



## Presentation

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#### Jean-Marie Lafortune

Editor, Journal Sociocultural community development and practices  
Professor, Department of social and public communication, University of Quebec in Montreal, Canada  
lafortune.jean-marie@uqam.ca

This special issue of the Journal not only celebrates 15 years of publication, but also allows us to follow the changes that the field has experienced since 2010 and identify its future developments in a dozen of countries where it has found a fertile soil.

It is divided into two complementary parts. The first, signed by Jean-Marie Lafortune and Olivier Picard-Borduas, looks back on the 25 issues published, by chronologically grouping the themes addressed in the articles and by describing the geographical and disciplinary provenance of the authors to account for the modalities of sociocultural community development that are deployed and the sociocultural practices that it overlaps with the specific features of the territories concerned.

In an increasingly complex world, marked by economic, political, social and environmental uncertainties, sociocultural community development is at a crossroads. It is called upon to play a crucial role in building a more just, inclusive and democratic future. But to do so, it must meet many challenges and adapt to the new realities of the contemporary world that undermine some of its foundations.

The second part of the report includes a series of prospective texts on the evolution of sociocultural community development in 2030-2035. We invited our colleagues to answer the following questions: what challenges will it face, what objectives will it pursue, what forms and modalities will it take, in which environments and among which populations will it be practiced, what training will it rely on, with which social movements will it be linked and what limits (professional, social, cultural, political) will it face?

A rather broad and contrasted panorama is offered by the contributions of Marianne Block, Marine Fontaine, Lore Martin, Marie Pirote and Julie Reynaert (Belgium), Fernando Curto and Mario Viché (Spain), Véronique Bordes and Luc Greffier (France), Joana Campos, Cristina Cruz and Laurence Vohlgemuth (Portugal), Sylvia Garcia Delahaye and Caroline Dubath (Switzerland), Sandra Llosa (Argentina), Izabel Solyszko (Colombia), Christian Cécile (Guyane), Martin Lussier and Ina Motoi (Quebec), Aïcha Boukhrissa (Algeria) and Koffi Roland Bini (Ivory Coast).

It is striking from the outset when reading these texts that, while a conceptual universe and reference values are shared by researchers and practitioners, sociocultural community development systems vary significantly according to socio-historical contexts, geopolitics, economics and

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culture where they fit. Although it is based on common critical perspectives, sociocultural community development draws its essential characteristics from its institutionalization processes, where social recognition is at stake, including the resources granted by the state that frame the purposes and modalities of practice, a militant action, which is based on socio-political activist paths, or professional, which requires its academic training.

If the articles published in the last 15 years (Part 1) attest to this, the anticipated reality of sociocultural community development in 2030 (Part 2) confirms it. On the one hand, the lexicon of cultural action is dominant: popular education, social animation, community organization, awareness-raising activities, collective action, resource mobilization, social movements. On the other hand, the diagnosis of territory, or the way to define the problems, induce objectives and working methods that derive from existing social frameworks, target populations and available tools.

The task of facilitators everywhere is to help individuals, groups and communities find their bearings and remove barriers that hinder their development. Widespread in the North and rarer in the South, the professionalization of sociocultural community development is accompanied by a questioning of its social function. Indeed, incorporated into university courses, which have the effect of transforming young people from the working classes into members of the middle classes, and regimented in professional orders, which replace militant ethics by respect for codes of conduct, sociocultural community development seems less to serve citizens in a dynamic focused on autonomous taking charge of their own development from below than of a political-administrative regulation resulting from a hierarchical logic coming from above. But the realities are obviously more complex.

In the countries of the North, 40 years of neoliberalism seems to have exhausted the transformative potential of sociocultural community development, not only by changing its training and implementation modalities, but above all by making obsolete its aspirations for a shared world and aspirations to well-being that do not follow only the paths of material accumulation.

While the neoliberal doctrine gives primacy to rights over participation, it is not only mutual assistance between populations on the margins that is eroding, but democratic regimes that are wavering and civic life that is receding. Within post-industrial societies that have relocated their industrial (and agricultural) activities since the 1980s, thus preventing the transmission of working cultures, what remains of the foundations of popular solidarity (the absence of volunteers in the associative milieu is a strong symptom)? In the face of the “liberation” of individuals from the grip of institutions through technological tools, whose algorithms act as “personalized accompanying devices”, has sociocultural community development lost its bases and landmarks? Would it have followed the same fate as the social democracies<sup>1</sup>, now extinct?

Perhaps we should turn to the South to reconnect with the roots of sociocultural community development. In an industrialization phase, African societies are trying to transpose the Northern model, which requires a dedicated workforce and specialized training, by adapting it to their cultural, economic and political realities. On its way to institutionalization, although dependent on political realities, the mechanisms are multiplying in favor of economic and demographic growth that strikes the continent.

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1. Social democracy refers to a middle way between capitalism and socialism, which was taken by the Nordic countries, particularly in the second half of the 20th century. It used democratic collective action to promote freedom (right) and equality (redistribution), in opposition to the inequality and oppression induced by *laissez-faire*.

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The trajectory of sociocultural community development in Latin America, which accompanied an initial industrial phase (1930-1970), stagnates in the absence of subsequent phases that would have reshaped societies. So the model still incorporates the principles of voluntary community organization without strong institutional foundation. As in all societies divided around an explicit class antagonism, the social lift does not work, and the middle classes struggle to emerge. The cultural revolution of leisure time, that is the reversal of the relationship between work and leisure values, takes time to take hold outside the richer urban centers, the status of each citizen deriving from the place it occupies in the production system.

The historical periods of societies seem to be colliding with the entry of humanity into the new digital regime, which refutes any transmission between generations and promotes the liberation of individuals by connecting them to selected communities and offering them technical prostheses to compensate for their physiological limitations.

In this context, which presupposes access to digital services, sociocultural community development gives way to algorithmic regulation promoted by platform owners and more predictable at the political level, to bloggers and influencers who govern the creativity and democratic life of virtual worlds.

Have the fundamentals of sociocultural community development disappeared or are they reconfigured today, especially around ecological issues and intercultural dialogue that globalization, carried out for the benefit of capital holders, has made central to the future of societies.

Is sociocultural community development still a source of hope? How the social struggles, aimed at more social justice, dialogue between citizens and social groups, presence in political-media arenas, opportunities for self-fulfilment in free time, still require sociocultural community development (mutual assistance and sociopolitical mobilization)?

The next issue of the Journal will be published in the spring of 2025. The deadline to submit an article or report for this issue is March 31th, 2025 (see instructions: <https://edition.uqam.ca/atps>). Please note that we always accept texts to appear in the Open Topic section.

Enjoy the reading!

Jean-Marie Lafortune  
Editor