

## *Call for Papers*

### *DEVELOPMENT NARRATIVES IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS*

#### *International Conference Interdisciplinary Perspectives*

*Université Côte d'Azur (Nice, France)*

*November 19-20, 2026*

#### *Scientific direction*

Daniel Ventura  
Associate Pr. of Public Law  
Université Côte d'Azur  
[daniel.ventura@univ-cotedazur.fr](mailto:daniel.ventura@univ-cotedazur.fr)

#### **Conference Overview**

Since 2015, the Sustainable development Goals (SDGs) have become the central framework of multilateral action for development and a key pillar of the legitimacy of international organizations (Ios).

By adopting this framework, structured around 17 goals and 169 targets, international organizations have reoriented their action around a simplified and encompassing grammar promoting a universal and consensual vision of development: “no poverty,” “zero hunger,” “good health,” and so on.

Over the past two decades, scholarship in Humanities has examined the role of “buzzwords” in development policies, highlighting the emergence of a “development speak” characterized by depersonalized, polysemic language capable of aligning heterogeneous positions without resolving underlying tensions (Cornwall & Brock, 2005). While these studies have shed light on the strategic use of development vocabulary, they have largely overlooked more structured forms of meaning-making. This is precisely where “development narratives” (Gulrajani, 2022) come into play. Within international organizations, such narratives do not merely rely on isolated keywords; they structure, articulate, and operationalize the guiding principles of the SDGs.

Development narratives can be understood as relatively stable sets of statements that diagnose the causes of underdevelopment and legitimize specific instruments and policy choices. Prominent examples include “*Leaving No One Behind*” (UNDP), “*One Health*” (FAO/WHO), “*Aid for Trade*” (WTO), “*Smart Development*” (World Bank), or “*Decent Work*” (ILO). Alongside these institutionalized narratives, more diffuse or alternative narratives also exist, such as *Buen Vivir*, radical food systems transformation, structural transformation, or collective autonomy.

### Research Focus

Far from conveying a homogeneous vision of development, these narratives are marked by profound plurality and ambivalence. They unfold along multiple lines of tension: geographical (North-South vs. South-South cooperation), political (multilateral, nationalist, or solidaristic narratives), conceptual (growth, innovation, basic needs, sustainability, poverty reduction), and instrumental (aid effectiveness vs. global partnership approaches).

IOs occupy a distinctive position within these dynamics. They are not only producers of development narratives, shaping and stabilizing them, but also arenas in which these narratives circulate, are translated, reconfigured, and contested. Bringing together a wide range of actors – member states, partner institutions, civil society organizations, and private actors – they function simultaneously as vectors and sites of transformation of development narratives.

In this context, the conference aims to examine the mutual relationship between international organizations and development narratives: what international organizations do to narratives – by producing, stabilizing, and circulating them – and what these narratives do, in turn, to international organizations – by shaping their practices, structuring their action, and affecting the conditions of their legitimacy.

### Methodological approach

The conference seeks to foster an interdisciplinary dialogue at the intersection of discourse analysis, communication studies, political science, political economy, and law. Each of these perspectives offers specific tools to analyse development narratives across their different dimensions: their construction, circulation, uses, effects, and contestation within international organizations.

**Contributions are invited to engage with one or more clearly identified development narratives, examined through specific empirical cases within international organizations. Particular attention will be given to proposals that bridge disciplinary perspectives.**

### Panels

The conference is structured around four analytical dimensions of development narratives. These panels are not intended as disciplinary silos: contributions from all fields are welcome in any panel, depending on their approach and object of study.

#### Panel 1 – Constructing Development Narratives

*How do international organizations construct development narratives?*

This panel focuses on the discursive formation of development narratives.

Possible topics include:

- Key categories, keywords, and recurring expressions (e.g., “partnership,” “inclusion,” “resilience,” “radical transformation,” “innovation”);
- narrative structures (problem framing, causal links, projected futures);
- strategies for coherence-building or tension-neutralization;
- variations across organizations (World Bank, FAO, UNIDO, regional development banks, etc.)

## **Panel 2 – Circulation and Transformation of Narratives**

*How do development narratives circulate, and how are they transformed in this process?*

This panel explores how narratives move across actors, institutions and scales.

Topics may include:

- processes of appropriation of development narratives by international organizations and their partners ;
- translation, reformulation, and hybridization of narratives ;
- interactions between IOs, states, donors, NGOs, and private actors ;
- circulation of narratives across global, regional, and national levels

## **Panel 3 – Legal and Institutional Effects**

*What do development narratives do to the law and institutional structures of international organizations?*

This panel examines the effects of narratives on legal and institutional frameworks.

Topics may include:

- impact of narratives on norms, standards, and legal instruments ;
- transformations of mandates, governance priorities, and functions ;
- institutional restructuring ;
- effects in terms of legitimacy or delegitimation

## **Panel 4 – Contestation and Reconfiguration**

*How are development narratives challenged, and with what consequences?*

This panel addresses the contestation of development narratives within and around international organizations.

Topics may include:

- explicit contestation and emergence of counter-narratives;
- competing narratives within or between organizations;
- tensions between narratives and practice;
- processes of resistance, reinterpretation, and critical appropriation

## Submission Guidelines and Timeline

**The call is open to scholars at all career stages, including doctoral candidates and early-career researchers.**

Proposals (300–500 words) should include:

- a provisional title
- the selected panel
- the development narrative(s) under study
- the empirical case(s)
- the disciplinary approach

Particular attention will be given to proposals that bring multiple disciplinary perspectives into dialogue.

Proposals may be submitted no later than Monday, June 1, 2026, to the following address: [ladie@univ-cotedazur.fr](mailto:ladie@univ-cotedazur.fr)

Authors will be notified of the decision of the organizing committee no later than Monday, June 29.

Selected participants will be required to submit, by November 2, 2026 at the latest, an extended abstract of their presentation (3-4 pages), intended to facilitate the preparation of discussions.

The conference will take place in Nice, at the Faculty of Law and Political Science, on Thursday, November 19 and Friday, November 20, 2026.

## Publication

Selected contributions will be considered for publication in a collective volume. Further details will be provided after the conference.