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AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPES, HERITAGE AND IDENTITY IN PERI-URBAN AREAS IN WESTERN EUROPE

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Abstract: This work focuses on particularly sensitive agricultural landscapes, which are visible in peri-urban areas. These territories are indeed fast evolving areas that consist of a "third-area", both urban and rural. The aim of this paper is to analyze the role played by heritage in agricultural landscapes of peri-urban areas. The paper is built around these following questions: what are the changes in agricultural landscapes in the framework of the fast urban sprawl, and what are their effects on practices, especially around heritage, and on the many stakeholders' perceptions? With the help of visuals like aerial or ground pictures, maps, diagrams, interviews, this paper uses a panel of specific examples selected in Western Europe. A wide range of peri-urban situations has been chosen to show the different kinds of existing urban pressure on agricultural landscapes.

Key words: peri-urban area, agricultural landscape, heritage, territories, stakeholders

Résumé: Ce travail est ciblé sur les paysages agricoles périurbains qui sont particulièrement sensibles. Ces territoires périurbains, en évolution rapide, sont considérés comme des « tiers-espaces » à la fois urbains et ruraux. L'objectif de cet article est donc d'analyser la place du patrimoine dans les paysages agricoles des territoires périurbains. L'article est construit autour des questions suivantes : quels sont les changements des paysages agricoles dans le cadre d'une forte croissance périurbaine et quels sont leurs effets sur les pratiques, particulièrement patrimoniales, et sur les perceptions des nombreux acteurs. À l'aide de photographies aériennes ou au sol, de cartes, de graphiques, d'interviews, cet article utilise plusieurs exemples spécifiques, principalement en Europe occidentale. Ce choix est fondé sur la nécessité d'explorer un large échantillon de situations périurbaines pour rendre compte des différents types de pressions qui y existent.

Mots-clés: territoires périurbains, paysage agricole, patrimoine, territoires, acteurs

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1. Introduction

This paper results from the cooperation of three geographers with different fields of research[4] and different methods. It's a generalization of their previous works carried out for the research laboratory CERPA (Centre d'Études et de Recherches sur les Paysages – Centre for researches and studies on landscapes) of Nancy University.

This cooperation started in 2009-2010 as a DVD on the landscapes of Lorraine (2011), ordered and funded by the Lorraine region[5] was made by the CERPA. This work, mainly based on aerial and ground pictures analyses, brings the three authors to confront with one another their long-term experience, methods and results. CERPA researchers founded their works on the study of landscapes from a traditional method of description / explanation, renewed by the use of several pictures with different angles of shots (ground, aerial oblique, aerial vertical) into reduce part of subjectivity in the readings. This type of landscapes analysis is here completed by a large range of working methods: statistics surveys, the media's analysis and the study of stakeholders' (mainly former students from the Geography department of Nancy University now working in territorial planning) and populations' perceptions, are all decisive in the successful achievements of our work.

During the making of the DVD, many contrasts showed up between agricultural landscapes of remote rural areas and agricultural landscapes of peri-urban areas, and it seems relevant for the authors to focus, for this paper, on most sensitive agricultural landscapes, which are visible in peri-urban areas. Because they are located close to cities and have as a result to face strong pressures (especially in the frame of urban sprawl), these territories are fast changing areas and indeed consist of a third-area (*tiers-espace*) (Vanier, 2005) or a in-between city (*Zwischenstadt*) (Sieverts, 2004), both urban and rural. According to Vanier, the peri-urban area is a zone mixing urban and rural areas, which stems from political and local actions taken by the stakeholders on both areas

These areas are often studied, but rarely aimed at preserving and/or conserving cultural heritage, some exceptions apart (Swensen, Jerpåsen, 2008). However, these fast changes threaten agricultural heritage and lead to special protecting actions. The heritage is directly linked to the territory (Di Méo, 1994), and thus to the local identity. In specific and sensitive areas of peri-urban fringes, it seems essential to analyze the role played by heritage. So this work raises the following issues directly linked to these preoccupations: what are the changes of agricultural landscapes in the territories of the fast urban expansion, and what are their effects on practices, especially around heritage, and on the various perceptions of the stakeholders and populations?

In this work, examples in French peri-urban areas are mostly developed. However, some comparisons, especially with British examples, are used to replace French examples in the broader context of Western Europe.

