



ALTERNAUTAS

(Re)Searching Development: The Abya Yala Chapter

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Alternautas in The Changing Landscape of Latin America's and Global Development Imaginaries

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Alternautas is a peer reviewed academic journal that publishes content related to Latin American Critical Development Thinking.

It intends to serve as a platform for testing, circulating, and debating new ideas and reflections on these topics, expanding beyond the geographical, cultural and linguistic boundaries of Latin America - Abya Yala. We hope to contribute to connecting ideas, and to provide a space for intellectual exchange and discussion for a nascent academic community of scholars, devoted to counter-balancing mainstream understandings of development.

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First off, a very warm welcome to this landmark issue of *Alternautas*, now hosted in an OJS platform at the University of Warwick. Opening our first issue as an OJS journal is a significant milestone and in this editorial introduction we would like to share with you, our dear readers, some insights about our journey so far. *Alternautas* collective editorial project has been one of the pioneers in the creation of decentralized and collaborative media platforms for the production and dissemination of non-mainstream academic and activist knowledge.

Born between Europe and Latin America, *Alternautas* has come a long way since early 2013, when a core group of like-minded then-PhD candidates started tinkering around with the idea of creating a novel research, discussion, and publication format. Our aim was to contribute to the mainstreaming of knowledge from (and on) the global South for a global audience, and to do so while exploring the boundaries of scholarly publishing. Our reasoning at this time remained unchanged:

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The world of hyper information in which we live creates the illusion of a fairly democratized circulation and access to knowledge worldwide. Sadly, this is far from being true. This is especially visible in the dominance of the English language serving the reproduction of mainstream Eurocentric frameworks and Western epistemic canons, as much of decolonial thought has reminded us (Quijano 2007, Mignolo 2011, Sousa Santos 2016). This has also been particularly clear in discourses on the project of “development” (concepts, models, descriptions and prescriptions), or – more generally – on the regulative principles steering the evolution of contemporary societies in the larger context of human-made transgressions of ecological boundaries which threaten survival prospects for humankind (Quijano 2000, Escobar 1995, Rist 2008).

We are still convinced that there exists a vast and valuable production of relevant and original thinking on these issues in Latin America, or *Abya Yala*, as many native populations refer to it. However, this knowledge remains largely confined to regional boundaries in part due to language barriers. *Alternautas* emerged from a desire to bridge such barriers, by bringing Latin-American intellectual critical reflections on development and ecology to larger, English-speaking, audiences. Since the launch of *Alternautas* in 2014, we have increasingly focused particularly on post-colonial and decolonial approaches, yet our commitment to alternative and critical development frameworks has extended beyond that. *Alternautas* seeks to recover Latin America’s critical tradition in development debates both contemporary and in the past, which have been eclipsed by mainstream frameworks such as modernization and dependency theories.

Indeed, it is only in the last half decade, in the wake of the broad impact of the Black Lives Matter movement, the mainstreaming of nature crises and climate change as a political agenda topic and of related justice struggles, that we witness a proliferation of postcolonial and decolonial approaches to academic scholarship, particularly in the field of development studies (e.g. Kornprobst and et al. 2019; Orbie 2021; Capan 2017). We take pride in being among the pioneers who have contributed to the advancement of critical development and sustainability studies, at the interface with other academic fields such as Latin American and global studies, political and social ecology, ecological economics and more. Creating a platform to amplify, recover and share the rich critical Latin American heritage and contemporary thinking on these issues will always be at the core of *Alternautas*’ mission.

Alternautas has also intended to serve as a platform for testing, circulating, and debating new ideas and reflections on these topics, expanding beyond the

geographical, cultural and linguistic boundaries of Latin America – Abya Yala. Thus, we continue to encourage bolder and engaged, exploratory and imaginative academic thinking, which also seeks to balance out the epistemic bias of the mainstream social sciences in favor of positivism, rationalism, individualism, and utilitarianism; in sum: Eurocentrism. We are persuaded that the enterprise of imagining (or highlighting existing imaginations of) different worlds and engaging with their realization does not have to come at the expense of rigor and systematicity in academic production. On the contrary, therein lies the crucial *raison d'être* of academics in a world fraught with unsettling cultural, political, and technological changes while at the same time seemingly incapable of changing trajectories to ensure biospheric stability. Hence the name *Alternautas*, from the latin *alter-* (“other”) and *nauta* (“sailor”) emerged. We hoped to contribute connecting ideas, and providing a space for intellectual exchange and discussion for a nascent and, by now, established academic community of scholars, devoted to counter-balancing mainstream understandings of (sustainable) development. And thus to the emergence of a “pluriverse” of pathways to a possible future of cultural diversity with universal dignity of human life and ecological sustainability of the biosphere as a whole.

