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Multi-actor and Participative Socio-Territorial Development: Toward a New Model of Intervention?

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Multi-actor and Participative Socio-territorial Development: Toward a New Model of Intervention?

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Abstract

In recent decades, many rural territories have been dealing with obstacles to their development. The nation state model, which was based on centrality and polarity and tended to hierarchize territories based on their economic or political value, is less able today to address many of the problems faced by these rural territories. Productive as well as social and cultural peculiarities of different territories are increasingly perceived as an asset rather than a constraint. Furthermore, novel socio-economic arrangements are put into place with the aim of ensuring development that benefits local populations. Our case studies analysis reveals the emergence of a new model of socio-territorial development based on collective local action (to solve local problems, namely population decline and a generalized devitalization) through greater citizen participation, a dense and interconnected civil society and third sector, the valorization of built and symbolic heritage, and the capacity to reflect collectively and create a shared vision for the community.

Keywords: socio-territorial development, social innovation, community development, citizen participation, commons, *buen vivir*

Développement socioterritorial, multi-acteur et participatif : vers un nouveau modèle d'intervention?

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Résumé

Au cours des dernières décennies, de nombreux territoires ruraux ont été confrontés à des obstacles à leur développement. Le modèle de l'État-nation, qui reposait sur la centralité et la polarité et tendait à hiérarchiser les territoires en fonction de leur valeur économique ou politique, est aujourd'hui moins à même de répondre à bon nombre des problèmes auxquels sont confrontés ces territoires ruraux. Les particularités productives ainsi que sociales et culturelles des différents territoires sont de plus en plus perçues comme des atouts plutôt que des contraintes. Par ailleurs, des dispositifs socio-économiques inédits sont mis en place dans le but d'assurer un développement au bénéfice des populations locales. L'analyse de nos études de cas révèle l'émergence d'un nouveau modèle de développement socioterritorial basé sur l'action collective locale (pour résoudre les problèmes locaux, à savoir le déclin démographique et une dévitalisation généralisée) à travers une plus grande participation citoyenne, une société civile et un tiers-secteur denses et interconnectés, la valorisation du patrimoine bâti et symbolique, et la capacité de réfléchir collectivement et de créer une vision partagée de la communauté.

Mots clés : développement socioterritorial; innovation sociale; développement communautaire; participation citoyenne, communs, *buen vivir*

1.0 Introduction

The key to successful territorial (re)development is, among other things, the capacity of devitalized communities to respond to the needs and aspirations of their citizens, especially in territories affected by significant population decline. Population decline may result in the loss of services, jobs, schools or other fundamental assets for a well living. Such social and economic issues pose important challenges for socio-economic actors at the local community level. In many territories, these problems are intensified as an effect of a globalized economy, which calls for rethinking the coherence between economic growth and social inclusion at various scales, from the local to the global.

From a social and territorial development perspective, social innovation (hereafter “SI”) is increasingly considered a vital element for enhancing social and territorial inclusion. In recent years, SI has received much attention worldwide (Moulaert et al., 2013; McGowan & Westley, 2017; Howaldt et al., 2015; Moulaert & McCallum, 2019; Juan et al., 2020). International organizations such as the OECD and the European Commission have implemented several strategies based on this perspective. More specifically, SI can be understood as responses to needs and aspirations that the state and the market cannot (or do not want) to address (Klein et al., 2014; Alberio, 2018a). The focus of SI is on social relations, living conditions and power disparities (Nicholls et al., 2015). Consequently, SI is a process of emancipation, which increases social actors’ capacity to generate collective action (Donolo & Fichera, 1988; Unger, 2015) and to establish a new relational rationality, which is coherent with alternative approaches of territorial development.

In this text, we focus on SI as a fundamental element of territorial development. After years of territorial development strategies driven by economic growth, researchers and policymakers are increasingly pushing for a convergence of social and economic objectives within territorial development, in an integrated territorial frame (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013). This contribution will reflect more specifically on the interweaving of SI and territorial development (Torre, 2015; 2019). For example, we look at how SI can contribute to change and act on several socio-territorial mechanisms. Unlike in our other contributions (Klein & Harrisson, 2007; Alberio, 2018a; Alberio, 2018c; Alberio & Moralli, 2021), we do not start with SI itself but rather introduce it as a theoretical and conceptual frame useful for analyzing territorial development processes. We will focus on trajectories of local experiences carried out by social actors in specific contexts. These experiences are then disseminated, adopted and adapted by other actors in different environments (Alberio & Moralli, 2021), and they might come into conflict with already established ways of doing things and dominant social structures (Klein, 2014). Ultimately, they shape new modes of territorial action, which increases actors’ and citizens’ collective capability to act.

As mentioned above, such an analysis is increasingly necessary as social inequalities intensify among populations and territories and as socio-territorial cleavages deepen, despite a quite efficient (at least in appearance) economy. The global pandemic, which has affected different populations and territories of the planet in different ways, exacerbates those inequalities. Based on observations of two different territories (Saint-Camille and La Mitis, in the province of Quebec, Canada), we will analyze the emergence (but also the obstacles and barriers to that emergence), the development and the maintenance of socially innovative initiatives that contribute to structuring “new” models of socio-territorial development. These initiatives

clearly aim to create territories that are primarily spaces for living, integrating principles of autonomy, shared leadership, collective innovation, co-construction of knowledge and socio-environmental justice.

