

# Presentación

**BRIDGES TO SUSTAINABILITY: DIALOGUES BETWEEN ECONOMY,  
ECOLOGY, AND POLITICS**

**PUNTES HACIA LA SOSTENIBILIDAD: DIÁLOGOS ENTRE ECONOMÍA,  
ECOLOGÍA Y POLÍTICA**

The *Revista Perfiles Económicos* (Journal of Economic Profiles) promotes the perspective of an inclusive and transdisciplinary economy that can contribute to the social, political, and environmental challenges we must urgently address. In the last decades we have seen neoclassical quantitative approaches clashing with emerging critical perspectives within the discipline -e.g., feminist economics, ecological economics, degrowth- and others in the broad field of social sciences -e.g., political ecology, eco-feminism - that lay bare the limitations of the former to explain economic phenomena. Consequently, there is currently a growing heterogeneity of approaches that provide alternative analytical frameworks to understand political-economic dynamics, bringing rich insights into the debate. Arguably, what they all have in common is the realization that economy as a discipline should not be a science of the market but of the whole productive and reproductive processes that are involved in the satisfaction of

material and immaterial human needs.

In this context, the aim the dossier is to present theoretical research that look at topics within the field of sustainability, where economy, ecology, and politics intersect. However, its novelty lies less in the proposal of a dialogue between different disciplines than in the integration of actors that are traditionally dismissed from academic debates. Indeed, we believe important to democratize these spaces by providing a platform to share knowledge done by students, and this time the opportunity was open to master students either enrolled in the program of Sustainable Development or in programs sharing courses with the latter at the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium (KU Leuven). Moreover, this endeavor entailed a collaboration between students and professors, authors of this brief introduction, showing a commitment with young researchers doing their first steps in scientific research.

One could reasonably ask, what can students from a European university add to a Chilean Journal that mainly deals with research coming from, and related with, Latin American contexts. And the answer is simple: expand our perspectives and build bridges between regions to address global challenges. In a capitalist world-system where political-economic structures systematically outshine nations in their path towards 'development', it will be hard to overcome inequalities if we don't share a common analysis on the roots of the issue. And the global environmental crises we face today provide a great opportunity to highlight the vulnerable nature of the human existence, the flaws of our democracies, and the possible pathways that can be opened if solidarity overrules competition. Besides, the international character of the KU Leuven program enabled us to be introduced to research from authors of different regions of the world and looking at diverse problematics, from the local to the global scale.

The present dossier is composed by four papers that delve into topics like social innovation, hegemonic masculinity, epistemic coloniality, the commons, socio-environmental conflicts, among others. The geographies of the cases analyzed range from southern

Europe to the Andean region in Latin America, and from urban to rural struggles and their interdependencies, often zooming in local dynamics that are inexorably related with regional and global trajectories.

The paper of Irene Platarrueda entitled “*Community Aqueducts in Colombia and their struggle for legal recognition: a political ecology approach*” introduces an ancient communitarian practice for water provisioning in rural territories but also in the urban peripheries, threatened by neoliberal legal frameworks that are forcing them to comply with logics of accountancy and business efficiency. Departing from a Latin American political ecology perspective, she highlights the latter as a field of knowledge that is able to study autonomously the regional realities and transform them, sitting aside from hegemonic development models and epistemic traditions. This approach allows to capture the particularities of human-nature relations within local communities through the concept of territory, and the relational nature of water management through the concept of the hydrosocial cycle. The paper explores how the neoliberal hegemony seeks to expand its dominance and provides insights to understand the strategies that local people display to contest threats of dispossession both materially and discursively. Overall, community aqueducts present an economic model for self-managing a vital common resource that might inspire sustainable solutions for water crisis in the region and beyond.

Vittorio Bellotto’s paper “*Resisting urban neoliberalism through social innovation: the case of Italian Centri Sociali*” sheds light on the role of social centres in creating common spaces of political, cultural, and social aggregation. Italian *Centri Sociali* are self-managed spaces that resulted from the social and economic crisis of the 1970s, linked to the transition from Fordism to flexible accumulation. They are not to be considered merely physical spaces but rather a left-wing radical praxis that aims at the re-appropriation of urban space against commodification and privatization. Their structure is most often characterised by horizontality in decision making and it is organised on a voluntary basis. Moreover, they can be unified

by recurrent themes, such as the fight against any form of racism and fascism, the defence of workers' and students' rights, along with feminism, anticapitalism, and environmentalism theories, to name a few.

Using the Social Innovation theoretical approach, this paper assess how *Centri Sociali* respond to the collective improvement of deprived communities. They do so by: (1) addressing unmet needs of a group or community operating in peripheric and marginalised city districts, often inhabited by low-income households ignored by the neoliberal city; (2) employing alternative forms of governance, based on self-management, horizontality, and bottom-up dynamics; (3) fostering the collective empowerment that enables sustained socio-spatial transformations at the grassroots level. Under this perspective, *Centri Sociali* represent spaces of aggregation where individuals can shape together an alternative future based on collective popular organization.

The two following papers deal with certain plant species which are being manipulated according to their market profitability, while reproducing unequal political, cultural, and social dynamics. In “*Exploring the reasons behind Belgian prohibition of the commercialization of the plant Artemisia annua*” Marie-Mathilde Vandenshrick develops a critical analysis on the prohibition of the *Artemisia annua* tea infusion to cure the malaria disease (in favor of a standardized conventional therapy), mobilizing three concepts: epistemic coloniality, technocracy, and commodification of nature. First, she explores how power/knowledge relations are at work when the Western scientific canon renders invisible alternative forms of knowledge, in this case applied to medical traditional treatments. Further, she problematizes the conflicts of interest between pharmaceutical companies and the World Health Organization (and its member countries), uncovering the not-neutral character of technocratic regimes when dealing with health public policies. Finally, she discusses the process of commodification of nature as inherently profit-driven, providing a third argument to explain why the alternative tea infusion, more accessible and with centuries of

practical success, has not entered the market. The call is therefore to reflect on the businesses behind diseases, the patient-client dialectic, and the capacities of public health systems to remain clean in front of the drug of money.

Finally, Mary Hogan's paper "*Superplants: hegemonic masculinities holding up the green transition*" explores the patriarchal and anthropogenic character of a novel biotechnology: agromining. The use of plants to mine metals and potentially restore chemically eroded soils seems like an interesting mechanism to move on from extractivist activities. However, appealing to 'superplants' developed by white Western scientists to 'save the planet' reinforces the anthropocentric rationality that humans are separated and somewhere above nature, a logic that took us to the present ecological crises. Combining conceptual elements from Feminist, Queer, and Political theories, she dissects the emerging popular discourse supporting agromining through three critical arguments: (1) the reproduction of hegemonic masculinities with another attempt of controlling nature through science; (2) the narrow political space for alternative voices that also have strong arguments to refuse the 'gifts' of technological innovation, and (3) the difficulties of mobilizing such demands in a context of climate crisis where politics is often considered as a limitation to advance (dominant) green solutions.

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