

Sustainable development policies and strategies in Guadeloupe and Martinique: The missing social and human dimension

Loïza A. Rauzduel

PhD. Student, Laboratoire Caribéen des Sciences Sociales

Université des Antilles

Martinique, France

loiza.rauzduel@ymail.com

Abstract: The French Caribbean island territories of Guadeloupe and Martinique are still searching for their path to hitherto elusive sustainable development. They both still face serious challenges, among which is a high dependency on a few economic sectors, high levels of unemployment and other social inequalities. While protecting the environment is of critical importance, human well-being, decent work, and access to clean air and water, are equally crucial to achieve sustainable development. In the mid-1940s, Guadeloupe and Martinique demanded better living conditions and social justice. Ten years ago, in a vastly different context, similar issues contributed to a major social breaking point. This paper looks at some of the ways in which the complex relationship between these two islands and mainland France has impacted their path to development. Their smallness may only be relative, while the environmental pillar of sustainable development seems to have been prioritised, to the detriment of their social dimension. Not having been able design their own development strategies may also account for various lingering societal challenges.

Keywords: French *départements*, Guadeloupe, Martinique, social dimension, subnational island jurisdictions, sustainable development, unemployment.

© 2020 – Islands and Small States Institute, University of Malta, Malta.

Introduction

In 1992, further to discussions held at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, more than 182 states signed the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. The Rio Declaration, wide in scope but not legally binding, became one of the first steps towards what could be called a global consensus on the need to pursue sustainable development. Prior to the Rio conference, the Brundtland report, published in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development, makes unequivocal references to the three pillars of sustainability: measures for economic growth, environmental protection as well as “the satisfaction of human needs and aspirations”, the latter being considered “the major objective of development” (WCED, 1987). The first principle of the 1992 Rio Declaration also states “human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development”. However, it seems that sustainable development, at least when it is being implemented and translated into action, mostly refers to initiatives and policies related to environmental conservation and protection, and not to the social and human dimension.

In 1996, a few years after the Rio Conference, the first national sustainable development conference was held in France. Among the key steps taken in the wake of this event was the design of a national sustainable development strategy for the period 2003-2008. France, as one of the world’s “great powers” and a founding member of the predecessor of the European Union, owes much of its greatness, some may argue (Le Monde, 1953), to its various overseas

territories. Indeed, by being present in all seas and oceans around the world except the Arctic, France thus has “considerable assets” (Office of the Prime Minister, 2015). Among these far-flung regions of France, which together account for some 4% of the national population, Guadeloupe and Martinique are two overseas departments located in the Eastern Caribbean, close to the sovereign island states of the Commonwealth of Dominica and Saint Lucia.

Many former colonies have maintained relatively strong links with their metropolitan powers. Since becoming French *départements* in 1946, Guadeloupe and Martinique have also had a singular relationship with mainland France, characterised by evolving governance arrangements. At first glance, these two territories of France in the Caribbean may be considered insignificant if measured by area or population. Although they may be small, we use that adjective cautiously. We share the views articulated by others that ‘small’ is a relative concept, and that what the small unit is being compared to is significant (Wettenhall, 2018). We also do not wish to succumb to the tendency displayed by many to use the notion of smallness for its convenience (Baldacchino, 2018a). It seems fair, however, to consider Guadeloupe and Martinique as small in comparison to France. Looking at Guadeloupe, we see an island territory of less than 1,500 km²; Martinique is only a few hundred square kilometres smaller. According to recent statistics, Guadeloupe and Martinique each have just under 400,000 inhabitants while France’s mainland population is 67.2 million, spread over 549,000 km² (Lancien, 2018). But if we limit our discussion of size only to population or land area, we soon realise that other elements have played a key role in the development trajectories of Guadeloupe and Martinique.

In looking more closely at the evolution of the relationship between France and the two French Caribbean islands over the past few decades, we encounter some of the ways in which a multi-layered, complex and sometimes paradoxical relationship may have determined their development trajectories.

We believe that focusing mostly on environmental conservation and protection can be particularly detrimental in a Caribbean small island context, where issues of poverty and social inequity are especially prevalent. We also argue that being French subnational island jurisdictions (SNIJs) adds a layer of complexity to Guadeloupe and Martinique’s development process (Daniel, 2002). Indeed, the implications of being not only small, but also a non-independent territory are various, while this combination of characteristics should have made it critical to design development strategies that address the social and human dimension of sustainable development.

Becoming French *départements* in 1946: turning point or missed opportunity?

When ‘The Four Old Colonies’ – Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guyana and La Réunion – became French *départements* in 1946, this major change was perceived as a source of hope for better living conditions and brighter future perspectives in these jurisdictions. Aimé Césaire, the renowned poet, writer and key political figure from Martinique, and a member of parliament at the time, offered two key arguments for the granting of this new status. The first was that the people of these territories were expecting their living conditions to drastically improve, stating “they need assimilation to walk away from the social chaos that is looming”. He also referred to “the most unjustifiable poverty” under which two thirds of the population is living, while “the shocking evidence of social injustice” is barely disguised under the beauty of the islands’ natural landscapes (Assemblée Nationale, 1946). Another key element was that the population of Guadeloupe and Martinique believed they deserved the same rights as any other French citizen. Most were in favour of being treated as full French citizens, and this was indeed

part of the message relayed to the French parliament by Aimé Césaire and his peers (Lavenaire, 2017). Assimilation and integration were at the foundation of their demands.