2.0 From Space-based Inequalities to Social Innovation in Devitalized Territories

With globalization, the prevailing models of development, which tend to promote unlimited growth, are proving to be inadequate in addressing the various emerging problems in both urban spaces and rural communities. The crisis of Fordism at the end of the 1970s, the redeployment of economic activities which began in the early 1980s, and the subsequent changes in the distribution of power within societies are some of the factors that led to a crisis in the regulation of economic activities (Boyer & Saillard, 2002). The post-Fordist form of economic organization, focused on flexibility, has replaced Fordist rigidity and networks at the global and local levels, thus replacing as well the integrated public management of the social and economic spheres advocated by Keynesianism. Far from promoting social equality, this “new context” provoked the devitalization of urban neighbourhoods and rural villages abandoned by private capital and neglected by public authorities, who concentrated their efforts and focused on territories that were more profitable economically and politically (Fontan et al., 2003; Fournis, 2012).

The new global space structured by these changes, as well as the restructuring of governance at the level of local territories, are not homogenous. In addition to differences between countries, there is also a diversity of contexts within countries, a diversity which is accentuated by the loss of inter-territorial solidarity and the decline of effectiveness of the institutions that generated social cohesion at the nation state level (Novy et al., 2012). The result is an atomized national society and a loss of effectiveness of state structures and democratic institutions (Fraser, 2003; 2008), which again benefits more advantaged territories (Veltz, 2017).

This new global space also conceals yet another process that, in many ways, contradicts the first. New institutional and organizational structures are emerging alongside what is being destroyed (Lévesque, 2012). This process consists of social actors in local territories experimenting with new ways of doing things, both economically and socially (Lachapelle & Bourque, 2020). In these territories, private (businesses, private capital), public (national, regional or municipal government agencies) and social (cooperatives, third sector organizations, associations) actors establish innovative partnerships and modes of collaboration driven by a shared territorial identity (Alberio, 2018b; Alberio & Moralli, 2021). Novel socio-economic arrangements are put into place with the aim of ensuring development that benefits local populations. These arrangements bring forth initiatives, sometimes with the help of state programmes that create opportunities for local collective action, sometimes because of the action of local authorities themselves (Drewe et al., 2008; Tremblay et al., 2016). Within this framework, ties between the different dimensions of territorial development, first and foremost between the economic and social dimensions (and all their various forms), are essential.

In our opinion, SI thus becomes a viable option for socio-territorial development since state action tends to be insufficient to address social needs and issues, part of which is generated by changes in the economic system. This inadequacy of the state may be caused by reforms that disengage the state from territorial development in order to better reengage it in support of sectors considered to be more efficient

(Mingione, 2016; Alberio, 2015). It may also be the consequence of the state's historical inability to regulate the action of private capital, an inability accentuated by neoliberal-inspired policies (La Serna, 2007).

The territory is the starting point for a bottom-up vision of a more just and integrated society at various scales. When linking initiatives to the imperative of social and environmental justice, one can observe through a new lens experimental development models induced by the global demands of the market and by the sense of belonging of actors and citizens to their territory. This can make initiatives more respectful of the living environment at the local level but also promote integration at various scales favouring dynamics of territorial and environmental justice.

3.0 Methodological Remarks

As said in the introduction, this work is based on a meta analysis of two case studies carried out within two different territories (Saint-Camille and La Mitis) and at different times. The case of Saint-Camille was a collaborative research (2012–2015) done with the participation of most of the main stakeholders of the community (leaders and citizens). This research allowed us to identify different projects and initiatives that have shaped the path of the village's development and to point out the challenges that they had to face (Klein et al., 2015; Klein et al., 2016a). The case of La Mitis (Alberio & Handfield, 2018; Alberio et al., 2019), for its part, was collaborative research done with the NGO COSMOSS (Communauté ouverte et solidaire pour un monde outillé, scolarisé et en santé) [Open and supportive community for a well-equipped, educated and healthy world], an association that brings together all the actors and groups working with children and young people under the age of 30. The main purpose of this research was to study and understand the experiences of young people, as a way of better understanding the social and territorial development of this rural area which is considered remote and peripheral. Since the conclusion of this project, a special relationship has been maintained between the researchers implied in the project and the community (leaders of the associations, policymakers and elected representatives, citizens, etc.). We created a sort of "community of practice". The collaboration has given rise to joint seminars, events, research projects and, more recently, joint publications.

The design of our analysis was based on an inductive approach and was inspired by the Grounded Theory (Glaser, 2002). Themes like type of initiative, local stakeholders involvement, nature of main exogenous partners, kind of leadership, modes of governance, and aims of mobilization will be the main axes for carrying out the comparative research. The resulting theoretical and strategic proposals about new models of territorial development are presented in the last sections of this text.

