

IRSA - CONGRESSO MUNDIAL DE SOCIOLOGIA RURAL (01/10/2025 A
20/01/2026) - IRSA 40 - CONCEPTUAL FRONTIERS OF THE RURAL:
EPISTEMOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS AND EMERGING PARADIGMS IN THE
CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

**A CRITICAL RESEARCH AGENDA ON PARTICIPATORY AND
DELIBERATIVE PRACTICES IN RURAL STUDIES**

José Ribeiro (jdmr33@gmail.com)

Although democratic innovations (DIs) such as deliberative mini-publics, participatory budgeting and participatory & collaborative governance have become central to contemporary debates on deliberative and participatory democracy, their deployment in rural settings remains strikingly under-theorised. At the same time, existing scholarship continues to display a strong urban bias. Therefore, this paper aims to bridge democratic innovation and rural studies by asking whether there are democratic innovations that require explicit consideration from a 'rural' perspective, and, if so, what the related epistemological, conceptual, and methodological challenges are.

These interrogations are backed by a previously conducted research and publication (Ribeiro and Moniz, 2025) that empirically drew on a mixed-methods

comparative analysis of two original datasets: 59 rural-related DI cases from 11 European countries and 212 cases from 18 Latin American countries, compiled from several open-access databases. In Europe, rural DIs are dominated by deliberative practices that operate primarily at the stages of problem identification and policy formulation and are thematically focused on rural development, environmental sustainability, and local governance within existing institutional architectures. In Latin America, by contrast, participatory and collaborative governance prevails, with a more substantial presence in policy implementation and evaluation and a thematic focus on social justice, territorial rights and food sovereignty. Nonetheless, work remains to be done on the epistemological, conceptual, and methodological understanding of democratic innovations in/about the 'rural', which is warranted by differences empirically identified in our previous work.

In sum, this paper argues that rural socio-spatial configurations reshape the democratic goods pursued by democratic innovations, challenging standard frameworks developed for urban contexts. It concludes by proposing a critical research agenda that prioritises comparative designs, participatory action research, ethnographic and longitudinal methods, and the exploration of hybrid governance models capable of addressing democratic challenges of peripheral and contested rural spaces, including critical prefigurative spaces of post-capitalist futures.

Palavras-chave: rural studies; democratic innovations; rural governance; research agenda; latin america; europe.