While both the working and middle classes were said to be struggling in this post-war context, the modernisation of basic infrastructure and evidence of social advancement did not happen overnight. At the time, most of the population lacked proper access to sanitation, water and transportation systems, to name a few. It was not until 1948-1950 that the first major infrastructure projects got underway. However, decades later, many still found ample reason for disenchantment (Lamy, 2013). Indeed, this defining moment in the history of the two former French colonies may be seen as a missed opportunity, perhaps the first of many, to truly become actors of their own development.

Even as political representatives in both countries were quite vocal in expressing their people's frustration and demands for social justice, it appears that they had little influence in shaping their new status. As the people of Guadeloupe and Martinique became, at least in theory, as French as their fellow citizens in mainland France, their parliamentary representatives or key political figures had no real input in defining the contours of this law, nor were they much involved in its implementation. Translating the provisions of this new status proved challenging. Decisions on how to make the long list of fiscal and administrative adjustments applicable on the ground were made in Paris, with the input of public servants and representatives of the French government who had been sent to the two islands. Changes eventually occurred, but may have been ill-adapted fixes given the intrinsic characteristics of these two small French territories.

A critical and lasting feature of the first decade following the 1946 law is the sharp increase in the proportion of public service employment in both *départements*. However, there was something unnatural, even brutal, in this transition (Dumont, 2010; Lavenaire, 2017). For French authorities, the belief was that providing large portions of the population with employment in the public service would ease discontent regarding low wages, unemployment and the poor living conditions experienced by many. This, however, ended up being only a superficial measure used to hide deeper issues. For example, authorities failed to fully take into account that both islands were still, at the time, mostly rural societies. On both islands, relying so heavily on the public sector for employment probably contributed to limiting their people's potential. Although this perception is evolving, in the years that followed, public sector employment was considered the equivalent of having a successful life and/or career. Job security and the guarantee of decent salaries were why many aspired only to be public servants. Another element which also contributed to changing the fabric of society is that, as people started to enjoy more comfortable living conditions, the perennial challenge of balance of payments deficits emerged, primarily as a result of the importation of foreign goods, a typical trait of a consumerist society in small territories.

Navigating through complex governance arrangements: Specificities of the relationship between Guadeloupe and Martinique and the Hexagon

The islanders of Guadeloupe and Martinique first became French citizens in 1848, the same year slavery was abolished again, after the first abolition in 1794. However, the newly granted citizenship did not mean Guadeloupeans and Martinicans would benefit from the same rights and equal treatment as their counterparts on the French mainland. While it represented great progress at the time, French citizenship only translated into equality in principle, especially since the two islands remained colonies until 1946 (Lamy, 2013).

Both Antilleans and France have now become accustomed navigating through multi-layered governance arrangements at local and national levels. France has had this unique relationship with its overseas territories, which has evolved over the years to various levels of local government.

In theory, French citizens in Guadeloupe and Martinique have the same rights as their counterparts in mainland France. Guadeloupeans and Martinicans are represented in both legislative chambers in the French capital. Members of Parliament and Senators are elected locally, according to the same rules applied to their colleagues in the Hexagon. Residents of the overseas territories also vote to elect the President of the French Republic, as well as their representatives in the European Parliament.

Traditionally operating in a very centralised way, France embarked on a vast decentralisation process in the early 1980s. Several phases of decentralisation have given more decision-making power to local levels of government. In this context, in 1982, Guadeloupe and Martinique were both granted the status of region, a type of local authority managed by a regional council. Elected members of this council have responsibilities in the areas of economic development, town and country planning, vocational training, transportation. While in the Hexagon several departments comprise one region, Guadeloupe and Martinique were among these overseas territories with both region and department status. At this latter level of local administration, elected members of this assembly exercise their powers in the infrastructure and social services sectors mainly.

After a 2003 constitutional amendment, Guadeloupe and Martinique chose different institutional paths. Guadeloupe voted in favour of maintaining both regional and departmental councils; Martinique chose to be administered through a unique local authority.

Local officials may have decision-making powers over a range of areas at local level; but sovereign power rests in the hands of the French state. In both islands, the official representative of the State is the *Préfet*, appointed by presidential decree, who oversees the implementation of national public policies in each territory.

There are obviously many layers to the contemporary shared history between France and its overseas territories. Highly coveted colonies during the 17th and 18th centuries (Ouahnon, 2019), becoming French *départements* in 1946 did not solve the lingering issue of their place within the French Republic. The changes to be brought into effect by the March 1946 law soon turned out to be failed expectations. Mere years after being one of its strongest advocate, Aimé Césaire himself was referring to the law as a caricature and a parody of what had been requested by citizens of the overseas territories (Stromberg-Childers, 2016, p. 2). Indeed, as early as December 1946, differences between residents of the islands and their counterparts on the mainland were being enshrined into law: a decree stated that all metropolitan laws would not automatically be applicable to the new *départements* (Stromberg-Childers, 2016, p. 124). The provisions of the French social security system did not fully apply to the two territories after 1946, and for decades. Social security benefits were granted to overseas residents based on conditions that differ to those applied on the mainland, thus contributing to unequal treatment.

