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The territorial economy of enrichment (TEE) in mountain areas

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Introduction

- 1 Boltanski & Esquerre (2017) adopt a “pragmatic structuralist” approach (p. 16) called the “economy of enrichment” with the aim of developing a “critique of commodities”. This economy is defined in opposition to the industrial economy: while the industrial economy pursues novelty through the development of standardised products, the enrichment economy depends on the past, on legacy, on heritage. This article applies a territorial approach to the economy of enrichment as a way of understanding the development processes and innovation dynamics operating in mountain areas.
- 2 The article is structured as follows. In the first section, we examine the theories that present regional development processes and innovation dynamics typical of the industrial economy. The vision generally embodied in these models focuses on sectoral competitiveness. In the second section, we introduce the broad lines of the economy of enrichment (Boltanski & Esquerre, 2017), an economy that depends on creating value out of the past. From a territorial perspective, this form of value creation is intrinsically linked with the territory, bringing into play dynamics that involve a wide range of actors and resources. In the third part, we look in particular at mountain areas through two “ideal-type” situations arising from 20th-century development pathways: areas that depend mainly on agriculture, crafts and mature industries (not specialising in a particular industrial branch), and areas that have specialised in the tourist industry. In our conclusion, we emphasise how the territorial approach to the economy of enrichment contributes to the understanding of development processes in mountain areas, but also the challenge that this economy presents to the people on the ground: recognition of the potential of local specificities as a resource for development, and their long-term preservation through the management of tensions and the creation of synergies among a huge range of actors within the territory.

Development and innovation processes in the industrial economy

- 3 During the “*Trente glorieuses*”, the 30 years of progress that followed the Second World War, most north-western areas developed through the mass production of industrial goods. Since the 1980s, territorial development models (e.g. innovative milieux (Maillat, 2006), clusters (Porter, 1998), Regional Innovation Systems (Cooke, 2008)) have focused on the main drivers of development, i.e. the organisation of actors committed to the enhancement of corporate competitiveness, mostly in industry. These models were built on the idea that innovation, often technological innovation, leads to the renewal of goods and services in a process of “creative destruction” (Schumpeter, 1999). In geographical terms, activities that reach a certain critical mass, which are knowledge-intensive and innovative, are concentrated in specialised regions that mainly prove to be big urban centres. Innovation results from the relations between activities within a single sector, or even a single branch (related variety) (Boschma & Iammarino, 2009). The implicit geography of the revenue flows in these so-called “competitiveness” models assumes that innovation will lead to the emergence of export activities, which at regional scale stimulate the development of knock-on activities (multiplier effect). Low-profit activities (e.g. agriculture or agri-food industry) as well as non-exporting, so-called “domestic” activities (e.g. local retail trade, education, health, culture) play little or no driving role.
- 4 Often because of the absence of a critical mass of industrial players, but also more generally because of their “thinness” (Tödtling & Trippl, 2005), in particular institutional thinness, peripheral regions were excluded from the dynamics of innovation. As a result, many mountain territories maintained or developed only mature industrial activities (e.g. timber, crafts, smallholder farming). And in addition, many mountain areas specialised in tourism. Tourist resorts were an integral part of Fordist regulation, absorbing the growing (primarily national) demand for leisure among workers during the *Trente glorieuses* (Cuvelier, 1998).
- 5 In their quest to understand the development processes of the areas concerned, the approach adopted in tourism studies was the same as the approach to traditional key industrial sectors. For Butler (1980), for example, tourist resorts have a “life cycle” in the same way as an industrial product. From this perspective, approaches that have drawn on concepts from Evolutionary Economic Geography (Boschma, 2015; Boschma & Lambooy, 1999; Dosi & Nelson, 1994) had a certain resonance for the understanding of the economic pathways of tourist areas (Brouder, 2014; Brouder & Eriksson, 2013; Ma & Hassink, 2013; Papatheodorou, 2004; Sanz-Ibáñez & Clavé, 2014). In many cases, however, the development of mountain areas challenges the notion of industrial-type specialisation driven by a traditional dynamic of innovation (creative destruction), either because these territories did not specialise, and/or because the development processes depend on using the past to create value rather than on “modernity”.

