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## Editorial

### Socio-territorial Innovation and Innovative Development Models: The Challenges of Social and Environmental Justice

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## **Editorial**

# **Socio-territorial Innovation and Innovative Development Models: The Challenges of Social and Environmental Justice**

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Social and environmental justice are evolving as highly interconnected issues, if not completely unified ones, in ongoing research and analysis processes (Svampa, 2020; Van den Broeck, 2020). The convergence between social and environmental justice is emerging as much in political, social and economic spheres as in environmental ones out of reflection and action on territorial development.

### **Socio-environmental Transformation and Action Models**

This convergence could be explained by various theoretical approaches, the first being an analysis of the current social, political and environmental transformations, which explains global climate change as a product of the multidimensional transformation that the Earth has undergone due to human activity in a context that Moore defines as *the Capitalocene*. “The Capitalocene does not stand for capitalism as an economic and social system. It is not a radical inflection of Green Arithmetic. Rather, the Capitalocene signifies capitalism as a way of organizing nature—as a multispecies, situated, capitalist world-ecology.” (Moore, 2016, p. 6, as cited in Alberio & Soubirou, 2022) Here, Moore stipulates that the dominant development model depends on a connection between the environment and society that is not always overt. As for the interactions between environment and community, the influence is reciprocal and manifold. Development through capitalism in northern countries has greatly affected the environment, which in turn has affected individuals and social groups to different degrees depending on context and demographics. In other words, environmental transformations have played a part in

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reinforcing inequalities and vulnerabilities for certain individuals and groups, and the effects of these transformations on the system, and on the capacity of groups and individuals to deal with them, vary depending on social, economic and geographic context. Thus, the issues that define collectives affected by various social and environmental vulnerabilities tend to intersect (Ford & Smit, 2004), converging toward a common aspiration of social and environmental justice. All scientific disciplines are concerned with this convergence (Lefèvre, 2020), which requires revisiting the epistemological and theoretical approaches at stake.

In occidental cultures where the former level of social cohesion and well-being has been eroded and where the effects of climate change have put extra pressure on social systems, confronting these social and environmental issues—which are both global and local one—requires applying new territorial development action models (Klein & Pecqueur, 2020). Strategies that traditionally aimed to intensify the economic competitiveness of local communities in a sectorized and deterritorialized market, and to regulate them on a global scale, must be revisited, modified and replaced by action models that favour the integrated development of territories by viewing them as living environments and not as repositories of resources to be valued uniquely for their productivity (Glon & Pecqueur, 2016). The extractive approach applied in territorial development models during the era of Fordism, and then as a response to the crisis of Fordism, should be replaced by an approach favouring a more just societal and ecological transition, one that is more respectful of both citizens' rights and nature. Therefore, priority should be given to experimenting with new perspectives that foster, on the one hand, the development of all facets contributing to citizens' quality of life, including tangible resources (physical, heritage, human, etc.) and intangible resources (culture, knowledge, identity, etc.) and on the other hand, the participation of all social stakeholders, including citizens.

## **Territories and Knowledge**

Applied practices must recognize the intrinsic resources of each territory and be implemented by appropriate shared leadership strategies and inclusive governance (Colletis & Pecqueur, 2018). Homogenizing models cannot meet this need, which is why it is necessary to develop strategies with a bottom-up approach generated from the practices of actors on each territory and local experimentation, operating through percolation and adopted by an intersection of knowledge emerging from these experiments. In this sense, the role of expertise and knowledge is strategic.

Practice settings (socio-economic actors, practitioners), research institutions (universities, centres and teams), and government bodies (national, regional, municipal) must recognize the role of expertise and knowledge in territorial development and thus institute collaborations centred on experimentation and socio-territorial innovation. This paradigm shift must simultaneously foster research partnerships that employ performative methods (Gibson & Graham, 2008) and aim to make all options visible, apply them and mobilize all stakeholders in order to test and implement them.

## **Recognition and Justice**

From a territorial perspective, a socio-environmental justice approach broaches the matter of the relationship between rungs on the ladder of development. Territorial development cannot be uniquely local, but experiments aiming to generate

development dynamics that mobilize local actors will benefit from being generated by local collective action, thus categorizing development as a social movement. In this context, we can add a repertoire of subnational territorial initiatives to those centred on the national and global scales as a means of promoting redistribution, recognition, and participation (Fraser, 2011).

To do so would suggest the need to promote recognizing the right to access a territory as well as to pursue a living space that corresponds as much as possible to one's needs, but also to the ambitions, the profile and the capacities of the groups living in said territory. Inhabiting a certain territory, a remote and rural one, for example, should not be reason enough to renounce aspirations of *Buen Vivir* integral to the human condition (Santos, 2016; Fontan & Klein, 2020). Communities cannot achieve social and environmental justice by adapting to strategies imposed on them by external powers (Alberio, 2016). Citizens must therefore be granted the right to fully participate in the whole of society, independently of the type of territory in which they live. The ability to access jobs and social services should go hand in hand with the ability to participate effectively in defining the future of the communities rooted in these territories, all while considering the unpredictability of eventual health and geopolitical crises as well as the climate crisis. Food supply, housing, social services, mobility, cultural identity and the workplace are currently under global pressure, which is only being intensified by neoliberal-inspired models that weaken the future of communities. Therein lies the need for experiments that aim to reterritorialize both the main economic spheres and the services prioritizing citizens and their goals. The contributors to this issue have reflected this trend in their writings. Social and environmental justice will, in this way, become a key theme in understanding the initiatives proposed by various actors, as well as a potential vector of innovation and social transformation.

