduced gradually, based on traditional custom concessions and accompanied by cooperation at a local and regional scale. To intensify technology transfers, bilateral agreements between cities, regions and states were proposed, to be concluded independently on all self-reliant levels. Such decentralisation in decision-making would ensure better diagnosis of the problems and needs of specific places. Scientific cooperation should give priority to education and provide access to technical documentation for joint projects. This would stimulate unused human capital and economic resources, creating conditions for a real "revolution of social intelligence" (Lukman et al. 1986, p. 8). Yugoslav projects that illustrate such technology transfer include the construction of a hydroelectric power facility in Kenya (performed by INGRA), hydrogeological research and borings in Venezuela (Projektni biro

TEB), irrigation projects in Iran (Elektroprojekt), export of irrigation pumps to Egypt (Jugoturbina-INGRA), joint vegetable raising experiments with Sudan (IPK Osijek) and the construction of radio stations in Libya (RTZ Zagreb) (Švob-Đokić, Samardžija & Polić 1984, p. 38).

To coordinate such an extensive cooperation, it was necessary to establish a network of specialised consultancy centres that would take over research on integrating economies, as well as strategic resources and products. Furthermore, an export-promoting agency should be set up to enhance information flows about opportunities for export within the "Third World region", as well as a central institution engaged in financing investments and facilitating access to developing markets for investors from partner countries (Kerim 1983). Such an institution would undoubtedly be a direct rival to the World Bank, which began to be perceived as an instrument of "colonial" aid policies. Apart from conventional foreign investment and joint ventures, multinational production companies were also planned. These collectively owned companies would work on strategic projects on the territory of partner states and their input and output was to be logically harmonised with the existing sector structure and geographical characteristics of the region. Such cooperation would base development on a foundation of long-term import contracts, technological cooperation and barter agreements. The social component was not neglected: literacy, stimulation of human creativeness, combating social exclusion and promoting the role of women in society were also strongly advocated (Tomšić, Klemen-Krek & Kovačić 1986).

The Yugoslav development strategy was aimed at every interested country. Despite the strong "autocentric" component, it rejected self-sufficiency or autarchy. This development vision aimed to create a space of solidarity and cooperation beyond political divisions, in accordance with the spirit of *Panchashila* (Nehru) and peaceful coexistence (Tito). These were also the two most important priorities of the entirety of Yugoslav foreign policy (Vučković 1981, p. 32) and were followed by the horizontal cooperation between equal partners, political and economic independence, mutual technological aid and openness towards global trade flows (Galogaža 1987, p. 165).

Not only did Yugoslavia work on new development strategies, it also realised at least some of its postulates. The share of developing countries in the overall Yugoslav commodity exchange rose significantly from 1972 and stabilised at 16% in 1977¹. At the same time, exports to developing countries increased by a factor of 10 while imports rose by 8.3 times. Direct investment accounted for between 82% and 89% of overall Yugoslav exports to these countries, with projects carried out in Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Angola and Gabon (Galogaža 1987, p. 84).

The Yugoslav collective self-reliance strategy inspired many politicians and development professionals and not only in the Balkans. In Tanzania it became almost a state ideology under president Nyerere in the form of his concept of *ujamaa* (Okoko 1987). Despite criticism from the West, this experiment with self-reliance

was considered positive in the country itself (Ibhawoh & Dibua 2003). In Vietnam and Cameroon (Fonchingong & Fonjong 2003), agro-cooperatives based on local autocentrism are still in existence. CARICOM in the Caribbean is an example of regional cooperation founded largely on autonomous utilisation of regional resources (Blake & Hall 1979).

Critical views

Collective autocentrism was criticised both from liberal and Marxist positions. The main criticism was directed at the somewhat utopian view of potential Third World solidarity (Wolfe 1979). It was much easier to achieve a common stance on the political aspects of non-alignment than to accept a framework of economic action and reforms. Some authors claim that cooperation between the poor cannot lead to prosperity. Bauer (1977) argues that the people addressed by this strategy cannot be regarded as a meaningful community or even collective, and therefore cannot benefit from any overall framework or formula for development. Another problem was the question of how a state can reach the stage from which it can develop autonomously based principally on its own resources. In the 1970s there was already a level of disillusionment about the perspectives of South-South cooperation and a large discrepancy between declarations, projects and real actions could be clearly seen. Collective self-reliance became one of the bargaining tactics used towards countries of the North rather than a strategy of autonomous development (Svetličić 1989). On the other hand, it was sometimes regarded as too liberal and trade-oriented, aimed only at changing terms of trade in favour of the poor and not the very division of labour, thereby creating a sort of "capitalism for everybody" (Galtung 1977b).

Current perspectives

Yugoslav collective autocentrism is worth revisiting today as its basic ideas started to reappear in the 1990s in form of criticism of globalisation. Rejection of the overwhelming logic of international trade based on maximum profits for transnational oligopolies, coupled with reaffirmation of endogenous development theories, dominates the new discourse. Movements such as neozapatism in Mexico, the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil and Abahlali baseMjondolo in South Africa seem to be distant echoes of the bygone hope of achieving a more just world order that is based on local and regional self-reliance.

Today, in the globalised and economically deeply polarised world, it is the ideas of solidarity and justice that lie behind the self-reliance strategy that are most worthy of attention. The ideological axis of collective autocentric strategy is very up-to-date. The dominance of the discourse of the free and self-regulating market pushes aside ideas of independence and solidarity of the poor. The postulates of collective self-reliance could well be used as a theoretical impulse to break the impasse in the field of development research. This interesting and theoretically elaborated development vision is a fertile alternative for all researchers and politicians fighting for economic and social improvements in the developing world.

¹ In the light of the ideas of collective self-reliance, this figure can be regarded as too low. The reality did not always conform to the postulates and was thus subject to constant criticism (see below).

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