Characterize a terroir to better understand the sustainability issues of rural areas

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Abstract

Terroir is a socio-ecological system that expresses particular social, technical and economic practices regarding one or several typical products. The dynamic development of production, with natural and cultural local resources, can be a process of sustainable development of an area, suitable to the community associated with it. Terroir is a construct representing a local productive and cultural system; yet, it is also the project of a community whose goals are concrete and subjective. It has a potential (i) for the interdisciplinary training of local actors in a territory, and (ii) to set educational situations in regional development projects.

Using communication, the example of a new training module, tested in an engineering curriculum, will highlight how (i) the contextualization of learning where local products, based on natural and cultural resources, can inform the characterization of socio-ecological systems in their technical, economic, social and cultural dimensions, (ii) meeting with the actors gives access to various local and generic knowledge, (iii) active learning, that allows multiple types of learning beyond knowledge, addresses issues of ethics, identity and professional commitment and (iv) the multi-referentiality inherent in the notion of terroir helps identify, in its diversity, humans’ relationship with their environment (natural and social) in its dimensions “eco-techno-symbolic”. The discussion will focus on the interests of the teaching / learning of the terroir concept for understanding the issues of sustainability of rural areas and the ability to act and, therefore, to develop adaptive strategies for the resilience of local socio-ecosystems.

Keywords: socio, ecological systems, community engagement, local knowledge, ways of knowing, education, sustainable development