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Stakes of new agriurban territories in Ile-de-France

André Fleury

The expression urban agriculture has appeared for eighties to qualify family gardening, developed as an individual answer to food crisis of developing countries. It is also used, a decade ago, to analyse the twin social identity of periurban agricultural areas, at time inhabited by farmers and by commuting city dwellers. Such a settlement was permitted by merging of usual country and city housing, thanks to advent of individual cars.

So, this rurbanisation movement was inventing a new alliance between city and periurban agriculture, often formalized in a common chart. However, Ile-de-France had preferred country parks, near of region boundaries, far from building areas; so, intervening areas were de facto devoted to future urbanization. But, new inhabitants has locally assumed power to keep life framework they had chosen; they have invented agriurban territory.

The agriurban project of territory, or agriculture as an urban component

The usual concept of urban parks excluded any kind of agriculture; these parks was designed and implemented with higher horticultural know how. However, towards 1900, a new urban planners generation have conceived another kind of green city, by including farmland. Especially, E. Howard in England, inventor of Garden Cities and green belt, and J.C.N. Forestier in Paris, who thought of a park system.

For early sixties, the environmental revolution put nature forward. So, 1976 Ile-de-France master plan designed preserved natural areas to balance built areas, considered as antinature.

Later, their outside part was managed as Regional Country Parks (Parcs Naturels Régionaux, PNR); but, their inside parts were excluded of this label. Located near urban fabric, they could not considered as natural enough by National Nature Protection Commission. So, these PNR and large heritage forests are making a rural belt all around Region. Between this rural belt and central urban fabric, a gap was so maintained, registered as Green Belt in the 1994 master plan. It is devoted to be the green and landscaped framework of urban core (Paris and suburbs). But, in this area, there was no management project, up to local citizens take initiative for preservation of the life framework they have chosen. So, they has invented the agriurban project of territory

The main stakes

New meanings of farmland are appeared. In 1973, a 2,000 inh. quiet rural village, Périgny-sur-Yerres, was enjoined to let build 4,000 social flats block in place of fields. When they got this project was given up, city councillors understood that urban planners saw their countryside as vacant, meaningless place. So, they conceived and implemented a multifunctional park: a market gardening area, surrounded with public paths and an environment education house. So, farmers were becoming actors of common territory. From point of view of urban dwellers, that means new relationships both to open space, henceforth considered dynamic landscape and heritage, in co-evolution with agriculture, and also as a urban recreational areas. Rurban dwellers highlight modernity of their rurban housing, absolutely different of suburban one. By choosing their living place, they have invented a new

art of living: rural landscape is become residential infrastructure. So, they grab hold of city council and create new relationships with farmers, heirs of a long tradition of innovative entrepreneurship. A lot of the latter have adapted their farm systems to new chains and new fields, thanks new know how. Others keep their usual arable crops farming, and empower their agricultural system by enlargement (> 1,000 ha) and new strategies of quality; so they maintain rural landscape.

These new territories needs to define identity, between invention and re-discovery. In comparison with this one of Paris, suburbs are short of identity; so, it's a major action focus for new elects. Best policies are looking for a linkage between past and future: the Triangle vert des Villes Maraîchères du Hurepoix underlines both market gardening, enrooted in a long history and its new state of green oasis in heart of a huge banal urban fabric; the Plateau de Saclay binds modernity of a scientific pole and modernity of successful agriculture.

If such sound characteristics are lacking, identity can be re-invented: it's especially the case of new vineyards. The last stake is to highlight the differences in comparison with near territories. For instance: banal suburbs against specific agriurban territories; β social composition of population social housing against quasi cottages. These distinctions are often underlined by boundaries style (maintaining of a fields belt around city) or by rating plates (you enter a PNR), etc.

Because of these common features, these territories would like to manage a network, at a time for exchanging experiences, and building a common representation face to regional government. Such

a network exists in France since 2000 (Terres en Villes); early warning signs can be observed in Europe, such as new network called PURPLE (PeriUrban Regions Platform in Europe).

A new governance

If concept of agriurban territory is now well designed, a true cultural revolution is requested to a lot of territory stake holders who don't understand still how agriculture could be urban: urban developers, who are thinking development only as jobs, taxes and growth population; city department of green spaces, who don't deal such an idea of green urban breaks; ecologists, for whom agriculture is not nature, and farmers themselves who have other conceptions of their job. Another local management is requested; till now, city dwellers moving to country were not fond of agriculture, they often want to rule, because of farming nuisances. But, in agriurban projects, agriculture is asked to stay along. So, the first step results in a chart, founding document of new alliance between city council and farmers; it established a common will that urban agriculture is no more only community gardens or public parks. Generally, the main commitments are due to city, because urban policy has never taken agriculture in account.

An action programme is necessary to give again confidence to farmers, for whom the usual process was to be pushed away. First step is to restore management freedom for farmers, too often harmed by city dwellers way of life. The prime example is this one of business parks, which must be attractive test for enterprises; it's the same for agriculture. Main questions concern traffic, crop safety, long term land safety. The second one is to

sustain economic projects, for which countryside as an infrastructure; so, goods and services value can be emphasized. Useful tools are different kinds of contracts, such as now sustainable agriculture contract, created by French government.

Conclusion

At time of globalisation, agriurban project expressed a new modernity of urban design. A new basis of urban planning was permitted by a socio-geographic analysis, called urban areas (aires urbaines). More generally, new concept of urban region is more and more shared, and request to recognize nature a part of city. From this point of view, agriculture can be nature, whatever farming systems, except intensive breeding of course.