The territorial economy of the economy of enrichment (TEE)

- 6 For Boltanski & Esquerre (2017), capitalism in the last 30 years has also developed by creating value from the past, from heritage and more generally from culture. This economy thus differs from the industrial economy, which pursues novelty (modernity) through the development of standardised products. The authors draw a parallel with the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century, when coal emerged as the new resource to exploit. Today, culture is a resource.
- 7 Boltanski & Esquerre (2017) propose a general conceptualisation of the economy of enrichment based on a “pragmatic structuralist” approach (p. 16) operating at both micro and macro scales: the first for the analysis of value creation processes, the second for the analysis of the development dynamics of capitalism. The process taking place at the micro scale is the “*mise en valeur*” (p. 153) (valorisation) of the commodity, which makes it possible to exploit a kind of rent on difference that operates mainly at the macro scale. Below, we describe the processes at work on these two scales, and explore how they are interwoven at the “meso” scale, while approaching the problem from a territorial perspective.

At the micro scale: “valorisation” processes

- 8 The industrial economy is still very marked by the notions of “utility” and “need” as the basis of value. The economy of enrichment, born in a time when the need for material products causes no more than very marginal shortages, reflects the decline of functionalism and forms part of an economic vision in which value is above all created by meaning. In the economy of enrichment, what is not useful in the functional sense can have a value: a product or a service can be a source of meaning or of a particular experience for the consumer. Enrichment therefore consists more in a “diversification of the universe of commodities” (p. 10), encompassing everything that was traditionally thought to have no value: what originates in the past, culture, design, waste, nature as more than a source of raw materials, etc. Things are therefore acquired to be collected, rather than to be used.
- 9 The industrial economy and the economy of enrichment differ in the ways they achieve “valorisation” (p. 153). “Valorisation” depends on the “presentation” and the “market power” of things. On the one hand, “market power” depends on the role of time in the valuation of things: time can confer value on them (positive market power in the economy of enrichment) or reduce their value (negative market value in the industrial economy) (p. 157). On the other hand, goods and services are respectively presented analytically or narratively (p. 167). When a thing is presented analytically, its components are broken down, all its properties (useful to the functionality of the product) are objectively specified. The properties this confers on it are atemporal and aspatial. For example, a television possesses the technical qualities that guarantee its functionality. Narrative presentation, by contrast, consists in recounting (or showing, e.g. through pictures) the context in which the thing is situated (whether the story is real or fictional). This market power and presentation have the effect of activating the consumer’s sentimental functions, rather than the rational functions that limit the appreciation of the thing to its utility.

- 10 The process of innovation – in terms of value creation – is very different in the industrial economy than in the economy of enrichment. It can be said that “modern” technological innovation as conceptualised by Schumpeter (that inspired classic theories about innovation and regional development, see point 1.) is presented analytically and depends on negative market power. In the economy of enrichment, there is no break between things and the past. On the contrary, innovation relies on creating value out of the past. In addition, from a territorial perspective, the role of the context – both historical and geographical – is often central in the process of valorisation. Thus, in the territorial economy of enrichment (TEE), the market power of things and the resources for converting them into narrative value depend on the territory. In other words, the territory is a resource used by producers to “enrich” the merchandise. This could be described as valorisation based on the exploitation of a “territorial quality rent” (Pecqueur, 2001). When this model is adapted to the TEE, a wide range of actors, beyond those directly involved in the “production” of goods and services, take part in the process of creating value out of territorial specificities and in the establishment of a “basket of goods” (Pecqueur, 2001).

At the macro scale: exploitation of the rent on difference

- 11 From a macro point of view, for Boltanski & Esquerre (2017) the economy of enrichment is the source of the current renewal of capitalism. The development of big luxury groups such as Kering or LVMH, for example, illustrates this movement. These companies have substantial resources (both human and capital) which can be used to add value to things. It can be said that such companies possess an “allogenous” point of view (p. 386), enabling them to inject value into things to meet a global demand.
- 12 In parallel to these big corporations, we note that other types of company benefit from the economy of enrichment. Unlisted companies, family businesses and non-profit organisations contribute to the development of territories while exploiting “territorial quality rent”. To do this, however, they must be able to inject their goods or services into the global market. This can be difficult, since these entities generally lack an allogenous point of view, in other words are less generously endowed with both human and capital resources. On the other hand, their territorial embeddedness endows them with an “indigenous” point of view (p. 385) which is particularly crucial for the process of differentiating and valorising goods and services in the TEE: the actors possess historical, geographical and sociocultural knowledge. They employ their network, which is not limited to so-called economic activities (importance of the family network, volunteering, cultural practices, etc.), for the value creation processes.