To clarify these issues, the paper is divided into three parts:

- firstly, the use of the intricate concept of peri-urban area in France, with some information on the position of agricultural landscape and on the involvement of many stakeholders in this area, will be shown;
- secondly, the different kinds of still existing agricultural heritage, preserved and required by the inhabitants in these peri-urban areas, will be examined;
- the last part of the paper will be a focus on new identities in these areas (of which agricultural landscapes and heritage are key-elements) and on the new conflicts between stakeholders and new conflicts of use.

[4] Mark Bailoni's work is about geopolitics, especially about local and regional identities. Simon Edelblutte is studying industrial landscapes, conversion and heritage. Anthony Tchékémian is working on the evolution of the rural territories and the stakeholders' interactions.

[5] Most of the pictures used in the DVD are visible in the CERPA website: http://cerpa.univ-nancy2.fr.

The conclusion will show that these processes lead to new landscapes in this transition zone between remote rural area and urban area.

2. How to define the peri-urban area in the French way?

For a majority of people, the urban area is a piece of land with a high density of populations (as opposed to the rural villages) which covers most human activities (housing, shopping areas, industries, education, politics, culture). A municipality is regarded as an urban unit with a population threshold that depends on the period of time and the countries. This threshold raises the representation issue of the town according to the countries. The United Nations (UN) statistics show these differences in the thresholds among the national institutes for statistics (200 worldwide). If this threshold in France or in Germany begins with a population of 2,000, it begins with 200 people in Denmark, 300 in Iceland, 1,000 in Canada, 2,500 in the United States, 10,000 in Switzerland and Spain, 50,000 in Japan. As for the UN, the reference is 20,000 even though an international statistic definition of the urban population was given at the Prag conference in 1966. As far as France is concerned, a municipality will be called a town if it has a population of over 2,000 people living in the city and in its suburbs. The same problems exist with the words “rural” and “peri-urban”. What is the French way to define peri-urban territories?

So far, the words city and countryside or urban and rural have been opposed to each other. But in the reality, the two worlds have been for a long time, deeply nested. As an example, Baudonvilliers (figure 1), a small French municipality with a population of only 469, shows 90% percent of its workers who commute for work to nearby towns. We can clearly see the duality of the landscape with the juxtaposition, on the one hand of the old and rural village and on the other hand with a range of new individual houses built as a set of condominiums being part of a common property estate called *lotissement* in France. So Baudonvilliers shows a classical landscape of peri-urbanisation. The old village with its farms surrounded by gardens and orchards (on the right hand side) contrasts with the new district of individual and recent houses (in the centre). This district is situated along the main road, which allows an easy access to the neighboring cities of Bar-le-Duc or Saint-Dizier.

Peri-urbanisation is now clearly visible in the landscapes, but the usual words city, countryside, urban, rural stay simply descriptive and emotional terms, and not scientific terms. Moreover, the analysis of these new territories between urban and rural worlds, needs to overcome this traditional dichotomy (Poulot, 2008).

As a result, researchers have tried, for forty years, to define the phenomenon of the urban growth using the terms, in French: *rurbanisation* (Bauer, Roux, 1976; Berger, 1977), *périurbanisation* (Beaujeu-Garnier, 1983), *exurbanisation* (Racine, 1993), *suburbanisation* (Marot, 1997), *réurbanisation* (Van Criekingen, 2008), *contre-urbanisation* (Thomsin, 2001) and more recently the terms of *tiers-espace* (Vanier, 2001) and *péri-rural* (Vanier, 2008). All the terms show how complex these processes of the sprawling suburban areas are. However, common characteristics of the peri-urbanisation can be defined: it’s an expansion of the city spreading over the nearby countryside but which, unlike the traditional suburb linked to the city centre, has a disorganized development (Brück, 2002).

Moreover, for town planning, political authorities need scientific and accurate definitions.

- Firstly, the French national institute for statistics and economic studies (INSEE) created in 1952 the notion “urban unity” which consists of a range of municipalities joined together[6] and reaching a population of two thousand people or more. The figure 2 highlights the urban growth which has gone beyond the limits of the municipality and spreads out to the territory of nearby municipality. The first developing area is called central municipality *(commune-centre)* and the second area, consisting mainly of ranges of high-rise buildings and after-war houses, is called suburbia (*banlieue*). From the *commune-centre* of Nancy (limits in red), urban growth spread to neighboring municipalities (limits in yellow). The picture shows only a small part of

[6] The notion of joined settlements concerns buildings under 200m away from each other.

the *banlieue* of Nancy which actually gathered 36 *communes* for a total of 330,232 inhabitants (2007).



