Developing a territorial project
The 'territory game', a coordination tool for local stakeholders

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Témiscamingue, a territory with a remarkable natural heritage

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Designing, implementing and evaluating a territory project while playing a game is the challenge taken up successfully by a research team at the Métafort Joint Research Unit in Clermont-Ferrand. This was done by helping territorial stakeholders to discuss their spatial representations, to develop a shared strategic vision of their territory and initiate dynamics of change.

■ **Sylvie Lardon**

In France and in developed countries in general, one of the major issues for local authorities is that of developing territory projects in a context of sustainable development. For example, this means reconciling landscape, employment, services, etc. Many stakeholders are involved in the management of projects (individual and collective, institutional or professional, organised or associated) and have different visions on current and past dynamics and issues.

How can actions be coordinated in order to organise synergy and solidarity? How can research help to link individual and collective competences? How can the scope of possible actions be enlarged?

In order to increase the capacity of stakeholders to master the dynamics of evolution that concern them, we provide accompaniment in a 'territory game' approach that facilitates the expression of their representations of their project territory. This is illustrated by the operation carried out in Quebec in May 2008 with students studying for a specialised master's degree in 'Local Development and Regional Planning '' (DLAT) at ENGREF, Clermont-Ferrand.

Bringing Témiscamingue back to life...

Témiscamingue, a region 700 km north of Montréal, has lost its vitality. It is remote from the large decision centres and suffers loss of employment, strong decrease in population and the withdrawal of public services. The regional county municipality (RCM) drew up a first strategic management plan (2005-2010) with the aim of 'Making Témiscamingue a prosperous rural community and a great place to live'. Six priorities were set for this: enhancing and ensuring recognition of the beauty of its heritage and landscape, building the capacity of its natural and human potential, making it a healthy environment by providing access to health and social services, promoting creativity, innovation and intelligent development, making it an attractive and fun area that retains its population and integrates newcomers. In 2008, at a key point in the revision of this plan, the Société de Développement du Témiscamingue (SDT) called on our team to test the prospective and participative diagnosis approach that we had designed and tested in different contexts in France. The work consisted of performing an assessment of the procedures initiated and enhancing the emergence of a more transverse project involving all the local stakeholders.

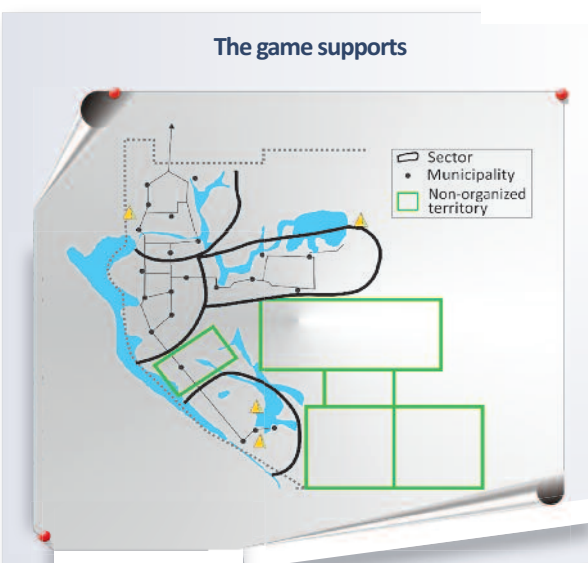## ... a tool for diagnostic analysis and organisation

The 'territory game' has three goals: enhancing participation by the various stakeholders, enabling them to make use of the dynamics and issues of the territory and promoting their involvement in collective actions. Our reasoning is guided by several strong points: a) understanding the spatial organisation of the territory as regards both its internal hinging and also the external linking with neighbouring territories, b) setting positions in existing dynamics, and c) specifying the development models desired for drawing the most from its specific features.

Three methodological choices were made:

- The first is that of being clear as regards the role of the researchers. Their intervention is the subject of a prior agreement with the partner commissioning the work; this covers what is expected of the game, the method used and his requirements as regards results. This involves a precise joint formulation of the question underlying the intervention.
- The second is the production of knowledge for action in an iterative process with pooling of the knowledge of the territorial stakeholders and that of the researchers.
- The third is the reporting of the results as progress is made in order to show the stakeholders the information that they are producing and to provide them with the tools of their own reasoning.

Preparing the game

The operations require a certain knowledge of ongoing dynamics and stakeholders' plays. Helped by the SDT, we collected two types of data. Data in the first category were drawn from available cartographical and statistical material and completed by the exploration of websites. The others consisted of more qualitative information drawn from surveys of some forty persons representing the various working, social, economic and cultural sectors of the territory as a whole. This information made it possible to plot the base for a maquette and the fiches forming the basis for the game.

Three types of organisers/participants

- The **designers** (researchers and partners) guide the game.
- The **Organisers** (researchers and students) perform several tasks:
  - setting the rules of the game and check that progress is satisfactory, making reminders about instructions, giving the floor to persons and refocusing discussions on the objectives of the stage;
  - helping players to transcribe their explanations and arguments in graphic language form;
  - recording the process by noting what is said and the attitudes and behaviour of the players.
- The **players** are territory stakeholders:
  - the commissioning partner (the SDT in this case);
  - guest players (mayors, development agents, persons responsible for various departments and associations, etc.) chosen with the commissioning partner. They are divided among the various workshops according to their institutional or professional affiliation.