At the meso scale: managing the territorial paradox of the economy of enrichment

- 13 The TEE depends on the management of a paradox: on the one hand, actors must adopt an allogenous point of view in order to achieve a degree of competitiveness, to export, in other words to commoditise goods and services that are easily consumable and affordable. On the other hand, this competitiveness depends on an indigenous point of view in order to add “authentic” value to local specificities, which necessitates their long-term preservation, for social or environmental as well as economic reasons. In the

TEE, the ability of the different actors to play simultaneously on different scales is therefore crucial for development. Small family businesses, for example, are obliged to learn to develop and operate from the allogeous perspective in order to commoditise goods and services on the largest possible scale. Conversely, big companies are obliged (either by law or under market pressure) to respect local specificities (e.g. the natural environment) in their activities. From a territorial point of view, the risk of disembodiedness exists for firms, regarding knowledge and sociocultural values. The risk of introversion exists for the region, regarding monetary flows. The quest for competitiveness entails both the value placed on specificities and a form of standardisation, for example improving access to a site by building transport infrastructures.

- 14 The risks and potential for development through the TEE therefore depend on the capacity of the actors to combine the allogeous and indigenou points of view: to find resources that will ensure competitiveness on the most global possible market, yet without endangering territorial specificity while, where necessary, resolving the tensions inherent to development. The management of tensions and the creation of synergies through the TEE is particularly salient with regard to asset ownership. Indeed, in the economy of enrichment, it is access to things themselves (Boltanski & Esquerre, 2017, p. 391) and therefore asset ownership, which are crucial, by contrast with the knowledge and production processes (intellectual property) that are essential to profit making in the industrial economy. Land ownership factors and consumer mobility therefore play an important role in the development of the territories concerned. From a theoretical point of view, the TEE thus overlaps with several aspects of the residential (or presential) economy (Davezies, 2009; Davezies and Talandier, 2014). As in the latter, the risks associated with high territorial attractiveness through the TEE are of two kinds: economic and social. The economic risk lies in the long-term loss of the territory's specificity, and therefore its competitiveness. Socially, insofar as the market is free and globalised, the risk of access being confined to consumers with the greatest purchasing power can become significant (eviction, gentrification). The degree of regulation or deregulation in the markets, in particular the property market, depends on the compromises or conflicts around these different issues.
- 15 The synergies and tensions develop between a wide range of actors, around the sociocultural patrimonial specificities needed to exploit rent from territorial specificity and to recreate the resources relating to them. These specificities are not developed, as they are in the industrial economy, within any particular branch or sector. From a theoretical perspective, the notions of rent on territorial quality and baskets of goods need to be understood differently in this context: the dynamics of development in the TEE depend on all the relations between different types of activities within a territory (export, non-export, in all sectors), including non-market activities (culture, heritage, folklore, etc.). Development is therefore driven by dynamics that go beyond the connecting and sharing of common interests between a small number of "producers" for example - it involves residents (who maintain all kinds of local traditions), cultural bodies, planning departments, etc. In the TEE, there is not the same boundary as in the industrial economy between activities that play a role in economic development and those that do not. The degree of involvement of the authorities therefore reflects the twofold economic nature of these activities, which contribute both directly to the generation of monetary profits and indirectly to the development of other forms of

values (social cohesion, intergenerational solidarity, etc.), which in their turn contribute to profit generation.