4.0 Two Examples of Socio-territorial Development

Our first case is that of the municipality of Saint-Camille in the Estrie region in the province of Quebec. It is a small community of approximately 550 inhabitants, located 35 kilometres north-east of the city of Sherbrooke and 191 kilometres east of Montreal. Various social experiments have taken place in Saint-Camille since the 1980s, experiments that were generally initiated by actions that initially advocated for and protected local assets (public services, school, etc.) that had been compromised by social, economic and demographic devitalization which, as mentioned, is a very common phenomenon in rural Quebec. This devitalization is the result of both productive integration and land concentration within the

agricultural sector, particularly since the 1950s, and the disappearance of industrial production in rural communities (Klein et al., 2015). An intensive mode of food production to meet the needs of urbanization and international markets has since replaced a self-sufficient mode of production. This shift has led to a decrease in the number of agricultural producers, yet an increase in the individual land area of each producer. Therefore, by the 1980s, the population of Saint-Camille had reached 450.

The population slowly began to grow at the turn of the 21st century, reaching some 550 inhabitants today. This demographic revival is also common to other places, according to Jean et al. (2009). The authors pointed out that the rural population was globally growing, stating that “since 1981, it had increased by about 9%” (2009, p. 26, our translation). This growth mainly affects rural areas that are relatively close to urban centres, such as Montreal or Quebec City, or medium-sized cities, like Sherbrooke and Rimouski. The two cases we analyze in this text are located in these types of areas, except that demographic growth there has been, above all, the result of collective actions that explicitly aim to revitalize the municipality.

The village of Saint-Camille has a history of mobilization dating back to the 1980s, when its citizens, as a response to the decline of assets in their community, decided to invert such a declining path. Since then, more than 30 new organizations have emerged, implementing projects and ensuring participatory governance in the village (Klein & Tremblay, 2013). A non-for-profit organization first acquired several of the main abandoned buildings in the village (including the general store and the church rectory). This facilitated the implementation of projects that shaped local identity and strengthened ties among citizens. The old general store was transformed into a cultural centre. Named *P’tit Bonheur* in honour of Félix Leclerc, a Quebec poet and songwriter, this venue became the headquarters for various collective initiatives in the village. These initiatives include the *Popote roulante* [Meals on Wheels], a mobile catering service for the elderly and school children; *La Corvée*, a housing cooperative for the elderly; *La clé des champs*, a market and gardening cooperative; and a local newspaper circulated over the internet (Klein & Tremblay, 2013). Additionally, a project was launched to address population drain more specifically, which remained the most important challenge for the village. The community launched a residential development project. The project not only involved land transactions but was also a collective project, implemented by a cooperative of solidarity. Twenty-five families were attracted not only by the possibility of acquiring a parcel of land in the area but also by the possibility of participating in a fascinating new social project. Moreover, three important reflection-based projects were carried out: a university study program on the ethics of development, with the collaboration of the University of Sherbrooke; a rural laboratory project backed by the government of Quebec; and a knowledge-sharing project carried out with a group of researchers from the Centre for research on social innovation (CRISES).

Four dimensions of the development model implemented in Saint-Camille emerged after the analysis of the knowledge-sharing project, as is stated by Klein et al. (2015). First, the presence of a dense network of local organizations that interact. There are several citizen associations in Saint-Camille promoting citizen participation and working toward the collective construction of local development projects. These spaces for citizen participation, within civil society, work closely with the local municipality and are part of a greater community governance approach. Collaboration between these different groups has increased over time, contributing

to the gradual construction of a shared vision for the community based on common values, such as acknowledgement, dialogue, democracy and inclusiveness.

Second, a sense of openness to what is happening outside the community and connections with other organizations in the region and throughout Quebec in general, specifically organizations related to rurality or in other rural contexts. This networking capacity is structured around different sectors (e.g., youth, education, succession in the labour market) or in a territorial perspective (e.g., economic development, culture). It also extends to the regional level through sectoral and cross-sectoral connections with other bodies for citizen consultation throughout the MRC of Les Sources and the Estrie region (of which Saint-Camille is part of). This networking capacity also extends throughout the province. Additionally, at the political level, the town's elected officials are willing to participate as much as possible in supra-local political decision-making bodies at various scales. This networking capacity is important because it is conducive to accessing funding and know-how that can facilitate and provide the means for citizens to participate in specific projects.

Third, a focus on time or temporality (i.e., on the past as well as on the future). Saint-Camille is a community that looks to the future while at the same time acknowledging and affirming its historical roots, which it mobilizes for development purposes. In Saint-Camille, there is therefore a dialogue between the past, present, and future, primarily as a way to build the future. A variety of organizations preserve and carry this link with the past, such as a local museum, a chapel (reconverted into a local culture facility), the *P'tit bonheur* (an event venue) and the church, which has been reconverted into social and connectivity assets. The past is a stepping stone for imagining the future of the community. Mobilizing memory and the past allows newcomers to share a common vision with the native population.

Fourth, the use of reflexivity and creativity to understand the development process and to act in anticipation of obstacles in keeping with collectively developed objectives. Citizens were able to give themselves the time and the tools to reflect on the objectives for the development of their community. These “pauses” spent on reflection were also opportunities for leaders and members of the various organizations to situate their work within a larger context that transcends them. These moments of reflection also encouraged citizens to move toward a proactive mode of action focused on building their future. Overall, the reflexive capacity has become a tool for the community and empowers it to become the main actor in its development.