Over the years, both attraction and rejection have characterised France's posture towards Guadeloupe and Martinique (Lamy, 2013). It has been argued that the Antilles have only maintained a marginal place within the French nation (Bonilla, 2015, p. 4). More than a mere

perception, this grim assessment can be supported by an analysis of the law itself. Indeed, both the 1946 French Constitution and the 1958 version that replaced it contributed to the confusion and controversy over the place of the overseas territories, with many imprecisions and ambiguities. The official recognition of the overseas residents as part of the Republic only came through a 2003 constitutional amendment (Thiellay, 2011).

In 2016, celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the assimilation law were an occasion to note that social inequalities between mainland France and Guadeloupe and Martinique were still very blatant. That same year, Victorin Lurel, key political figure from Guadeloupe and former Minister for the Overseas Territories in the French government from 2012-2014, wished for a social and economic “Big Bang” (Outremers 360°, 2016). In a report he authored, in which he outlines recommendations to achieve “real” equality in the overseas territories, indicators such as the standard of living, unemployment rate, school dropouts or childhood mortality rates all reveal stark differences between mainland France and the overseas territories (Lurel, 2016).

Addressing social unrest and discontent on the ground: The French way

The French islands have had a complex social history, initially demanding social justice and an institutional exit to their colonial status. Subsequently, concerns over high living costs, low wages and unemployment became more prominent in the daily lives of these islanders. Two episodes in particular have left their mark on the history of Guadeloupe and Martinique.

In March 1967, in Basse-Terre, capital of Guadeloupe, Srnsky, a white business owner, released his dog on an old man standing in front of his store. The dog attacked and injured the man, before he was rescued by outraged passers-by, further angered by Srnsky’s insults as he watched on. This event led to several protests and riots (France Inter, 2017). It was a prelude to more serious and tragic events. Two months later, in an already charged social climate, workers in construction went on strike, asking for a 2.5% wage increase. The demands were dismissed, and the situation escalated after a representative of the employers’ delegation allegedly declared “*When the negroes get hungry, they will get back to work*” (France Inter, 2017).

The Commission mandated by the Minister for overseas territories in 2016 referred to these events as “The May 1967 massacre”. Indeed, as the situation escalated, riots were quelled by the discharge of live ammunition and several demonstrators were killed. Official reports initially mentioned eight casualties (Stora Commission, 2016, p. 67). For decades after they occurred, the May 1967 events were kept under a shroud of secrecy. It was only in 1985 that the French government representative for the overseas territories mentioned 87 casualties (Triay, 2017). The actual death toll remains a topic of keen debate.

Less than a decade later, Martinique also witnessed social unrest resulting in casualties. In January 1974, banana plantation workers from le Lorrain, northern Martinique, went on strike to demand higher wages, claiming that they could no longer make ends meet in the context of a fall in production, while the cost of living had increased in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis and price hike (Celestine, 2007). Their demands were not met, and the strike continued well into the new year. On February 14th 1974, events took a violent turn during confrontations between police and strikers, and a worker was killed by the police. A few days later, the body of a 19-year-old striker who had disappeared a few days prior washed ashore on a beach (Celestine, 2007). The authorities have officially denied any wrongdoing by the police; but, the mystery surrounding this death, and the very tense context in which it took place, did little to ease the population’s anger.

These two events may seem anecdotal. However, they may be deemed defining moments in the history of Guadeloupe and Martinique, providing insights on how authorities in France perceived and tried to contain any contestation of the status quo, as well as demands for improvement of their working and living conditions stemming from the two former colonies. Both events highlighted a deeply rooted social malaise that could no longer be contained. When extreme living conditions became too hard to bear, workers took their demands to the streets. Over and over again, demonstrations and public protests were marred by violence.

French authorities tried to contain a complicated social climate by organising the voluntary migration of men and women willing to leave their native islands to seek better job prospects in France. The Office for the Development of Migration in Overseas *Départements* (*Bureau pour le développement des migrations dans les départements d'outre-mer* - BUMIDOM) was set up in 1963 to encourage and organise this migration, that the government tried at the time to use as a safety valve in a fairly agitated socio-economic context, while addressing labour shortages in mainland France (Calmont, et al., 2009). Those willing to leave the *départements* were promised professional training and a job in the French public service and administration: in other words, an escape from poverty. However, the reality was different: low-paid, low-skill jobs were what hundreds of people from the former French colonies found soon after they arrived (Pattieu, 2016). By the time that the agency was dismantled in 1982, some 160,000 French citizens from Guadeloupe and Martinique had opted to settle in mainland France (Marie, 2014), while in the early 1960s, the population of both Guadeloupe and Martinique was under 300,000 (Pattieu, 2016). The organised migration enforced by this government agency for two decades has been severely criticised (Palmiste, 2012), one argument being that the islands were systematically emptied, or robbed, of precisely those citizens most needed for their development. Moreover, documents from the national archives relating to this period, and statements from migrants themselves, have revealed some of the harsh realities of the system (Palmiste, 2012; Marie, 2014; Pattieu, 2016). Application forms showed that men and women were being categorised and evaluated based on their religion, their apparent robustness, how articulate they were, and even how 'nice' women looked (Pattieu, 2016).