Fig 1. Baudonvilliers, Lorraine, France, a peri-urbanised municipality (Humbert / CERPA, 1993).

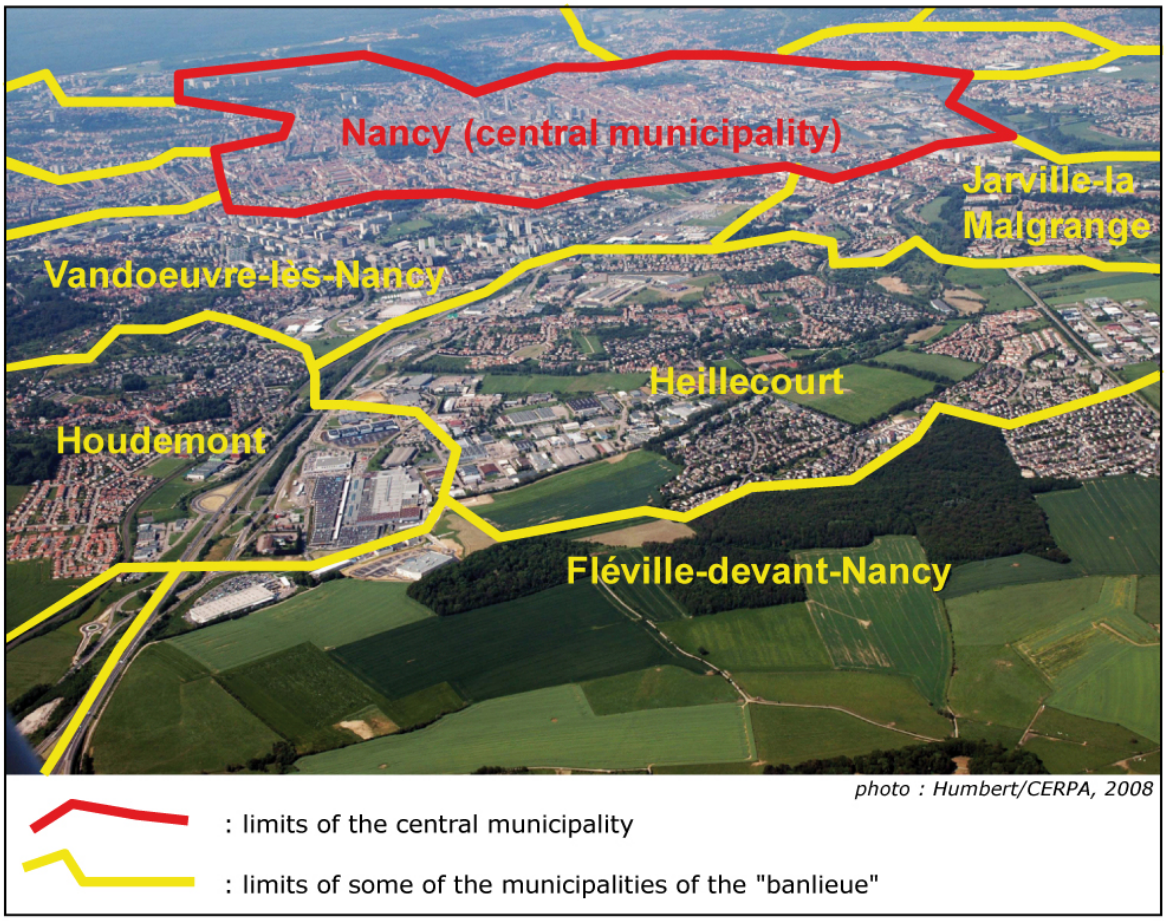


Fig 2. Part of the urban unity of Nancy, Lorraine, France.

But this definition of urban unity didn't include peri-urban municipalities with no joined settlements. So and secondly, to be even closer to the reality, the INSEE has tried to take into account the economic or demographic aspect. In 1996 an official definition of the peri-urban was created: it gathers the municipalities (not in urban unity) of which over 40% of the workers commute to the urban unity. These two first definitions are summarized on figure 3.