The four dimensions of the case of territorial development in Saint-Camille all revolve around a core characteristic, that of creative local leadership that implements projects that tie in with public policies, on the one hand, and that ensure local regulation of the interactions between the political, social and private actors, on the other. Saint-Camille's model of shared leadership is characterized by citizens playing an active role in several significant projects and by civil society leaders working hand in hand with political leaders (Klein, 2016).

The second case we considered for this article is that of the *Municipalité régionale de comté* (MRC) [Regional County Municipality] of La Mitis. This rural territory includes several towns located on the shore of the St. Lawrence River or further inland. Its main municipality, the city of Mont-Joli, has a population of approximately 6,200. The nearest urban centre is the city of Rimouski (located about 25 km to the west, which has a population of approximately 48,000 people. Quebec City (the capital of the province of Quebec) is about 350 km away, while Montreal

(the province's biggest city) is more than 650 km away. La Mitis can therefore be clearly defined as peripheral and remote.

The population of this territory declined significantly between 2001 and 2006. It continued to decline to a smaller degree between 2006 and 2011 (0.4%), following which it has maintained a certain stability. It should be noted that the population of the province of Quebec has been ageing for some time, and that La Mitis is located in the Bas-Saint-Laurent administrative region, one of the regions most affected by this demographic trend. The average age of the population of La Mitis is higher than that of Quebec as a whole. However, the various towns of La Mitis have recently seen an influx of new residents and families. Several regional organizations, funded through service agreements with the provincial government, work toward attracting and retaining new populations in the area. Moreover, the MRC of La Mitis adopted a local attraction and retention strategy, led by the *Carrefour Jeunesse Emploi* (CJE), a local youth employment service.¹

This new population, composed in part of people returning to the region (i.e., young people originally from the region who left to study or work, and then returned to settle down and, most often, start a family), has revitalized and renewed the local landscape of socio-political engagement and associative life. A new generation of young mayors has recently been elected in some municipalities of the MRC, and intergenerational alliances seem to be developing in the spirit of greater collaboration.

This vitality is supported by an already existing and relatively solid structure of associations, organizations and public services. In fact, La Mitis has nearly fifty civil society organizations that work directly or indirectly with the local branches of national institutions, such as the *Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux du Bas-Saint-Laurent* (CISSS-BSL) [Integrated Health and Social Services Centre of Bas-Saint-Laurent] or the local branch of *Emploi-Québec*.

Similar to what was observed in Saint-Camille, La Mitis' territorial development is supported by a dense network of local organizations and associations. This density is inherited from a history of federated and well-organized civic engagement and public services. An example is the *Communauté Ouverte et Solidaire pour un Monde Outillé, Scolarisé et en Santé* (COSMOSS) [Open and Supportive Community for a Healthy, Educated and Well-Equipped World]: "COSMOSS is a group that brings together, on a voluntary basis, organizations in the Bas-Saint-Laurent region working to promote health, well-being, school perseverance and labour market integration among young people aged 0 to 30." (our translation)² The La Mitis branch of COSMOSS is one of its most active branches. The activeness of COSMOSS of La Mitis is an example of the ability of local organizations to be open

¹ The first CJE was created in 1984 under the name "Le Centre communautaire des jeunes sans emploi" [The Community Centre for Unemployed Youth], which later became the "Carrefour jeunesse emploi de l'Outaouais" [Outaouais Region Youth Employment Hub]. In 1995, convinced by the CJE model, Jacques Parizeau, the prime minister of Quebec at the time, proceeded to implement new CJE throughout the province. In 2014, the *Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale* [Quebec's Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity] reviewed the mission and operations of CJE. As a result, they went from receiving mission-based funding from the government to receiving funding through service agreements with the *Centres locaux d'emploi* [Local Employment Centres].

² "COSMOSS est un regroupement qui réunit sur une base volontaire des organismes du Bas-Saint-Laurent œuvrant à la santé, le bien-être, la persévérance scolaire et l'insertion au marché du travail chez les jeunes âgés de 0 à 30 ans." (<https://cosmoss.qc.ca/mitis/a-propos/mission.html>)

to what is happening outside their community and to network with other organizations in the region and the province.

Furthermore, the temporal dimension is also constitutive in the case of La Mitis. An accumulation of associative and social capital over time is central to the development processes in the MRC's different towns. The relationship between generations (and between native and new residents) influences the structuring of socio-territorial development. However, this does not mean that there are no tensions between new and old residents or between the ageing and younger population. The local traditional culture (related to its agricultural/rural, maritime or linguistic heritage³) is re-shaped, re-interpreted and mobilized in new projects, including those of economic and entrepreneurial nature. One example is the recently opened restaurant and microbrewery, named *Ketch*, in the town of Sainte-Flavie, which is considered the gate to the Gaspé Peninsula tourist region. Although privately held, this initiative benefited from strong community support. The name itself, *Ketch*, refers to a traditional type of sailboat used in the region, one of which proudly sits in front of the establishment and can be seen by all cars passing through on the main regional road. Although the initiative is primarily geared to tourists, the *Ketch* has also become a coveted gathering place for local people, specifically the young population. Indeed, the area is lacking in cultural activities and recreational spaces (private and public) for young people (Alberio, 2015; Alberio & Beghdadi, 2019). Yet such spaces are crucial in Canada and Quebec, where harsh winters make it difficult to make optimal use of public outdoor spaces, as can be done in countries of southern Europe, for example.