The BUMIDOM era therefore appears as quite typical of the relationship between France and its overseas departments at the time. Under the guise of providing the means to develop, the very notion of development was being shaped. And this shaping was not necessarily done in ways that would benefit the overseas populations, but in the interest of mainland priorities of containing resentment and dissatisfaction on the ground, plus plugging labour supply gaps. Some have even argued that French authorities considered it to be their mission to push for a type of development that had to originate from the more advanced territory (Lavenaire, 2017).

The demand for better living conditions and social justice from French islanders in Guadeloupe and Martinique gave rise to various types of reaction from mainland France, one of them being the 1946 law through which they became French *départements*. However, in the decades that followed, Guadeloupe and Martinique have still had to face challenging times due to high levels of unemployment, spiralling cost of living, and an overall tense social climate. These culminated in early 2009 in a general strike, with tens of thousands demonstrating for better wages, among many other demands, a historic phenomenon by many standards.

Persisting social challenges and the 'breaking point' of 2009

The lack of a steady source of income is often problematic for those persons affected by unemployment. In any given society, a high percentage of joblessness represents a challenge.

In relation to similar statistics for continental France, the differences are notable: unemployment is historically much higher in Guadeloupe and Martinique (Audebert, 2011), especially when the age and gender of the unemployed are factored in.

Unemployment is hardly a new issue in the French *départements*. Indeed, in Guadeloupe, in 1980, the unemployment rate stood at 22.8%. Around half the youth under age 25 was looking for work at the time. More recent statistics reveal that unemployment is still very much a concern in both Martinican and Guadeloupean societies. In 2018, the overall unemployment rate in Guadeloupe was 23% (Cratère, 2019). We also note that unemployment in both Guadeloupe and Martinique is around 2.5 times higher than in France. In addition, 41% of the population under 25 years old is unemployed in Martinique, while the duration of unemployment in the French *départements d'outre-mer* is typically around three times longer than in mainland France (Cratère, 2019).

Even looking at unemployment in other British and Dutch Caribbean SNIJs, shows that rates there are also significantly lower. The relationship that France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands have maintained with their former colonies in the Caribbean region has taken very different paths. Yet, it is worth noting that the British and Dutch territories are performing much better with respect to the percentage of their population that is in gainful employment. The UK has been said to have been unapologetic about resisting free association or integration of its former colonies, while Guadeloupe and Martinique were able to negotiate full integration (Hintjens & Hodge, 2012). Nevertheless, it may well be this relative distance that has allowed most of the UK Overseas Territories to thrive, to some extent; or could it be indeed that their prosperity is in part due to UK neglect? (Hintjens & Hodge, 2012).

Since unemployment is not a novel issue in the region, the factors contributing to this phenomenon have been exhaustively researched (Audebert, 2011; L'Horty, 2014; Orphé, 2016). Among such factors is the fact that there is a mismatch between available skills and those needed on the labour market. That skills mismatch seems to be a factor in the two French *départements* (L'Horty, 2014).

There is also a link between unemployment rate and an aging population, and projections for both French overseas territories are quite grim in that respect. In 2010, there were 77,000 persons under 15 years old in the two French island territories. Projections show that this number might drop to a mere 10,000 by 2030 (Sudrie et al., 2015).

Unemployment and youth unemployment in particular, caused mainly by skill mismatches, are all too common in Caribbean states and territories. A 2014 World Bank report on youth unemployment in the region notes that the quality of education is low, despite efforts and significant public investment (Parra-Torrado, 2014). The ratio of youth with reading difficulties is quite high in both Guadeloupe and Martinique. Similarly, the proportion of holders of a higher education degree is much higher on the continent. Guadeloupe and Martinique's education system and curricula throughout an individual's years in school are exactly the same as in metropolitan France. However, data reveals that the education system yields different outcomes in the overseas territories. Poverty and social inequalities are more prevalent in the overseas *départements*. There is also a high number of single-parent families, for whom supporting more than one child to pursue university studies could be impossible (even to study on one of the two campuses of the Université des Antilles, in Guadeloupe or Martinique). In Guadeloupe, 2009 data reveals that 25% of youth aged 20-24 had left the education system with primary education only; compared to 14% in France (INSEE, 2015).

In the early 1960s, the high unemployment rate in the two French Caribbean territories was one of the reasons used to justify organised migration to the mainland. It has been an issue ever since, and was still a key concern at the time of the 2009 breaking point.

A decade ago, a combination of factors led to what appeared to be a social explosion in both French territories that had been brewing for too long. In January 2009, some 50 organisations from a wide range of sectors, including civil society organisations, trade unions and political parties, joined forces to form an alliance to protest against excessive prices of gasoline, basic commodities and an overall high cost of living. This movement led to a general strike which lasted 44 days in Guadeloupe and a little less in Martinique. Even as oil prices were falling on the international market, gasoline prices remained high in the French islands. Profit margins, as well as the entire system for setting gas prices, were being questioned, especially since a single private oil refinery provided (and continues to provide) gasoline for Martinique and Guadeloupe. Public transportation is ineffective on both islands, making private cars the norm for everyday mobility, at least for those who can afford them. The issue of gasoline price increases therefore resonated with the general population. In addition, the alliance that was formed was able to increase its relevance by developing a list of 130 specific demands related to the cost of basic commodities, specifically noting costs relative to the same items in continental France, the high cost of living, and the insufficient provision of key public services such as water, electricity and transportation.

