Editorial

Observing complex social territories

Understanding the territory as a complex system involves paying attention to the emergence of new phenomena that arise from the interaction between social and environmental elements in delimited contexts. In this sense, the territory encompasses objective, temporal, and communicational dimensions, shaping itself based on these factors. Observing the territory, therefore, implies identifying spatial or geographical limits; past and present decisions from which future expectations are projected; thematicizations of problems, conflicts, and controversies arising from the positions of different agents and institutions. On the other hand, each territory represents a particular context in which universal phenomena express themselves with their own logics.

In this issue of the Critical Proposals in Social Work Journal, different studies and territorial analyses are integrated, where strategies and intervention proposals can be identified arising from both second-order observation processes and self-observation that territories' actors make of their problems and their relationship with the environment. The presented works address diverse issues that also originate from territories in different regions of Chile, highlighting the spatial and cultural limits of such systems.

The issue begins with the article by Labraña, Rodriguez-Ponce, and Puyol, in which they analyze the relevance that the territory acquires for higher education institutions in fulfilling their training and research objectives. The authors propose a conceptual framework that can be used as a tool for analyzing the links that universities establish with their local environments. They invite us to assess the level of reflexivity with which decisions are made to achieve their goals. In this context, they argue that effective reflection is one that integrates knowledge and perspectives from the territory, thus fostering institutional learning and improving practices and processes.

Alejandro Marambio's article presents an analysis of a collective management experience in a territory in the city of Talca, representing a particular form of governance.

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The analysis of this case shows how the collective management of the territory, oriented towards the pursuit of the common, enhances the agency capacity of local actors, allowing them to overcome clientelistic logics in their relationship with the State and the market, which often characterize territorial management. In line with the previous article, the need to develop reflective decision-making processes where different involved actors cooperate without losing their autonomy is emphasized.

Panes and Mendoza analyze the epistemic, investigative, and methodological potential of studying phenomena associated with conflict, resistance, and extractivism in Latin America. From this, they analyze the impacts of fruit agribusiness in the Ñuble region, Chile. Their work shows the need to understand the territory from its socio-ecological imprint to develop research that unveils the different forms of resistance with which local actors affected by extractivism cope with associated conflicts. They point out that systematizing these experiences allows disseminating lessons and learnings, contributing to the design of eco-territorial, ethical, and contextual interventions.

Saavedra, based on the concept of biopolitics, analyzes the ethical, political, and operational consequences of intervention devices deployed in disaster contexts. In this context, the risks of pre and post-disaster intervention management are critically analyzed when operating under an authoritative logic protected by the foundation of exception, especially when the predominant goal is control and security in the face of the complexity of urban catastrophe consequences.

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Vallejos' article addresses another socio-environmental conflict, this time in the territory formed by the communes of Quintero and Puchuncaví, in the Valparaíso Region, Chile. The emblematic case of environmental pollution due to the presence of industries in a territory designated as a sacrifice zone is analyzed from feminist and ecofeminist narratives of activists and community members actively involved in local organizations. Through these narratives, women are positioned as a social group particularly affected by environmental degradation impacting these localities and the associated conflict. Additionally, emphasis is placed on daily practices that seek to place life at the center of the dispute, as well as the recognition of the affective relationship between human and non-human beings coexisting in this territory.

Finally, Vergara Vidal's article introduces us to the analysis of residential vulnerability related to the presence of asbestos in social housing in Chile. The author explains how decisions about the costs and materiality of social housing, in a context of mass production, generate vulnerable territories whose exposure to damage caused by toxic materials persists over time. On the other hand, he highlights the need to address an issue of this magnitude through new social intervention logics that empower communities in managing solutions considering their connection to the space and history of the affected territories.

We invite you to review this interesting compilation of research where the relevance of the territory as a medium for observing conflicts, narratives, and intervention projections is appreciated from different approaches and critical perspectives, and where the agency of local communities assumes special prominence

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