

DR. IRENA ATELJEVIC

Founderess of rural hub – *Terra Meera* – Center for Regeneration and Human Development, Croatia

Founderess of *SHE* (Sibenik Hub for Ecology), Croatia

Scientific Associate, Institute for Tourism, Zagreb, Croatia

Visiting Scholar, Cultural Geography, Landscape Center, Wageningen University

Visiting Scholar, Education and Competence Studies, Wageningen University

Email: ateljevic.irena@gmail.com

Of Croatian origin, Irena Ateljevic has lived abroad for over 20 years. She obtained her PhD in Human Geography in 1998 at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Looking through the lense of critical social theory, she has explored processes of tourism (neo)colonialisation of Aotearoa/New Zealand and its impacts on Maori indigenous people. During the 12 years she spent living in the country, she worked at Auckland University, Victoria University of Wellington and Auckland University of Technology and has done numerous international research projects in Asia and the South Pacific. In 2005, she moved to the Netherlands to teach at Wageningen University, a highly esteemed university for sustainability and nature conservation issues. She has been invited to teach and speak at various universities worldwide (from Brasil to Rwanda, Australia, Fiji islands, Thailand, China, Finland, the UK, etc.).

In the current context of increasingly distressed, divided and unsustainable human living her research passion lies in critical praxis and action research with the vision to enable more just and hopeful futures. She began her academic career as a (post)modern critical theorist who pessimistically observed structural socio-spatial inequalities produced by the overarching capitalist and patriarchal framework. Yet in the course of her progressive frustration of 'merely-marking-and-not-making-a-difference' she has moved to the transmodern and transdisciplinary space of commitment to hopeful scholarship and caring action that awakens the power of individual agency. She has been translating these theoretical ideas into the areas of critical tourism studies, women empowerment and transformative education and in empirical terms into her own classroom as well as various action-oriented projects in Croatia and India. She was a co-founder of Critical Tourism Studies network dedicated to promote the academy of hope concept. She's co-edited 3 books and published over 50 scientific journals.

Yet, feeling deeply frustrated that her sustainability pedagogy was mainly concerned with 'talking-the walk' rather than 'walking-the-talk', Irena left her academic tenure and returned to Croatia in 2011, to assist her home country in the aspirations towards its more sustainable future. Upon her return she worked in all sectors of society where she could see the potential to create change – as a social scientist and teacher, sustainability consultant for local municipalities and the national government of Croatia; as well as creating her own NGO followed by a social enterprise. In her capacity as a Scientific Associate at the Institute for Tourism in Zagreb, Croatia she conducted a longitudinal research project on the transformative power of tourism towards our sustainable future. Due to this ground-breaking work, the UNWTO invited her to produce a '*Global report on the transformative power of tourism: A paradigm shift towards a more responsible tourism traveller*'.

Free download: http://cf.cdn.unwto.org/sites/all/files/pdf/global_report_transformative_power_tourism_v5.compressed_2.pdf

After experimenting with her first social enterprise - SHE (Sibenik Hub for Ecology) -Irena is currently developing a Center for Regeneration and Human Potential – [Terra Meera](#) in the rural part of Croatia, near the National Park of Krka. She is also currently working on a strategy of transformative tourism for her native coastal town of Šibenik.