The events of January-February 2009 have been thoroughly analysed and discussed, and there seems to be a consensus that they originated in a deeply-rooted social crisis (Daniel, 2009; Monza, 2009; Desse, 2012). Some have argued that it all started because of the persistence of inequalities, dating from the islands' colonial past and plantation economy (Lavenaire, 2017).

Interestingly, in the aftermath of World War II, racism was among the issues of urgent concern for the people of Guadeloupe and Martinique, along with hunger, poverty, unemployment, disease (Stromberg-Childers, 2016, p. 199).

If overt racism has probably become marginal in Guadeloupe and Martinique, both societies still reflect longstanding racial constructs and prejudice. After the abolition of slavery and for decades until the 1946 law, which rendered the term "colony" technically inaccurate, there was no real shift in terms of the economic and power relations in either island.

Over the years, it became clearer that race did contribute to shaping socio-economic inequalities in both islands. While the contemporary period can hardly be compared with slavery and the subsequent colonialism era, it has been virtually impossible to completely eliminate the most controversial aspects of these ancient times. In Guadeloupe and Martinique, race has served as a social construct, often decisive in creating hierarchies based on social status. Racial hierarchies have persisted (Bonilla, 2015, p.2), and there remain evidence of a socio-racial stratification (Zander, 2013).

Indeed, in both islands but perhaps even more significantly in Martinique, among the many issues that came to the fore during the 2009 general strike was the near monopoly of a few *béké* families on a large portion of the small economy. *Békés*, descendants of the white plantation owners who settled on the islands during the slavery era, own a large proportion of the bigger businesses and franchises across a wide range of sectors on the two islands (e.g.: car dealerships, supermarkets, construction). The fairly widespread sentiment that only a handful

of families benefit from excessive profits contributed to the willingness of the general public to denounce a system considered to be unfair. The 2009 crisis was also reminiscent of several past social conflicts, in so far as these often had a racial component (Bellan, 2009).

As a result, the persistence of racial hierarchies has added a layer of complexity to the relationships between mainland France and the overseas territories.

Sustainable development may be the answer, but only if ...

Sustainable development is now mainstream. Even in its early days, it was applied to the Caribbean region (Cox & Embree, 1991; Bass & Dalal-Clayton, 1995). But in a small island context, it should be even more critical to pay attention to how development is being pursued.

Before it could be translated into policies and strategies, sustainable development needs to be politicised. This process may account for an interpretation of the concept that seems to have emphasised its environmental dimension. Concerns over global warming and the pressure on natural resources were certainly among the key issues that led the international community to realise that environmental protection required a global effort. But, while the Brundtland Report referred to human well-being and social cohesion, and as the consensus around sustainable development grew, its social dimension nearly disappeared under the weight of the imperatives for economic development and environmental protection (Sebastien & Brodhag, 2004). This has led to questioning whether the social and human dimension of sustainable development ought to be considered separately (Rousseau, 2004), while the concept continues to be linked to environmental policies (Bohmer-Christiansen, 2002). In France, for instance, the first government ministry dedicated to sustainable development was the Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development, created in 2003. Prior to this, sustainable development was within the portfolios of the Ministries of the Environment and Town and Country Planning.

As a result, observations point towards an overall lesser interest even in the study of the social dimension of sustainability, while environmental questions have been thoroughly discussed (Libaert & Guérin, 2008).

Guadeloupe and Martinique are small island territories located in an area which makes them prone to the effects of climate change, while they rely heavily on their natural resources and environment for revenue-generating activities in the tourism sector. As such, they should take all measures required to prevent environmental degradation. However, these physical characteristics need to be considered in their socio-economic context. And indeed, social inequality, high levels of unemployment, child mortality, school dropout rates, and the population ratio receiving minimum social benefits contribute to an often tense social climate. Added to this is the issue of the provision of key public services such as water. It becomes complicated, if not impossible, for many French citizens in Guadeloupe and Martinique to even understand the urgency for sustainable development when their immediate needs and pressing priorities are not addressed (Baldacchino, 2018b).

It has been argued that sustainable development is a fundamentally anthropocentric concept: human beings must be protected and their well-being is essential, but this approach has seldom been mentioned (Saffache, 2017). The two French Caribbean territories might have been affected by this insufficient consideration given to the human aspect of sustainable development. The concept has, in theory, the potential to contribute to putting Caribbean states

and territories on the path to a development trajectory that is more socially inclusive, with targeted actions designed to address those challenges that are damaging to any society.