The game supports

An outline representation of the territory

Without influencing the participants, the maquette of the Témiscamingue provides a summary view of the geographic structure of the territory.

Cards for the game

Each one-page card has a title and consists of a graphic representation and a short text providing thematic information on the territory.

A game in three stages

The 'territory game' is played at a half-day participative workshop. It is based on analysis of the main organisers of the space expressed as graphic models that serve as the thread for comparing and integrating the knowledge generated throughout the procedure.

The process is structured by three phases of reflection and argument.

● 1. Performing a diagnosis and specifying the issues

The first stage is aimed at drawing a portrait of the territory and identifying issues. Each player is given 4 or 5 fiches. He/she first chooses one and states the information he/she uses as a base and argues its importance for the territory, proposes a caption and enters the characteristics chosen for the territory on the joint maquette. He/she plays a second fiche during a second round of the game.

The choice can be discussed by the others but the player who holds the fiche has the final word. At the end of this stage when the players have spoken in turn and have each traced their representation of the dynamics of the territory, they discuss the representation produced and list the issues.

The representation has two features — that of being explicit for everybody because its construction is the subject of explanation and being accepted by each person as everybody has contributed to it. In this respect it becomes a mediating object.

● 2. Imagining scenarios of change

The second stage is based on a combination of dynamics that show possible future horizons. In concrete terms, each player or a small group of players emphasizes features to trace a scenario of the evolution of the territory in the form of a title, a drawing, a caption or a phrase explaining the scenario. It can be a catastrophe scenario, an ideal situation, an endogenous or open scenario, etc.

The scenarios are then shown to all the workshop participants. The drawings are posted on the wall, with similar ones next to each other. Comparison of the different scenarios forms the basis for discussions expressing the changes hoped for or feared by the stakeholders.
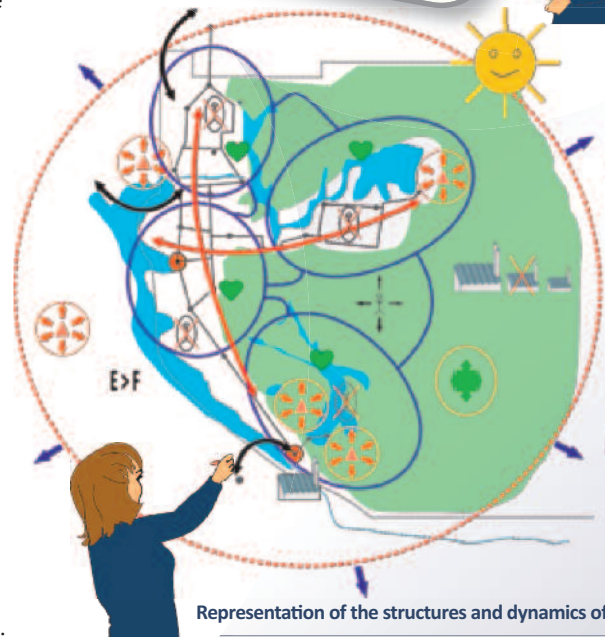
● 3. Defining the setting of possible actions

In the third stage, a player representing each workshop provides a summary description of the various scenarios. He/she indicates the conditions that hinder or facilitate the implementation of such and such a scenario. The whole is discussed with the aim of listing the actions to be carried out in order to achieve the trends desired. Pathways for actions are shown on a whiteboard and kept by the commissioning partner for subsequent use.

The Témiscamingue stakeholders agreed on several major trends: reversing the population trend by being attractive to young people and newcomers, innovating in the creation of businesses (forestry, mines, etc.) in order to overcome the present slump, better integrating the First Nations, etc.
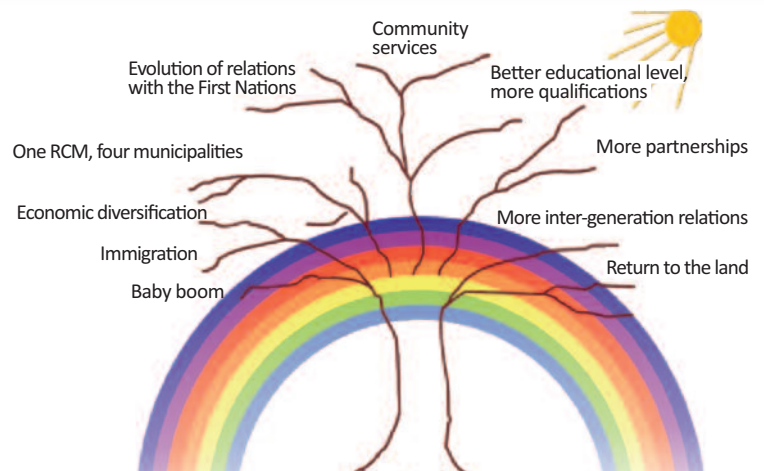