Another example of an initiative addressing both social and economic/entrepreneurial issues is the co-working space *Espace MitisLab*. The initiative emerged from a collaboration between the MRC, Reford Gardens (the gardens of the Reford estate, which are today open to the public and held by a non-profit organization), *Mitis en Affaires* (a local branch of the Bas-Saint-Laurent chamber of commerce), Telus (a Canadian telecommunications company with operations in Rimouski) and the *Ministère de l'Économie et de l'Innovation du Québec* [Quebec's Ministry of the Economy and Innovation]. *Espace MitisLab* is located in the *Maison ERE 132*⁴, a green construction in the heart of Reford Gardens. This location aims to become a new co-working hub in the eastern part of Bas-Saint-Laurent, alongside *La Station* in Rimouski and *La Centrale* in Matane. A partnership between these three spaces allows any member registered with any one of these spaces to access the other two, thus offering a more comprehensive co-working space package for entrepreneurs and self-employed workers in Eastern Quebec.

A third example in the social entrepreneurship and cooperative sector is a pilot flaxseed processing plant, and a cooperative that was created to operate it. The processing plant and the main office of the cooperative are located in the agricultural workshop of the Centre de formation professionnelle Mont-Joli-Mitis [Mont-Joli-

³ It is important to highlight the historical and current significance of an English-speaking minority population concentrated in and around the village of Métis-sur-Mer (previously called Metis Beach), and the presence of the Bas-Saint-Laurent's only English-language school in that same municipality.

⁴ The *Maison ERE 132* is an interpretation centre on eco-construction, based on an affordable model of green housing adapted to the northern climate. It meets the strictest environmental standards and is inspired by various sustainable building certifications. In conjunction with its surrounding gardens (Reford Gardens), *Maison ERE 132* is a showcase building for raising awareness of eco-construction as an intelligent and affordable alternative.

Mitis Vocational Training Centre] in Saint-Joseph-de-Lepage, a small village adjacent to Mont-Joli. The cooperative's mission is to innovate using flaxseed and explore new uses for this fibre. This equipment, owned by the National Research Council of Canada (NRC) and rented to the cooperative at low cost, is the only one in Quebec able to carry out this type of testing with flaxseeds.

This project is the result of a concerted effort between public, cooperative/community and private sector actors (namely *Coop Purdel*, a major player in Eastern Quebec's agricultural sector, the *ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation* (MAPAQ) [Quebec's Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food], the *Commission scolaire des Phares* (the local school board) and the Bas-Saint-Laurent branch of the *Union des producteurs agricoles* (UPA) [Agricultural Producers' Union]). Like the other examples cited above, this initiative is still in its infancy, which represents an opportunity for the region's socio-territorial development, yet also a risk factor that could weaken local actions.

The final characteristic of socio-territorial development in La Mitis is the presence of reflexivity. It is an earlier stage here than in Saint-Camille, where it was likewise observed. The actors of La Mitis have for several years exhibited a reflexive and critical capacity within their practices. In recent years, local actors have engaged in various research projects with the academic community. The proximity to the *Université du Québec à Rimouski* [University of Quebec at Rimouski] has contributed to the development of this local reflexive capacity. Several professionals within local organizations (public, community or private) are recent graduates or continuing education students of territorial development, psycho-sociology, social work or management. The skills acquired in these academic programs contribute to creating an environment conducive to reflection and experimentation. At least three significant research projects have been carried out in the MRC in the last five years. Furthermore, the MRC recently hosted the *Université Rurale* project, a five-day academic and community event whose aim is to share local experiences and novel practices with academics and practitioners from all over the province, organized by the MRC in collaboration with the *Groupe de Recherche sur le Développement de l'Est du Québec* (GRIDEQ) [Eastern Quebec Development Research Group] and a national organization working on rural issues, *Solidarité Rurale*. Finally, researchers and students of the university are also engaged in many local projects, through participation on the boards of directors of different organizations or by consulting on local development strategies, namely the La Mitis youth strategy, a project funded in only eight MRCs of Quebec by the Youth Secretariat of Quebec.

5.0 The Cases of Saint-Camille and La Mitis: Commonalities and Differences

The cases of Saint-Camille and La Mitis are examples of local development strategies that are well connected with regional and national networks (which is not always the case in remote and peripheral contexts). Their respective development strategies rely heavily on pre-existing and even "public" structures. Especially in La Mitis, the role of politics (i.e., the governing body of the MRC, or the council of mayors, composed of the mayors of the different municipalities of the MRC) is significant. The political leaders act in concert with community organizations that offer basic services on this territory, in the spirit of partnership between public institutions and third-sector actors.