A shift in perception may be required from both French islanders and French on the continent. To this day, many view the overseas territories as no more than a couple of *small* islands with nice landscapes that make great vacation spots. On the islands, some tend to have an overly simplistic view of themselves, and of their country. It is “too small”, “there is nothing here”, and no hope for anything better either. Islanders are not less capable than their fellow citizens thousands of kilometres away. The geography and small size of the French overseas territories make them similar to their independent Caribbean neighbours in many ways. However, the relationship with France, and its many layers, may be obstructing rather than facilitating progress. The notion that France has a collective guilt because of its history of slavery, and therefore owes its overseas *départements*; combined, on the other hand, with the impression that Guadeloupe and Martinique (along with the other overseas territories) represent a cost, and not much else, are prejudices that are hard to shift.

Conclusion: Sustainable development as endogenous and inclusive of the human dimension

Despite a recent push, at the international level, to make achieving sustainable development a high priority, the concept might have become overused, to the point of almost becoming an empty shell. It may be time to move away from a notion that was so broad that it had to be interpreted until some of its essence nearly disappeared. But before an actual paradigm shift becomes reality, sustainable development may contain some of the solutions that should help in addressing the crippling challenges of these small Caribbean island societies. However, and for Guadeloupe and Martinique in particular, we believe the context in which the solutions are put in place are as critical as the measures themselves.

If sustainable development is to be pursued widely, we may need to unlearn the way it continues to be interpreted by most. We argue that sustainable development may not have the same relevance it undoubtedly had decades ago, if it is considered mainly as pertaining to environmental protection. The advent of the concept coincided with an urgent shared awareness that economic development needed to be properly thought through. Environmental degradation, the effects of which are often irreversible, captured everyone’s attention. Back in 1987, when advocating for a new type of economic growth, the Brundtland Report listed many of the dire consequences on the planet’s biodiversity and natural resources.

However, the human project that sustainable development is meant to address may have been somewhat lost along the way. In both Guadeloupe and Martinique, local policy makers continue to refer to it. Meanwhile, key elements in designing sustainable development strategies – such as poverty reduction, human well-being, access to decent work and social cohesion – are seldom integrated. History suggests that unresolved and persisting social inequalities can have damaging consequences, especially in a small island context such as those in Guadeloupe and Martinique. Including the human and social dimension is therefore essential.

Smallness cannot be used to justify every societal challenge faced by the French overseas territories. However, combined with the complexity of different levels of administration with the metropolitan state (De Jong & Kruijt, 2008), it may well have lasting repercussions. It might be equally essential to consider, or revisit, the notion of development itself. Willingly or otherwise, actors in Guadeloupe and Martinique have been less focussed on working to find the

best ways to develop themselves; rather, they have been the recipients of whatever development was suggested, or handed, to them.

Guadeloupe and Martinique's small size, and their intrinsic characteristics as island territories, make them more vulnerable to the impacts of social challenges such as those they have been facing over the years. Besides, the dependency relationship that has existed with mainland France may not have helped the two overseas territories in taking the lead to design their own development strategies and ways to overcome challenges.

Leaving aside the assumption that all solutions or projects have to come from or be implemented by and/or with French counterparts, better integration with their immediate environment may be a useful starting point. The progress made recently in that regard is a step in the right direction. Indeed, as has been the case with many other SNIJs that have been finding appropriate mechanisms to engage in various forms of paradiplomacy (Baldacchino, 2018), Guadeloupe and Martinique have become more integrated in Caribbean affairs, trying to strengthen their presence in the region through membership in regional organisations. France joined the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) as an Associate Member on behalf of Guadeloupe and Martinique in the mid-nineties. A further step was taken in 2014, when each island became an Associate Member in its own right. Negotiations for Martinique to become an associate member of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) were completed in 2015; in March 2019, Guadeloupe also became an Associate Member of the OECS.

In his opening remarks at the Accession Ceremony in Guadeloupe, OECS Director Didacus Jules, pointed to Guadeloupe's "political persona as France, as Europe in the Caribbean" (St. Lucia Times, 2019). Mirroring the OECS Director's words, Ary Chalus, President of the Guadeloupe Regional Council, stated on that same historic day,

The triple Caribbean, French and European membership must be approached pragmatically because, like Martinique ... it offers Guadeloupe real opportunities for its development while nourishing the contribution it intends to make within the OECS (St Lucia Times, 2019).

Herein lies the hope of Guadeloupe and Martinique making the best use of their position and triple identity.

One must face and ask the following questions: do we wish to develop ourselves, and be actors of our development, or are we simply expecting 'them' to provide us with the means to develop ourselves, while we remain spectators? From a small island perspective – and this should certainly not be a 'one-size-fits-all' type of solution – best practices for development initiatives that can be environmentally sustainable, while also ensuring that the social and human dimensions of sustainable development are not left out, remain to be found.

Acknowledgements

I thank Chanzo Greenidge for his useful suggestions and corrections to an earlier draft of this article.

Disclaimer

This article did not benefit from research funding.