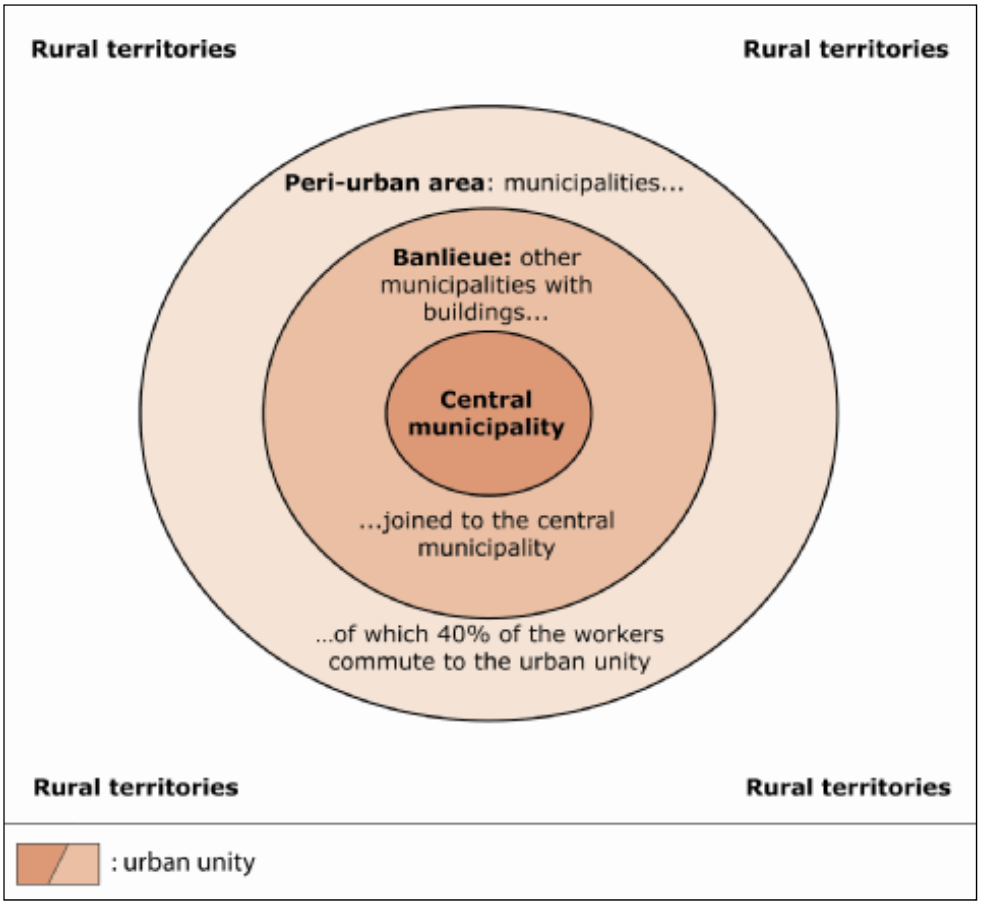


Fig 3. The INSEE definition for urban unity and peri-urban area.

- So far, this definition has not been accurate enough to analyze rural areas and the French national institute for research in agronomics (INRA) has even in 1998 a further definition of the rural territories divided into four items (Schmitt, 1998):
    - the "rural centers" are big villages where most of the dwellers live and work;
    - the "rural territory under a slight influence" (from the urban territory) where twenty percent or more of the dwellers commute to urban areas for work;
    - the "outskirts of the rural centers" where twenty percent or more of the dwellers work in rural territories;
    - the "remote rural territories" which is not included in any of the three definitions mentioned above.

So, both terms "urban" and "rural" can't be simply opposed to each other for two reasons (Tchékémian, 2008):

- Firstly, the rural is regarded as an area which is left behind, which is somehow the left-overs;
- Secondly, the peri-urban areas are still very much under the influence of rural and agricultural activities since these territories have the characteristics of the countryside.

On these peri-urban territories, a diversity of stakeholders interacts and builds the foundations of this new area. Each stakeholder has its representation of the area. That means that each institution, from the central government to the local authorities, the farmers, the new coming

dwellers, etc. has its interest and strategy. As a consequence, it has repercussions on these territories which have difficulties to find a specific identity, a specific status between rural and urban territories (Tchékémian, 2007).

The peri-urban territories are under the pressure of a high demand for land which raises environmental issues, social conflicts and specific, different needs and expectations from the stakeholders (figure 4).