## **The Articles Featured in This Issue**

This special issue of the *Journal of Rural and Community Development* (JRCD) aims to examine questions of social and environmental justice as they pertain to various territorial development models from an interdisciplinary perspective (sociology, geography, regional economics, land development, etc.) and a selection of national viewpoints (Canada/Quebec, Colombia, France and Italy). The articles have been written in English and French.

The issue opens with a text by *Alberio and Klein* presenting a brief evolution of territorial development models. Their article highlights the need to move beyond models that depend on centrality and polarity and that place territories in a hierarchy based on their economic or political value. As these models no longer address the principal problems facing territories outside of metropolitan areas, practitioners and researchers have been compelled to experiment with new territorial development models. Applying multiple components of a new territorial development model (reflexivity, collective action, collaboration, hybridization, etc.), this article supports its hypothesis with two case studies of partner-oriented research conducted in rural Quebec.

The second article featured in this special edition was written by *Vigné, Senil and Landel*. The authors begin with the observation that in times of major crisis, the idea of ecological transition must supersede that of sustainable development, requiring a transformation of the systems in which territorial development experiments take place. At the core of their analysis, the authors investigate the role of

patrimonialization in territorial transformations. A partial answer can be found in research on social and environmental justice, key elements to creating new ways of establishing cultural heritage.

The third article, written by *Pecqueur*, argues for the idea of territorial resources, which could provide communities with an income stemming from the unique characteristics of their territory, including its intangible resources. In the author's opinion, this territorial income could generate new wealth and give communities the means to oppose socio-environmental inequalities.

The article written by *Hamdouch and Carrière* reflects on low-density spaces, especially rural ones, in France. It comments that the main challenge of communities living in these spaces is to create forms of organization and governance founded on the principles of inclusion, cohesion and cooperation between territories. Like other research presented in this publication, the authors have concluded that a new, more balanced and inclusive paradigm for regional development, ostensibly on the rise, would be advantageous for low-density areas.

In the fifth article, *Moralli* discusses the intersection between socio-environmental justice, sustainable development and social innovation. She describes the high potential of Italian rural zones and their position of privilege in terms of creating social innovation that supports local, sustainable development initiatives. This type of development would especially depend on local collaborations and community vitality transformation projects.

*Pérez Muñoz, Fajardo and Granja's* article examines processes of theoretical, methodological and empirical constructs present in inclusive territories, a label identifying experiments that favour local development. Based on research conducted in Colombia, the article studies the diversity of the participating bodies and the dynamics of the process itself, including the territories themselves and their communities, academics and the national government. The author takes the inclusive territories she analyzed as examples of socio-territorial innovation for socio-environmental justice due to their contribution to the development of the capacity for local collective action to participate in what would qualify as *Buen Vivir*.

*Berti and D'Angelo* discuss the revitalization of "interior zones" in Italy. This term, which was specially developed in the last decade, refers to the remote areas, often rural or mountainous, that must confront several issues, specifically of sociodemographic nature. First, explaining the construction and the evolution of the concept of interior zones, the authors break down the Italian national strategy for interior zones, then analyze the implementation of a community co-op in an interior zone in Tuscany.

The eighth article, written by *Guimond and Plante*, is about the experiences of the *Coopérative de solidarité de Baie-Johan-Beetz* (Minganie, Côte-Nord, Quebec). The authors examine a small northern community's capacity for action in the way it has undertaken some sizable projects, despite having fewer than 80 permanent residents. They discuss the issue of local development in northern Quebec environments from a theoretical approach that puts centre-periphery structures into question and is based on social innovation and a connection to the territory.

This special issue concludes with a detailed presentation of a case study. *Tremblay et al.* review the *Ateliers des savoirs partagés* (Knowledge Sharing Workshops), an experiment based on a collaboration between researchers and local practitioners in

three rural communities in Quebec. The authors expose the ways in which this collaborative action has enabled collective action to be reinforced and has contributed to developing neighbourhoods and communities by promoting social innovation processes. As with many of the articles in this publication, the case study shows the emergence of innovative action plans for territorial development.

In conclusion, the initiatives and the realities presented and studied in this issue bring to light multiple complex challenges faced by actors in combative arenas where calls for social justice have been coupled, if not fused, with demands for territorial and environmental justice. These demands are equally motivated by a desire to not only safeguard collective gains (earning assets) currently under threat, quality workplaces and social services, but also to protect the aspirations of a more socially and environmentally just and equitable society. Today, several industries have outlined the need to balance economic development with social development and respect for the environment in a more fair and equitable way. The sum of these actions points to the progressive emergence of new models of territorial development. These are gradually shaping up to be not only simple hypotheses but new, increasingly tangible models that prioritize citizens' actions, their capacity for social innovation and their aspirations toward a common good.

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