References

- Assemblée Nationale Constituante (1946). Annexe au procès-verbal de la séance du 23 février 1946. Rapport fait par M. Aimé Césaire, député. Retrieved from: <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/histoire/images/rapport-520.pdf>
- Audebert, C., (2011). Les Antilles françaises à la croisée des chemins: de nouveaux enjeux de développement pour des sociétés en crise. *Les Cahiers d'Outre-Mer*, 256. Retrieved from: <http://journals.openedition.org/com/6409>
- Baldacchino, G., (2018a). Mainstreaming the study of small states and territories. *Small States and Territories*, 1(1), 3-18.
- Baldacchino, G. (2018b). Seizing history: development and non-climate change in Small Island Developing States. *International Journal of Climate Change Strategies & Management*, 10(2), 217-228.
- Bass, S. & Dalal-Clayton, B. (1995). *Small island states and sustainable development: Strategic issues and experience*. International Institute for Environment and Development.
- Bellan, M. (2009). La dimension ethnique est une constante dans les conflits sociaux en Guadeloupe. *Les Echos*. Retrieved from: <https://www.lesechos.fr/2009/02/la-dimension-ethnique-est-une-constante-dans-les-conflits-sociaux-en-guadeloupe-449937>
- Benoît, J., (1965). Évolution démographique de la population française: 1954-1965. *L'Information Géographique*, 29(5), 196-203.
- Boehmer-Christiansen S. (2002). The geopolitics of sustainable development: bureaucracies and politicians in search of the holy grail. *Geoforum*, 33(3), 351-365.
- Bonilla, Y., (2015). *Non-sovereign futures: French Caribbean politics in the age of disenchantment*. University of Chicago Press.
- Calmont, A., Daniel, J., Dubost, I., Destouches, D., Giraud, M., & Milia-Marie-Luce, M. (2009). La Guadeloupe et la Martinique dans l'histoire française des migrations en régions de 1848 à nos jours. *Hommes & Migrations*, 2(1278), 174-197. Retrieved from: <https://journals.openedition.org/hommesmigrations/252>
- Célestine, A. (2007). La lutte des Antillais pour l'égalité. *Plein Droit*, 74(3), 36-40.
- Commission d'information et de recherche historique sur les événements de décembre 1959 en Martinique, juin 1962 en Guadeloupe et en Guyane et mai 1967 en Guadeloupe, présidée par Benjamin Stora. (2016). Rapport à la Ministre des Outre-mer. Retrieved from: <https://fr.calameo.com/read/000886379720261dabe09>
- Contreras, J., González, D., Guzmán, J., Martínez, J., Rodríguez, J., (2006). La démographie de l'Amérique Latine et de la Caraïbe depuis 1950. *Population*, 61(5), 623-733.
- Cox, J., & Embree, C. (1991). Sustainable development in the Caribbean. *Ekistics*, 58(348/349), 226-230.
- Cratère, F. (2019). La population action continue de baisser en Guadeloupe. *INSEE Analyses*. 36.
- Daniel, J. (2009). La crise sociale aux Antilles françaises. *EchoGéo*. Retrieved from: <https://journals.openedition.org/echogeo/11117>
- Daniel, J. (2002). L'espace politique aux Antilles françaises. *Ethnologie Française*. 32(4), 589-600.
- De Jong, L. & Kruijt, D. (Eds.). (2008) *Extended statehood in the Caribbean: Paradoxes of quasi colonialism, local autonomy and extended statehood in the USA, French, Dutch & British Caribbean*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Rozenberg Publishers.
- Desse, M. (2012). Guadeloupe, Martinique, LKP, crise de 2009, crise économique, déclin économique: de crises en crises: la Guadeloupe et la Martinique. *Études Caribéennes*. Retrieved from: <https://journals.openedition.org/etudescaribeennes/4880>

- Dumont, J. (2010). La quête de l'égalité aux Antilles : la départementalisation et les manifestations des années 1950. *Le Mouvement Social*, 230(1), 79-98.
- France Inter (2017). 'Lorsque les nègres auront faim, ils reprendront le travail': Guadeloupe, Mai 67, la répression sanglante. Retrieved from: <https://www.franceinter.fr/emissions/affaires-sensibles/affaires-sensibles-09-aout-2017>
- Hermans, B., & Kösters, L. (2019). *Labour force on the Dutch Caribbean islands*. Amsterdam: Statistics Netherlands. Retrieved from: https://www.cbs.nl/-/media/pdf/2019/09/2019st08%20labour%20force%20dutch%20caribbean%20islands_web.pdf
- Hintjens, A., & Hodge, D. (2012). The UK Overseas Territories: governing unruliness amidst the extra-territorial EU. *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 50(2), 190-225.
- INSEE Dossier. (2015). Des indicateurs pour apprécier le développement durable en Guadeloupe. N°5. INSEE DEAL.
- Lamy, R. (2013, May 6). Antilles françaises: une histoire faite d'attirance et de rejet. *L'Express (France)*. Retrieved from: https://www.lexpress.fr/region/antilles-francaises-une-histoire-faite-d-attirance-et-de-rejet_1246384.html
- Lancien, O. (2018). La Guadeloupe perd ses habitants selon le dernier recensement. *France TV Info*. Retrieved from: <https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/guadeloupe/guadeloupe-perd-ses-habitants-dernier-recensement-549941.html>
- Lasserre, D. (2014). LKP: jamais vu, déjà vu ou reja vu ? Hétérotopologie d'une utopie régressive à caractère historique. *Études Caribéennes*. Retrieved from: <https://journals.openedition.org/etudescaribeennes/7238>
- Lavenaire, M. (2017). Décolonisation et changement social aux Antilles françaises. De l'assimilation à la 'départementalisation': socio-histoire d'une construction paradoxale (1946-1961). Retrieved from: <https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-01675708>
- Le Monde (1953, January 27). La réalisation de l'Union française prime et précède pour nous celle de l'entité européenne. Retrieved from: https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1953/01/27/la-realisation-de-l-union-francaise-prime-et-precede-pour-nous-celle-de-l-entite-europeenne-affirme-m-jacquiot_1971511_1819218.html
- L'Horty, Y. (2014). La persistance du chômage ultra-marin. Retrieved from: <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01100366>
- Libaert, T., & Guérin, A.-J. (2008). *Le développement durable*. Paris, France: Dunod.
- Lurel, V. (2016). Égalité réelle outre-mer. Rapport au Premier ministre. Assemblée Nationale.
- Malatesta, S., (2018). International actors as policymakers? Discussing the influence of international actors on the environmental policies of small island states. *Small States & Territories*, 1(1), 95-110.
- Marie, C.-V. (2014). Des 'nés' aux 'originaires': dom en métropole: les effets de 50 ans d'une politique publique ininterrompue d'émigration. *Informations Sociales* 2014/6, No. 186, 40-48.
- Marie, C.-V., & Rallu, J.-L. (2008). *Les tendances démographiques et migratoires dans les régions ultrapériphériques: quel impact sur leur cohésion?* Rapport Martinique. Paris, France: Institut National d'Études Démographiques.
- Monza, R. (2009). Géopolitique de la crise guadeloupéenne: crise sociale et/ou postcoloniale? *Hérodote*, 135(4), 170-197.
- Office of the Prime Minister, France (2015). *National strategy for the security of maritime areas*. Paris, France: OPM.
- Office for National Statistics (United Kingdom) (2019). Labour market economic commentary: July 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/labourmarketeconomiccommentaryjuly2019>