Territorial/regional governance in Quebec underwent a significant reform in 2014–2015, in a context of budget cuts that have since been referred to as “austerity measures” (Chiasson & Fortin, 2015). Structures such as the *Conférences régionales des élus* (CRE) [Regional Conferences of Elected Officials] and *Centres locaux de développement* (CLD) [Local Development Centres] were abolished or, in some cases, spun off into new structures, depending on the different contexts in the province’s different regions and MRCs. Over the years, these now abolished structures had favoured a regional governance structure that allowed local communities, organizations and associations to gradually structure initiatives in several sectors, including social services. The approach or paradigm mobilized by these structures was in keeping with the tradition of local development in Quebec, based, among other things, on the recognition of community actors. The role of these actors has historically been considered essential, specifically when governing a territory as vast as that of the province of Quebec, with only a few metropolitan centres and many remote regions. The changes that took place in 2014–2015 are part of a long process that is still ongoing. According to our observations, the government’s recent actions can be qualified as contradictory or paradoxical. On the one hand, the state (or, more generally, the public actor) is redefining its role by increasingly limiting its financial contribution in society and in public services. On the other hand, in line with its strong interventionist heritage, the state is having trouble relinquishing some forms of control. The central government’s hesitation in relinquishing control is apparent in the changes in governance experienced at the regional and local levels in recent decades. In 2004, the Liberal government of the time implemented the CREs, which replaced the *Conseils régionaux de développement* (CRD) [Regional Development Councils] as regional governance structures (Alberio, 2015). This change was not only a matter of nomenclature; it strengthened political power at the expense of representation and participation of civil society. The next step in this direction was the 2014–2015 reform, which abolished the CREs and transferred part of their budget to MRCs:

The objective of this new budget for MRCs is to give them additional means to intervene in rural, economic and regional development and planning with flexibility and accountability. It will be up to the MRCs to make decisions in these matters autonomously, for the benefit of the citizens they represent. *Ministère des Affaires municipales, des Régions et de l’Occupation du territoire* (MAMROT, [Quebec’s Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Regions and Land Occupancy] cited in Alberio, 2015, our translation).

By using a vocabulary focused on rationality and flexibility, the government seems to want to increase political control in a context of budget cuts. As previously highlighted (Alberio, 2015), this new transfer of powers is a sort of poisoned apple for local elected representatives, who suddenly find themselves responsible for new issues (and additional financial resources) of socio-economic significance. Local government structures (traditionally used to dealing with matters of infrastructure, such as planning and roads) do not necessarily have the expertise and skills to deal with these new issues. The risk is that this type of reform may weaken important spaces for participation of citizens and for dialogue between citizens and institutions—in the broadest sense of the term.

However, in the cases of La Mitis and Saint-Camille, proximity relationships (Torre, 2015; 2019), solidarity and forms of collaboration, at the local and regional levels, have persisted and at times even thrived. A local professional we met in 2016 in La Mitis reported:

The current context is difficult. At the same time, what reassures me is that I still see solidarity, even in the current context. In my opinion, this is what will enable us to get through all these reforms; but the basis for this solidarity was there before. The problem is that this is not the case for all sectors. If we [the speaker's sector of work] hadn't already been working in this way, I don't think we would be able to get through what's coming. (our translation).

An interesting element that emerges in both cases is the interaction between different actors: community/associative, private and institutional. There are, however, some nuances. In La Mitis, the main actors for development seem to be practitioners or professionals (e.g., from the MRC, the CISSS, schools, but also associations) more than volunteer citizens. While there is, of course, some volunteer engagement, it is compromised by the ageing population in the area. Moreover, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, given the average age of volunteers and the fact that this disease has affected more severely the elderly population, this observation might ring even more true today.

In an earlier study on the youth of La Mitis (Alberio et al., 2019), the municipal representatives who were interviewed highlighted a low rate of engagement or participation of the young population, particularly within municipal councils. Local elected representatives perceive this as an obstacle to understanding the needs of youth and therefore to planning a proper response to their needs through the services. The interviewed youth were aware of the relatively low level of engagement on their part. They also perceived the negative consequences of this lack of representation and pointed out how greater engagement on their part would positively affect their communities. Youth participation in activities and events organized by the municipalities is also low. One could argue that if youth were more explicitly included in the process of organizing these activities, this would have a positive impact on youth participation in these activities. Municipal elected representatives were also aware of this and seemed to be willing to find ways to get youth involved and engaged in their communities. In response to this problem, the MRC put in place a formal Youth Strategy following a call for proposals from Quebec's Youth Secretariat. This led to the creation of the position of youth worker within the MRC. One of the challenges for development in the rural villages of La Mitis is therefore renewing and promoting citizen participation and volunteering. The professional and political structures in place are relatively solid and well balanced (with a relatively equitable representation and distribution of power between the political, the associative/community and the private/entrepreneurial sectors). What remains to be reinforced is participatory structures for those citizens who are not already engaged in associations, local politics or public institutions, in particular the most vulnerable populations, in a territory with a relatively high rate of poverty.

Compared to La Mitis, Sainte-Camille has a longer pragmatic and reflexive experience with citizen participation and engagement dating back to the 1980s, although at a different and smaller scale (that of a single village, instead of a cluster

of towns and villages, as is the case with the MRC of La Mitis). The innovations introduced over the years in Saint-Camille have enabled actors and citizens to discover and develop new individual and collective capabilities and new ways of envisioning themselves and their community. The implementation of a reflexive approach to social and cultural revitalization carried out over nearly forty years has strengthened the community of Saint-Camille.

One of the more essential elements of the Saint-Camille experience (Klein et al., 2015; Klein, 2016), which is also under construction in the La Mitis area, is shared leadership between actors of the political, social and economic sectors, as well as between actors of the public and private sectors. These actors participate in a process that has led to the creation of a socially innovative environment characterized by collective learning and networking. Opportunities for learning have enabled actors to draw lessons from projects and to launch new and improved projects, while also improving their capacity for collective action.