Two parallel workshops with 6 or 7 players

Social – Education

Nursery school
Primary school
Secondary school
> 50 pupils
Numbers flow

Young people leaving to study elsewhere and returning to Témiscamingue
Globalisation
Relations with Ontario
Population exodus
Demographic increase First Nation populations
Cohabitation with First Nation, territory to be shared
Economic and community network
Companies short of facilities
More employment than qualified labour
Centralised or limited services
Conserving the resouces of the territory
Forest management, our resource
Lack of public transport
Local v. territorial governance
End parochialism
Network

Representation of the structures and dynamics of the Témiscamingue territory (after DLAT, 2009)

Community services
Evolution of relations with the First Nations
Better educational level, more qualifications
One RCM, four municipalities
More partnerships
Economic diversification
More inter-generation relations
Immigration
Return to the land
Baby boom

Collective scenario of the Témiscamingue game
This image of a tree that draws its force from its roots via its anchorage in the territory and whose foliage gathers the light of its link with the outside world received unanimous approval

A plenary session to list the actions to be performed

Drawing lessons from the game

After the game, the players talk about their experience of it, about what they have learned and what they have drawn from it for their territory. We thus evaluate the interest of the approach and its appropriation by local stakeholders. The SDT praised the quality of our work and highlighted the effectiveness of the method as this had strengthened the determination of local stakeholders to work together. It stated that it was convinced of the usefulness of spatial representations that can decode the unsaid, indicate absences of replies and address taboo subjects, and especially relations with the First Nations. It went as far as wishing to train some of its members so that the approach could be incorporated in its own practices. In February 2009, it held a game session focused on municipalities in order to involve this sphere.

Our observations during sessions served research in the form of an in-depth analysis of the dynamics of the interactions allowed by the game. We also identified and used adaptations of the method devised to allow for special local features in Témiscamingue. A brochure containing a recapitulation was sent to all the participants. Field monitoring of the effects of our game extended the work.

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Implementing the territory game in a variety of real situations has proved its relevance in enhancing the expression of points of view and comparing ideas—proof of better collective appropriation of a territorial development project.

Three major lessons were drawn from it. The first is its operative nature. In Quebec, the game brought together a panel of stakeholders who were not used to working together, it was found to be operational using the sharing of information on ongoing dynamics to gain a shared view of the issues of change at the key moment of the revision of the strategic plan for the management of Témiscamingue. It revealed the determination and uncommon capacity of territorial stakeholders to make progress together. While the objectives of the first plan stemmed from sectoral actions, the new 2011-2016 has partnership objectives, is sleeker and more transversal.

Secondly, we showed that the approach is flexible and adaptable. Although it is reusable, the scenarios that can be drawn up with it do not have universal value. Each application of the territory game thus contributes to validating the template formed by the principles of the game and formalising the conditions of its adaptation to new solutions. Developed in French situations during territory project design phases, our approach was enriched by testing in Quebec to both lead and evaluate the project.

Thirdly, our approach was found to be a good formula for innovations as it allowed the various stakeholders to look at their territory differently. It generates ideas and coordination in all cases. It thus opens the way to new modes of governance of territories and the accompanying of the stakeholders in the change. ∎

A Research–Training-Action approach

The work described here is a result of the researches that we have conducted for more than 10 years on territorial development in Clermont-Ferrand. The aim of our team is to understand and accompany forms of territorial organisation in rural and periurban territories with the aim of sustainable development.

Our fields of analysis are project territories. These are organised (inter-municipalstructures, regional natural parks, etc.) or 'emerging' if they are the subject of informal approaches. We consider them as constantly evolving social construction at the interface between the initiatives of local stakeholders and fostering of public policies.

We use spatial representations to accompany these projects. Our research position involves the crossing of views whose frames of reference are anchored in different disciplines (geography, political science, economics, management science).

The 'territory game' designed within the framework of the training of AgroParisTech-ENGREF engineers in Clermont-Ferrand was tested in several French situations, including the opening of the Millau viaduct (2004), the rural-urban hinging of Greater Clermont-Ferrand and the Livradois-Forez regional national park (2007) and integrated forest management in the Vercors (2012). It has also been tested in Canada within the framework of international collaboration with the Desjardins Chair in 'The Development of Small Communities' at Quebec University in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, in Témiscamingue in 2008 and in Pikogan in 2012.

The hybridisation of competences and knowledge in training helps to update research questions and produces a stream of knowledge that is useful for action.

The author

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Further reading

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- DLAT, 2009. Faire du Témiscamingue une collectivité rurale où il fait bon vivre. In: Lardon S., Vollet D., Rieutort L., Devès C., Mamdy J.F., Développement, attractivité et ingénierie des territoires. Des enjeux de recherche pour l'action et la formation. *Revue d'Auvergne*, 123 (590-591), 545-555.

- Lardon S., Moquay P., Poss Y. (dir.), 2007. *Développement territorial et diagnostic prospectif. Réflexions autour du viaduc de Millau*. Éditions de l'Aube, coll. essai, 377p.