- Orphé, M. (2016). Rapport d'information fait au nom de la délégation aux outre-mer sur le projet de loi (n°3600) visant à instituer de nouvelles libertés et de nouvelles protections pour les entreprises et les actifs. Assemblée Nationale.
- Ouahnon, M. (2019) Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane ... Des colonies âprement disputées. *Géo*; Retrieved from: <https://www.geo.fr/histoire/guadeloupe-martinique-guyane-des-colonies-aprement-disputees-195003>
- Outremers 360⁰ (2016). Egalité réelle en Outre-mer: un rapport pour déclencher un 'Big Bang' économique. Retrieved from: <http://outremers360.com/politique/egalite-reelle-en-outre-mer-un-rapport-pour-reinventer-le-developpement-economique-et-sociale/>
- Palmiste, C. (2012). Génocide par substitution: usages et cadre théorique. *Les Outre-mers français: Actualités et études*. Vol. 1. Paris, France: L'Harmattan.
- Parra-Torrado, M. (2014). *Youth unemployment in the Caribbean*. Washington DC: World Bank.
- Pattieu, S. (2016). Un traitement spécifique des migrations d'outre-mer: le BUMIDOM (1963-1982) et ses ambiguïtés. *Politix*, 116(4), 81-113.
- Peron, Y. (1966). La population des départements français d'outre-mer. *Population*, 21(1), 99-132.
- Rousseau, S. (2004). Dimensions humaine et sociale du développement durable: une problématique séparée du volet environnemental? *Développement durable et territoires*, 3.
- Saffache, P. (2017). Qu'est-ce que le développement durable? *Antilla*. 6-9.
- Sébastien, L., & Brodhag, C. (2004). A la recherche de la dimension sociale du développement durable. *Développement Durable et Territoires*, 3.
- St Lucia Times (2019, March 19). OECS Director General hails accession of Guadeloupe to regional group. Retrieved from: <https://stluciatimes.com/oecs-director-general-hails-accession-of-guadeloupe-to-regional-group/>
- Stromberg Childers, K. (2016). *Seeking imperialism's embrace: National identity, decolonization and assimilation in the French Caribbean*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sudrie, O., Marie, C.-V., & Bernou, B. (2015). Vieillesse de la population en Martinique. Une analyse prospective des enjeux socio-économiques. *Etudes de l'AFD no.1*. Agence Française de Développement.
- Temporal, F. (2017). Les jeunes ultramarins: quelle(s) réalité(s)? *Cahiers de l'Action*, 49(2), 7-17.
- Thiellay, J.-P. (2011). *Le droit des outre-mers*. Paris: Dalloz.
- Triay, P. (2017). Guadeloupe, mai 1967: un massacre aux zones encore troubles. *France TV Info*. Retrieved from: <https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/guadeloupe-mai-1967-massacre-aux-zones-encore-troubles-477125.html>
- United Nations (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development*. New York: United Nations.
- WCED (1987). *Our common future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*. New York: United Nations.
- Wettenhall, R. (2018). A journey through small state governance. *Small States & Territories*, 1(1), 111-128.
- Zander, U. (2013). La hiérarchie 'socio- raciale' en Martinique: entre persistances postcoloniales et évolution vers un désir de vivre ensemble. *Asylon(s)*, No. 11, May.

To cite this article:

Rauzduel, L. A. (2020). Sustainable development policies and strategies in Guadeloupe and Martinique: the missing social and human dimension. *Small States & Territories*, 3(1), 173-186.