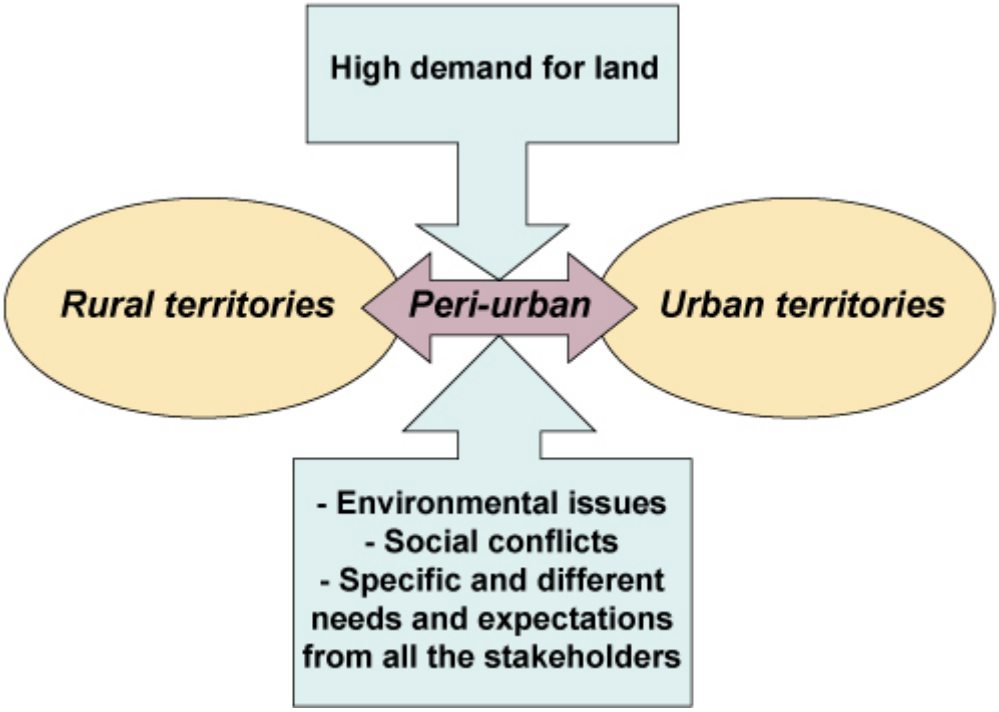


Fig 4. Stakeholders and conflicts in peri-urban area (Tchékémian, 2008).

As a conclusion, it can be noticed that the peri-urban territories result from the diversity of populations and institutions who live together and interact with one another. It's actually a transition zone, with a strong need for heritage elements.

3. Which is the role played by heritage in agricultural landscapes of peri-urban areas?

Because of their lack of clear identity, the notion of heritage is being granted a specific role in the peri-urban territories. Due to a strong urban pressure, the largest cities of Western Europe are an example. Such is the case for the creation, by The Town and Country Planning Act in 1947, of Green Belts around major British conurbations (London, Manchester, Birmingham, etc) and middle sized cities. This is a real mean to control urban sprawl and thus to protect a threatened agricultural landscape in peri-urban areas, even if the notion of heritage is not explicitly mentioned in the original Plan (Cullingworth, Nadin, 2006).

This notion of heritage, first defined in France as *"properties passed, according to law, from fathers and mothers to their children" (biens qui descendent, suivant la loi, des pères et des mères à leurs enfants*) (Choay, 2005: 617), has been gradually expanded to become *"a set of representations and attributes attached to a non- contemporary object (artwork, building, landscape, site ...) which recognized significance requires a protection" (un ensemble de représentations, d'attributs fixés sur un objet non contemporain (œuvre, bâtiment, paysage, site…) dont est décrétée collectivement l'importance intrinsèque qui exige qu'on le conserve)* (Lazzarotti, 2004: 692).

So this notion of heritage covers an even broader field (Poulot, 1998; Neyret, 2004) and although this *"frenzy of heritage" (frénésie patrimoniale)* (Babadzan, 2001: 1) is sometimes criticized (Choay, 1992), this enlargement is visible under different aspects:

- the thematic aspect: ranging from religious monuments (a church, a cathedral) and castles to buildings from the industry (Edelblutte, 2010) including as well farms, bridges, mills… in other words, from specific and outstanding elements to more common elements, known as small heritage (*petit patrimoine*) in France;
- the chronological aspect: ranging from antic, medieval, pre-industrial elements to XXth century buildings;
- and the spatial aspect: ranging from one single object, one single monument to a building and now to a district, a city and even a landscape.

Moreover, *"the range of meanings attached to this formerly precise legal term has recently undergone a quantum expansion to include almost any sort of intergenerational exchange or relationship […] between societies as well as individuals"* (Graham et al., 2000: 1). So, the notion of heritage includes now immaterial elements such as oral traditions, folklore, music, etc.

