

BUILDING TRANSITION BY SOCIAL INNOVATION: THE CASE OF THE DROME VALLEY

Olivier De Schutter, Sibylle Bui, Isabelle Cassiers, Tom Dedeurwaerdere,
Benoît Galand, Hervé Jeanmart, Marthe Nyssens et Etienne Verhaegen

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Abstract

The ecological and social transition can be conceived as operating from the top: guided by the State, through legal regulations and economic incentives, and by planning tools, to move to a low-carbon society. It can also be thought of as the result of local initiatives in the areas of food, energy, or mobility, wherein (groups of) persons create solutions from various motivations and in specific contexts, relying on local material resources and know-hows.

In this paper, we analyze the changes in the Drôme valley, a territory of 54,000 inhabitants, where a large number of such initiatives have developed in the last few years and where – among others – a major local sustainable development programme called Biovallée is implemented. Taking the Drôme valley as our departure point, we seek to explore the factors that could foster ecological and social transition from local initiatives, as well as the challenges and obstacles encountered. Taking into account its historical context and the geographic and demographic characteristics, we seek to identify the conditions which supported territory-based transition in this laboratory region. Our analysis highlights (i) the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations leading individuals to engage in social innovations ; (ii) the governance mechanisms and the networking that favored the emergence of shared values and visions allowing a shift in social norms ; and (iii) the new grammar of public action required by this emerging conception of transition and the new tools that public authorities can deploy to make it happen.