This approach is distinctive precisely because of its form of shared leadership characterized by, on the one hand, a distribution of responsibilities (i.e., several individuals and organizations exercise leadership) and, on the other hand, stability and continuity. A significant number of citizens play an active role in several key projects. This shared leadership also unifies the community, in the sense that it seeks to understand the tensions that are always present in the community, in order to better address them, while capitalizing on the strengths of the community. It is a pragmatic form of leadership, continuously anticipating and creating opportunities for experimentation. However, this form of leadership is not only pragmatic; it is also strategic because it harnesses leaders' capability to mobilize resources from their respective sectors (political, social or private) and to converge these resources for the benefit of the community. In the past few years, there have been some indications that new forms of community and political leadership (not limited to local elected officials) are emerging in the towns and villages of La Mitis.

These new forms of leadership seem to be increasingly collective and shared. This does not, however, mean that the leadership of past socio-political leaders was not locally recognized and constructed. What seems to be different and innovative in these emerging forms of leadership is the process itself toward building leadership and the hybridization of different approaches and expertise in order to build a capacity for action that is increasingly collective and plural.

That said, in La Mitis as in Saint-Camille, the challenges of increasing participation and the inclusion of more diverse populations (e.g., youth who are vulnerable or NEET [not in employment, education or training], as well as other vulnerable or marginalized populations) remains significant.

To conclude with this comparative section, we argue that the experiences that took place in Saint-Camille, as those that took place or that are currently taking place in La Mitis, are in line with the transformative perspective of the “cosmovision” of the *buen vivir* paradigm. Actions advocating individual and collective empowerment are proposed and implemented in order to “live well,” specifically through the transformation of institutional structures in order to ensure the reproduction of the innovation process. Strategic alliances are also mobilized in order to engage different types of actors—citizens, municipal and provincial public bodies, trade unions, social movements, foundations or funding bodies, academic institutions, etc.—and to act across several different institutional levels. In fact, in Saint-Camille

as in La Mitis, what we are currently observing is local leaders who move from one sphere to another or who are simultaneously present in more than one sphere, which facilitates cross-fertilization within different spheres (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Main Innovation-oriented Points in Common of Cases Studied*

Themes of analysis	Saint-Camille	La Mitis	Insights from both initiatives
Main projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Culture and creation ▪ Housing ▪ Farming ▪ Crossing knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local business ▪ Co-working space ▪ Job creation ▪ R&D projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improving life environment ▪ Experimentation ▪ Reflexivity
Local actors involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ NFPO, citizens, Socio-economic Development Corporation, municipality, school board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local business, municipal bodies, board of trade, cooperatives, school board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Association empowerment ▪ Collective capability ▪ Local partnership
Exogenous partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Universities, public bodies, regional boards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Government, Farmer’s Union, universities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multi-scalar networking and partnership
Leadership type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Distribution of responsibilities ▪ Community actors ▪ Shared sense of belonging ▪ Citizens’ involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community and political leadership ▪ Place of practitioners and professionals ▪ Hybridization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shared leadership ▪ Proximity-based interactions
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shared local vision of development ▪ Participatory governance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cross sectoral structures ▪ Regional-based governance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Closed interactions between actors of political, social and private actors ▪ Citizen participation
Mobilization aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stop population decline ▪ Local assets protection ▪ Socially embedded local attractiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Retention and attraction strategy ▪ Socio-economic equity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quality of life-related values ▪ Inclusionary-oriented rural development ▪ Sustainable territorial development

6.0 Discussion: Toward New Models and Concepts of Territorial Development?

Research on this topic, as well as the two cases presented in this article, indicate that the governance framework of territorial development is currently undergoing reconfiguration, which poses new challenges. One of these challenges lies in the emergence of a new generation of innovative initiatives and organizations (new forms of intervention, solidary financing, and production). These organizations emerge from social arrangements between trade unions, cooperatives and other social community, private and ecological actors (Lévesque, 2016; 2017). Hybridization is at the core of these changes (Alberio & Tremblay, 2014; Alberio & Moralli, 2021).

In this context, the development of territories is no longer perceived solely as a reaction to a problem. New models of action are necessary to provide actors with the capacity to transform their immediate institutional environment, on the one hand, and to change the scale of power and action, on the other. This context also requires interactions between emancipatory action anchored in civil society, actions linked to collective or cooperative entrepreneurship, public action for social and economic regulation, and academic research to promote knowledge building, the systematization of knowledge and theorization.

It has been shown that local governments' inability (or loss thereof) to address the causes of territorial inequities and demographic decline is the result of two factors: (1) the inability of national governments to respond actively to global economic restructuring (globalization, company closures, job losses) (Fraser, 2003; 2008), and (2) the difficulties many communities face in developing alternatives in order to innovate locally (Unger, 2015; Klein et al., 2016a; 2016b; Alberio, 2018a). In this context, it is crucial that actors develop the capabilities required for collective action.