At last, the preservation of heritage is deeply linked to the notion of sustainable development, as human groups can't develop by denying their past and therefore have to integrate it in the construction of their future. This reinforces the inclusion of heritage in territorial planning, as the concept of sustainable development has now become a major paradigm.

In peri-urban areas, first considered as just an area for urban sprawl where there is room for building, is this heritage valued? And if yes, what kind of heritage is considered and how it is valued? The use of landscape can tell us about it (figure 5).

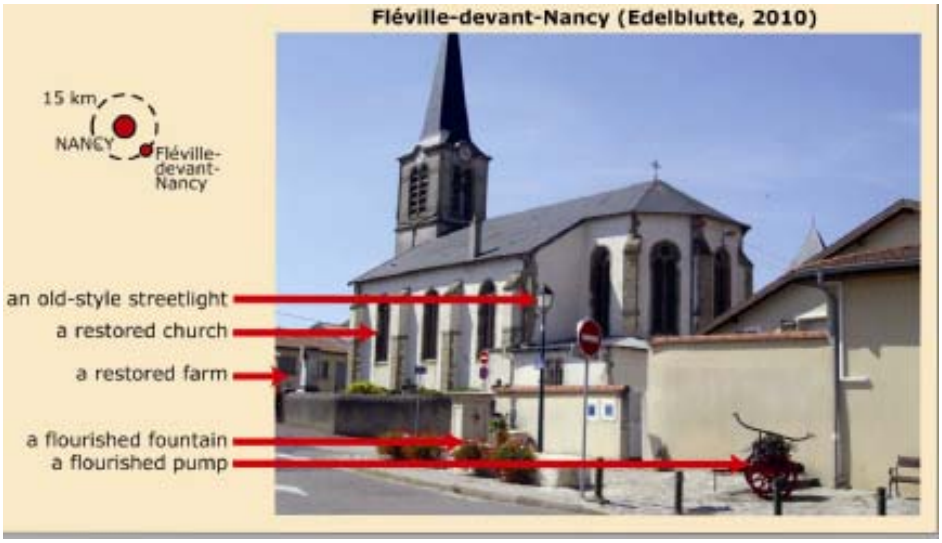


Fig 5. The heart of a village in Lorraine: a heritage treated differently.

The choice of these two villages as representative examples has been made during the achievement of the DVD referenced above. A hundred of pictures were analyzed and a strong contrast appeared, around the city of Nancy, the largest city of the Lorraine region, NE of France, between agricultural landscapes within a circle of 30/35 km around Nancy and those located beyond. The choice also takes into account of the proximity of another major city. Therefore the example chosen for the remote village, i.e. Assenoncourt, is too far from other local big cities (Metz – 80 km, Strasbourg – 150 km) for its landscape is influenced by them.

On the first picture, showing a village, 15 km away from Nancy, some heritage elements are clearly valued. On the second picture instead, showing a village 55 km away from Nancy, heritage elements are not valued and abandoned ruins can even be seen. So the difference

between the landscape of a peri-urban village and the landscape of a remote rural village, in terms of heritage value, is strong. This observation leads to several remarks:

● Firstly, peri-urban villages have financial means to value their heritage. The preservation of heritage is possible thanks to tax revenues from the new inhabitants. The villages without a new coming population, in remote rural areas, haven't the financial means to maintain this heritage;

● Secondly: the agricultural and rural heritage value, in peri-urban villages, is promoted by ex-urban inhabitants who seek authenticity. New inhabitants of peri-urban areas are very concerned about heritage, far more than people from remote countryside areas (Husson, 2004). This is indeed a matter of mentality. The new inhabitants come from urban areas and so they are keen on rural things: they're looking for what they feel as "authentic". They want rural and agricultural elements around their houses, even if these elements are not really authentic, as it can be seen about the streetlight on the picture of Fléville-devant-Nancy.

This comment raises questions on what is considered as being part of heritage in peri-urban areas. Mathieu and Jollivet (1989) showed that agricultural landscape is regarded as being much closer to nature and environment than other type of landscape. For them, "*there is currently an increasing social – mainly urban – identification between the rural, the nature and the environment. This identification is also deeply rooted on a vision of the rural as* idyllic *space"* (Figueiredo, 2009: 12), in fact not really a "real" space. Agricultural landscapes are indeed not "natural" and are still evolving as landscapes of food production. So, they often don't match with the representations sought by the new inhabitants.