- 16 In general, the role of institutions is central in the TEE, both in stimulating synergies and in anticipating and resolving the tensions between the different actors (subsidies for activities, regulations). Valorising and preserving local identity is tricky. Because the economy of enrichment depends on the narrative presentation of things and places, coordination between the actors in the use of language (including visual language), for example, is crucial. In a liberal and democratic society, this coordination can only work because it is in the interest – monetary or otherwise – of the parties involved. Thus, events or projects relating to the development of local environmental and social values can contribute to this coordination (e.g. events around jubilees, festivals, projects for the protection of natural areas or in support of local cultural institutions, etc.).

The territorial economy of enrichment (the TEE) in mountain areas

- 17 The geography of economic activities and revenue flows in the economy of enrichment differs from that in the industrial economy. In the latter, the dynamics are driven by groups of specialised actors (clusters, innovation milieux...) that are competitive in their sector. Because the TEE does not depend on specialisation, it can encompass all areas, including peripheral areas, and therefore potentially mountain areas as well. By creating value from local specificities originating in the past and by successfully adopting an alien point of view, a territory is able to develop, but also to undergo development, through the TEE. In this third part, we look in particular at mountain areas through two “ideal-type” situations resulting from 20th-century development pathways: areas that depend mainly on agriculture, crafts and mature industries (not specialising in a particular industrial branch), and areas that have specialised in tourism.
- 18 For the many historically non-specialised mountain areas, the TEE can be a way to avoid desertification, in other words to maintain economic activity or even to enjoy new growth. Firstly, these areas have the potential to develop exports of goods based in agriculture, crafts and industry, in particular the agri-food sector. Indeed, their output is potentially competitive in the context of the economy of enrichment, because the value of these goods and services depends on rent on territorial quality. Secondly, the potential for development exists once these territories manage to attract in situ demand for goods and services, in other words through tourism. However, this is not the standardised tourist industry found in many mountain areas that specialised in tourism in the 20th century. Precisely because of the absence of a previous tourist industry, this activity may often be limited to the sale of property, while associated services (shops, culture, leisure, etc.) develop only in a few best cases. Thirdly, territorial accessibility also makes it possible to attract residents who commute for work. Finally, as a result of this attractiveness, termed residential/presential because of the geography of the revenue flows, some areas with good access may be able to attract companies because they offer workers a high-quality residential and working environment, together with often affordable land prices. These companies may well turn out to be “innovative” in the industrial economy sense, reflecting the new

geographies of innovation which, according to some authors, are also potentially favourable to peripheral regions (Mayer, 2011; Shearmur, Carrincazeaux, & Doloreux, 2016). Indeed, according to these authors, it is no longer essential to the dynamics of innovation in the industrial economy for actors to be grouped in clusters. They can be located anywhere, including in peripheral zones. In these different cases, the quality of the residential and working environment is a key factor in territorial attractiveness.

- 19 For areas that have historically specialised in tourism, the prospects of development through the TEE offer further added value in the tourist industry and access to a variety of productive-residential activities. In other words, specialisation is a thing of the past. On the one hand, the diversity of activities is itself a source of development, since activities such as crafts, agriculture and small-scale industry continue in parallel with the development of the tourist industry, together with non-economic or de-commoditised activities. On the other hand, this diversity helps to generate further added value in the tourist industry. Beyond the idea of developing a “cultural” or “green” tourism, this is indeed a question of activity “enrichment”, i.e. a dynamic that does not depend on professionals specialising in tourism alone. All the activities concerned, different resources and counter-resources, have been accumulated along the track followed by these mountain resorts, often indeed referred to as “resorts” (*stations touristiques*). On the one hand, the area benefits from the existing accessibility and infrastructures. On the other hand, when its development bears the imprint of specialisation in the form of an industrial type standardisation of leisure, the area may suffer from a lack of “authenticity”. In the old mountain resorts, the decor of the former tourist heritage (Guex, 2014), together the quality of the infrastructures and services, often helps to distinguish the resort relative to its competitors (e.g. the prestige of Belle-Epoque architecture compared with the uniform look of modern architecture). In most cases, for example in areas where there has been little or no tourist industry up to now, it is the local environment that reflects its rural past and helps to distinguish it from others (typical mountain pastures, chalets, etc.). In certain cases, these factors come together, as in Zermatt, where the relics of the town’s touristic and mountaineering history, alongside the architectural remnants of the Alpine farming economy, contribute to the enrichment of the mountain resort (Guex, 2016).

