

Pachoud, Carine
Université Grenoble Alpes, France
Forum Origin, Diversity and Territories
[Workshop n°2], [Session n°2]

Networks and transformative capacity of social innovations in mountain territories

This presentation proposes to reflect on the contribution of citizen initiatives, also referred to as social innovation, to the ecological transition of agricultural and food systems in mountain territories. This research is conducted within the framework of the TransforMont 2.0 project, financed by the LabEx ITTEM (Innovations and Territorial Transitions in Mountains), which focuses on the capacities of social innovations to induce dynamics of socio-ecological transition in mountain territories. It examines the role of the nature and structure of the relationships forged between actors in citizen initiatives related to agriculture and food and with a variety of other actors (local authorities, businesses, residents, associations, etc.) in influencing territorial dynamics. To do so, it tests a relational approach to citizen initiatives through an analysis of social networks and semi-structured interviews, to assess how these relationships contribute to the deployment of practices in favor of the agricultural and agri-food transition. The research is conducted in several rural territories of the French Alps, where such initiatives have been growing over the last decade. The limited scope of the territories studied allows for an exhaustive exploration of the networks developed by the actors of citizen initiatives. This work has an exploratory aim to test the method of network analysis in the study of transitions and transformative capacities of citizen initiatives in mountains.

This presentation focuses on the territory of the heart of the Bauges. This territory, located in Savoie, is made up of 14 municipalities and includes about 5,000 inhabitants. The first results show that social innovations in the Bauges have gradually developed since the 1970s with the arrival of neo-rurals, then with a multiplication since the 2000s. Today, there are fourteen social innovations, mainly involved in the agricultural and agri-food transition. These have achieved a high level of visibility through the networking of their actors within a federating association. One of the main challenges for the actors of these projects is to intensify relations with the inhabitants and elected officials of the communes and to overcome the divisions between the categories of actors (former residents, neo-rurals, local elected officials).

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