● And thirdly, besides these evolutions, these peri-urban villages are more and more ruled by ex-urban categories of population. They show more concern, more preoccupation, for heritage. On the contrary, remote rural villages are still managed by ancient farmers. For a majority, they haven't got these preoccupations of preserving things of the past and don't really want to change methods of management developed for efficient food production.

At last, this agricultural heritage value in peri-urban areas covers an even larger field, as it was the case for heritage globally speaking. But, unlike the general trend in which spectacular monuments are first preserved, the preservation of rural heritage often begins with selected and small elements (small heritage – *petit patrimoine* – in France), with a high symbolic weight, such as wayside crosses, washeries, fountains, etc. Later, the preservation concerns larger buildings such as churches, farms and, eventually, the whole agricultural landscape (figures 6a, 6b & 6c).

In France, the 1993 landscape law *(loi paysage*) about the preservation of every kind of landscapes (urban, natural, rural…) with a heritage identity (*identité patrimoniale*) is the first text including landscape in the field of preservation. However, the definition of landscape, as well as what is a heritage identity, are not clearly established. So the law is very difficult to implement and it sometimes could freeze some landscapes in a sterilizing protection preventing their evolution. This preoccupation was already present during the XIXth century in the debate about the protection of the cities between Ruskin and Sitte; the first did not want any transformation of the European city while the second accepting some changes (Choay, 2005: 618). This risk is especially strong in peri-urban areas where the new inhabitants are very motivated to maintain landscapes they fantasized more than landscapes of efficient food production.

The debate is reinforced today because even the agricultural practices, linked to local and original productions, such as production of the *terroir*, can be preserved. Furthermore, some of the forgotten rural celebrations and traditions are re-launched and re-appropriated by the new inhabitants, as an immaterial heritage. This is the case in Aquitaine, near Bordeaux for example, where peri-urban villages have used an ancient celebration, the election of a May Queen, to assert their identity in the face of the great influence of the city of Bordeaux (Ribereau-Gayon, 2007).



Fig 6a, 6b & 6c. Enlargement or agricultural and rural heritage near Nancy (Lorraine, France).

So, in these peri-urban areas, agriculture has more and more an additional duty. Its duty is not only to produce foodstuff, but to maintain landscapes too. For example, a farmer can't just remain a producer, but needs to act as a curator / creator / coordinator / entertainer of heritage. More generally, Figuereido (2009: 12) notes that *"the majority of authors consulted point out three main functions of rural areas nowadays: ensuring food production in an efficient way; preserving the landscape and the rural environment, and maintaining the rural areas as a recreation and leisure resource for non local populations"*. This threefold "mission" is particularly difficult to fill in peri-urban area and this sometimes leads to conflicts between the different users of this area. So new identities are developing in this so-called "third-space" where there is a strong need for recognition since it has been for a long time regarded and studied as only a minor part of the city.

4. Landscape, identity and conflicts in peri-urban areas

Urban sprawl is a territorial, social and mental phenomenon which can be regarded as a main cause for the evolutions of the rural landscapes in peri-urban areas (Spiers, 2009). Certainly other factors have major impacts on landscapes, like the mutations of farming systems. Nevertheless, the landscape changes in a context of urban sprawl have sociological effects, major impacts on local identities and geopolitical[7] repercussions in peri-urban areas (Matless, 1998). Indeed the urban sprawl leads to a demographic redynamism, the construction of new dwellings and facilities, and the emergence of new planning issues. Their impacts on the landscape can cause local conflicts between different stakeholders (residents, environmental activists, rural and urban local politicians, regional and central governments, business sector, etc.) or between different generations or sociological categories of populations. Indeed, as Subra (2007) put it, planning issues can be at the heart of geopolitical questions about a "rejected planning issue". These conflicts are more and more intense since the 1960's, especially in rural fringes of the cities (Dziedzicki, 2003; Lecourt, Faburel, 2005; Subra 2007). The new rural dwellers have different perceptions, different expectations and different visions of the territory and the landscape than the native residents, and that can raise some local tensions.