Conclusion

- 20 In this article, we have proposed a territorial approach to the economy of enrichment, a theory developed from a sociological angle by Boltanski & Esquerre (2017). More specifically, we have examined the case of the development of mountain areas in terms of this economy. In this conclusion, we return to the question of innovation in the economy of enrichment, which takes a different territorial form than in the industrial economy.
- 21 In the industrial economy, the key to competitiveness is innovation, understood as modernisation to enhance the utility of things, which entails a process of creative destruction. This innovation dynamic entails territorial specialisation (in a sector or a branch). In the economy of enrichment, innovation is about the valorisation of the past. This kind of dynamic does not involve specialisation, but the coordination of a wide range of actors, including those in non-market or de-commoditised activities

(culture, public services). From a territorial perspective, therefore, innovation involves territories in a different way in the TEE than in the industrial economy. In the TEE, the territory can develop through the enrichment of goods and services: its inherited natural and cultural particularities are brought to the market as memorable experiences. Whereas in the industrial economy, the value of the territory (e.g. in its capacity to attract skilled workers, or in its monetary value measured in land prices) is a result of business competitiveness, in the TEE the role played by the value of the territory operates upstream from business competitiveness, which means that the quality of the territory as a living environment (nature, culture, etc.) is not secondary from an economic point of view.

- 22 Because of governance and business habits inherited from the industrial economy, the tendency towards the “standard” valorisation of goods, services and the territory in general can be tenacious, as can industrial type (mono-sectoral, even mono-branch) specialisation. It is not easy for local actors to develop a form of “marginality as a strategy” (Grabher, 2018). In other words, appropriation from an alien point of view on the basis of indigenous specificities is not self-evident, any more than the creation of synergies and the resolution of tensions between different activities. On the one hand, the regulations must be sufficiently flexible to adopt an alien point of view. Innovation support policies must be able to address activities other than cutting-edge technology, in particular cultural and social activities that showcase local specificities. Innovation can also apply to institutional practices, for example new forms of public-private partnership, or else the geography of institutions, the forms of regulation of access to resources. On the other hand, innovation in the TEE implies preserving local specificities and the presence of an indigenous point of view. Boltanski & Esquerre (2017) observe that mass production is on its way out in the industrial economy. However, in the case of an object (like a territory) that is intended for collection, as suggested in the economy of enrichment approach, value must be created durably, insofar as the object’s performance can lead to the (re)production of patrimonial and cultural resources that can be a source of future revenues. The question of preservation (e.g. environmental resources, diversity of activities and populations, architectural specificities) is therefore economically crucial, in particular because it plays a role in long-term territorial competitiveness. Insofar as domestic activities (e.g. retail trade), but also historically non-market local activities (e.g. folklore) or de-commoditised activities (e.g. education, health) contribute indirectly to the economic development of the territory, the TEE requires regulations which ensure that access to and/or ownership of territorial assets remain open for actors who would be excluded from them by market mechanisms (eviction, gentrification). For areas that have historically specialised in the tourist industry in particular, the development of the TEE, which often entails upscaling (and therefore price increases), must be accompanied by institutional safeguards that guarantee the maintenance of a degree of diversity.

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ABSTRACTS

This article looks at the development of mountain areas in terms of the economy of enrichment (Boltanski & Esquerre, 2017). According to this theory, capitalism today is developing through the creation of value from the past, from heritage and more generally from culture. This economy therefore differs from the industrial economy, which pursues novelty (modernity). From a territorial point of view, by contrast with the industrial economy, sectoral competitiveness is not an imperative in the TEE: development through the territorial economy of enrichment (TEE) depends on relations between a variety of activities and actors without these necessarily achieving a particular critical mass. Peripheral regions are therefore able to benefit from the TEE, whereas they generally experience difficulty in developing through the industrial economy. For mountain areas, the article examines two “ideal-type” situations arising from 20th-century pathways: areas that depend mainly on agriculture, crafts and mature industries (not specialising in a particular industrial branch), and areas that have specialised in the tourist industry.

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Keywords: territorial economy of enrichment (the TEE), mountain areas, innovation

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