We can conclude from the cases presented above that, while individual capabilities are necessary, as Sen (2004) has stated, they are not sufficient. Collective capabilities are equally necessary (Mintzberg, 2008; Glon & Pecqueur, 2016). These capabilities are associated with the development of reflexivity among researchers (Jessop et al., 2013) and practitioners (Hamdouch et al., 2013; Gillet & Tremblay, 2017; Fontan et al., 2018).

Accordingly, it is important to situate territorial development within the paradigm of a just transition (just sustainability), combining the societal and ecological spheres (Dedeurwaerdere, 2014; Lefèvre, 2020). The ecological approach and the societal approach separately are not sufficient, as shown by the works of Klein (2015) and Gibson-Graham et al. (2019). An interrelation between the two is necessary. Our hypothesis is that initiatives that originate in living milieus can combine these two spheres and thus become viable societal alternatives (Gibson-Graham et al., 2019).

This hypothesis is mainly based on two conceptual approaches: *commons* and *buen vivir*. Elinor Ostrom (1990) introduced the *commons* approach when she studied how the resilience of communities mobilized for the common management of resources favours institutional arrangements likely to generate new organizational models that balance human communities and the use of nature. These new organizational models require appropriate governance with the participation of stakeholders. Dardot and Laval (2014) add a political and normative dimension to this vision by arguing that the acting principle of the commons (or, according to them, “the common” in the singular) stems from the relevance of producing rules defining the common use of

public resources. The commons thus structure social and ecological territories based on their uses, or the value of uses, and their value or importance in terms of “living milieus,” or living environments, for actors and citizens (Durand-Folco, 2015; Klein & Pecqueur, 2020). The institutional and organizational innovations generated by the common use of resources, which have an effect on the quality of life in a specific living milieu, define and delineate the territory of the *common*.

7.0 Conclusion: A “Lived” and “Reflexive” Socio-territorial Development

In conclusion, in this article we highlighted the several dimensions and characteristics of a new model for socio-territorial development, which we define as a “lived” socio-territorial development, based on our analysis of the cases of Saint-Camille and La Mitis (although they are at different stages in this process).

Our focus has been on the actors, in other words, those who “act out” and implement social innovation in view of a transformation, as well as those who benefit from it, with the purpose of reducing this divide and making it possible for all citizens (including the most vulnerable) to participate and act (at different degrees) in the development processes of their communities. Having as a starting point the real and concrete lived experiences of the local population (and not the ideas that decision-makers have of the community’s needs and aspirations) allows for a new type of socio-territorial development that is less normative and less standardized (Alberio et al., 2019). This development is directly influenced by the experiences and living conditions of the people who get engaged in these territories as living environments. However, this model requires ongoing efforts to boost social participation and mobilization, which should never be taken for granted and should always be pursued as objectives, although they are difficult to measure and assess (Alberio, 2015).

The *buen vivir* (well living) approach, which converges in various ways with the *commons* approach (Fontan & Klein, 2020), focuses more on the societal scale. It is part of a greater vision that reflects the aspirations of communities that, because of systemic unequal social relations, have been constrained by precariousness, colonialism and dependency (Sousa Santos, 2016). This approach has been inspired by actors who advocated for a holistic and integrated vision of society and wanted to build a solidary and ecological society (Sauvé, 2014; Boyd, 2017). This perspective is rooted in a philosophy that seeks to improve the living conditions of citizens at the local level, while proposing a global and systemic vision of development. Born in South America among Indigenous peoples, with its basic principles also shared by other movements such as those of degrowth or decolonization (Laville, 2016), this vision inspires a wide range of experiments that favour the common rather than the private. This approach relies on collective skills and a learning process arising from reflexive practices (feedback on action, continuous dialogue). Brought over from the global South, and applied in a northern context such as Canada and Quebec, this approach defines territories as living environments, based on the real and concrete experiences of individuals (Alberio et al., 2019). These experiences and witnesses have to inform social territorial development.

From an epistemological perspective, these “new” forms of territorial development, which are dependent on changes in societal paradigms, are contingent on closer ties between social actors and academics. As stated by the Global University Network for Innovation (2017), the interweaving of universities and other higher education institutions at the local level is crucial to rebuilding the institutional frame that

guides social and economic development in local communities. By participating in social experiences aimed to resolving real issues in specific conditions, academic institutions could contribute positively to local communities. In addition, they offer a new look at the actors' perspectives and could engage in a concerted effort to transform the conditions that inhibit citizens' capacity to create significant changes and to shape an institutional environment that favours SI (Alberio, 2018a; Klein, 2017; 2020).

This implies a paradigm shift in that it allows unofficial knowledge—knowledge of a different cognitive order, co-constructed from diverse knowledge, both academic and practical, and generated, among others, by the stakeholders and actors of social innovation—to see the day. This is the meaning we give to the co-construction of knowledge. The co-construction of knowledge is part of a reflexivity-oriented model, which constitutes a collective capacity for conceiving new development paths. (Klein, 2017)

New forms of socio-territorial development, depending on greater participation from citizens and from a diversity of social actors, including academics, imply a paradigm shift in terms of what is valued as knowledge. These new processes imply the co-construction of knowledge that is not limited to academic or formal knowledge and engage the real lived experiences of all actors, including citizens and, in particular, the most vulnerable ones. For this reason, this “new” socio-territorial development can be, in our opinion, redefined not only as a “lived” but as a “lived and reflexive” socio-territorial development.

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