The history of *Alternautas* started and evolved, as most innovations do, with a large dose of serendipity. To the crossing-paths among the four founding members of *Alternautas*, who are authoring this short introduction, and the many more that have joined us along the way - and, in turns, took over protagonism when it came to infusing new energy to the project a - we feel today the need to additionally mention the multiple casual encounters and conversations with leading critical Latin American intellectuals and practitioners that set us on this path. Here we would like to acknowledge and express our gratitude to Catherine Walsh, Walter D'Almeida, Miriam Lang, Alberto Acosta, Eduardo Gudynas, Arturo Escobar and Maristella Svampa, who have encouraged and boosted the dissemination of our work in our initial stage, but also illuminated it with their thinking and sometimes contributed directly with original or republished content. We would also like to thank the University of Warwick for giving us a new home and allowing us to take our next steps as a journal whilst maintaining the commitment to open access at *Alternautas'* core. To all of them we owe a debt of gratitude.

On the other hand, there is our large network of collaborators, from those taking care of the daily business in the Editorial Board to those who contribute their publications, contacts, or strategic counselling on an intermittent basis. From the

very beginning, *Alternautas* aimed at building a loose network of like-minded individuals, willing to voluntarily take on the task to write, search or translate the most timely and relevant pieces of Latin American academic work into English. Soon this expanded towards opening calls for papers, reviewing and publishing original knowledge from and on Latin America, focusing (though not exclusively) on young scholars at the beginning of their academic careers. Our focus was interdisciplinary, bringing a socio-ecological and *glocal* perspective to the table that was informed by the academic and cultural background of the members. The lived experiences of *Alternautas*' editors, living, working and studying in diverse and hybrid spaces of collaboration around the globe has left a decisive imprint in *Alternautas*' identity, themes, and ways of working. Our editorial board has been a dynamic space throughout the years, with editors joining us from Universities in Australia, North and Latin America and Europe. We have had the pleasure – and the challenge – of coordinating lengthy editorial board meetings across the most diverse time zones, and across multiple commitments.

To many of us, *Alternautas* has offered a space from where to navigate the precariousness of academic life. We have grown in our discussions, nurturing our philosophical and collective imaginaries, in our scholarly praxis and academic solidarity, learning, exploring and challenging the boundaries of academic editorial work while maintaining our commitment to critical and alternative knowledge frameworks from and on Latin America. Some of the innovations brought in *Alternautas* were the rapid online publication of peer reviewed academic pieces in a blog format, online including a commentary function to encourage researchers and readers to share and discuss their insights. This also included a twofold publication process which started with the peer-reviewed online version, was then aggregated into a collective open access journal issue for download on a biannual basis. We did our best to try and combine conjunctural hot topics - yet often neglected or marginally covered by, mainstream media – with an analysis of their bottom-line, global implications from a socio-ecological perspective. Additionally, our editorial work has been carried out, by highly self-motivated, volunteering *Alternautas* in the form of an organically emerging network distributed around the world, based on regular calls for membership.

This de facto has given rise to a multifaceted, global institutional and collaborative academic network in the process, that has been entirely run self-funded all these years, by early career academics and graduate students (and most of us have moved across these academic categories while being members of *Alternautas*). Although *Alternautas* has mainly published in English, the working language of the

team has mostly been Spanish, which can be seen as an attempt of striking for a balance between the symbolic emancipation from and the pragmatic use of the English language as a bridge to the perceived-to-be-centres of academic knowledge production in the global North. Finally, *Alternautas* was to serve as an information hub too, thus regularly publishing news on relevant topics, scholarships, conference announcement and job opportunities on its website and related social media channels.

Alternautas was officially launched in May 2014, arguably around the peak of the so-called “Pink Wave” of left-leaning governments in Latin America. These governments demonstrated an approach to social and economic policy that was in stark contrast to the widespread neoliberal austerity approach and the receding of the social state in Europe and the United States, following a thread of financial crises and the “War on Terror”. Both the phenomena of economic reprimarization observable in Latin-America and the associated intensification of extractivism, on the one hand, and the heyday of Buen Vivir/Vivir Bien debates in Latin America on the other, constituted the pivotal urge to bring these discussions to a wider audience in and around the vast field of development and international studies, but also political ecology and political economy. At the same time, the authoritarian tendencies growing in the region called for a more nuanced analysis of the ground-level effects of “progressive” Latin American governments, amplifying the voice of indigenous actors and other historically marginalized populations groups, as well as mainstreaming ecological perspectives. At the moment of writing, pathbreaking change in the region becomes palpable. To name a few, the unprecedented outcome of the last presidential election in Colombia, but also the upcoming referendum on the new constitution in Chile in September 2022, together with the accelerated impact of the Pyrocene in the region, will certainly require our attention and spark future debates.

Now, nine years later, with over one hundred articles published, in eight volumes with two issues each, we are opening the first lines of an exciting new chapter. Launching *Alternautas* on an OJS platform, will allow its already open-access content to be more readily accessible, ensuring our high quality content to be more easily shared and to propel forward the current discussions in the field, which are more dynamic and timely than ever. You are warmly invited to join, read, share and engage!

Yours sincerely,

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Founding members of *Alternautas*

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