These perceptions and visions of the landscape are essential in the local identity of the residents. Indeed, as it was shown in the second part of this paper, the landscape is a key element of local heritage, and this notion of heritage is essential in history, in memory of a community and thus in the identity of a territory (Di Méo, 1994). The strong identity of rural communities, linked to an iconic landscape, can also seduce new populations in search of territories with "a character" and with "roots". Nevertheless, if the neo-rural populations are often willing to become part of the local community, their settlement upsets a pre-existing social order in the village. These new dwellers contribute to regenerate the village, providing a demographic renewal and new incomes, but this neo-rural population comes with its own values, with an urban way of life, and sometimes without any real knowledge of rural and agricultural practices. They build new homes and they restore the old ones, sometimes without taking into account the traditional architectural forms. Thus they contribute to the physical renovation of the village, and above all, they put up land prices, sometimes depriving natives of buying properties in the territory where they have their family roots. Thus a kind of rejection of new populations can appear in the peri-urban areas.

The rejection can concern a particular planning project: for example the construction of new homes, new business location (retail centre, industrial park, etc.) or equipments for neo-rural or even urban population in peri-urban area (road, waste recycling centre, airport, etc.). But it can also concern the general phenomenon of urban sprawl and the erosion of rural and agricultural areas, linked to social, lifestyle or ecologist regards. The rejection is particularly important when these new facilities are regarded as negative, and generate some nuisances (noise, pollution,

[7] Geopolitics is seen here in a French approach, defined by the geographer Yves Lacoste (1995) as the study of power rivalries on the territories. Through this approach, the French school of Geopolitics does not only analyze international conflicts, but also internal issues in democratic states (elections, identities, nation, planning, etc.).

aesthetics, etc.). This phenomenon of rejection is a NIMBY (Not In My BackYard)-type reaction, generating a form of local geopolitical conflict with two challenges: building the equipment or maintaining a territorial tradition, a landscape.

Elsewhere, if this notion of NIMBY reaction is now widely popularized and used in all works on planning conflicts, it was first developed about urban sprawl phenomenon in the British countryside. Nicholas Ridley, as Mrs. Thatcher's secretary for environment, brought it to a wider audience in the late 1980's while fighting the construction of new homes in peri-urban areas. He regarded although the English countryside as a heritage to be protected: *"our English countryside is one of the most heavily man-made habitats in Europe. To make it into a green museum would be to belie its whole history"* (N. Ridley, 1988, quoted in *BBC News*, 2002).

However the rejection and the NIMBY attitudes are not confined to native population in peri-urban areas: the neo-rural dwellers are sometimes the most virulent in these conflicts. Moreover conflicts between generations of neo-rural populations may appear. Indeed these new residents have settled in peri-urban areas because land prices are cheaper and the property access is easier than in town. Furthermore many of them have left the city looking for a better living environment. They do not want to sacrifice their quality of life, their quiet living environment in the countryside or the beauty of the landscape, which are potentially threatened by a planning project or by urban sprawl. Indeed the NIMBY attitude is first a reaction to defend the value or the quality of a property. In this type of planning conflict, the protection and the valorisation of historical, cultural or natural heritage are key-elements of the debates.

This type of geopolitical local conflict is found consistently in the peri-urban fringes of all the cities in Western Europe and increasingly in Eastern Europe regardless of the size of the city or its rank in the urban hierarchy. Indeed we can regard examples of these planning conflicts in the periphery of a global city, with the case of the urbanisation of the Metropolitan Green Belt around London, but also in the peri-urban fringe of medium-large cities in France, such as Nantes or Grenoble.

The peri-urban fringe of Greater London is essentially included in the perimeter of the Metropolitan Green Belt. Each planning project in or near this area – for example housing construction projects or plans to expand Heathrow Airport – has brought about many reactions in the involved rural areas (Bailoni, 2009). In these cases the neo-rural populations are particularly engaged and often the most virulent defenders of the protection of rural landscapes. If there are reactions to such projects all around the capital city, the mobilization is much more intense in the western peri-urban areas than in the eastern periphery. This is a traditional phenomenon in this type of NIMBY reactions: wealthier populations are more reactive (Subra, 2007). The western periphery of London is one of the most prosperous areas of the United-Kingdom, while the eastern is a traditional working-class area.

Associations, such as the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) in the Londoner periphery, largely lead the mobilization of the population. In these conflicts, local residents associations were created to fight against a specific project. They often work in networks. The construction of the arguments of opponents to the planning projects are very similar in a lot of cases, whatever the location and the city affected by the conflict, or whatever the suggested equipment.

Indeed the arguments against the expansion of Heathrow, the main European airport in a global city, are very close to those of the opponents of the construction of a new regional airport in Nantes, a "provincial" town in Western France (Lecourt, Faburel, 2005). The same major global non-governmental organizations, such as Greenpeace, are also involved in these two conflicts, organising the same type of action and mobilization.

Moreover arguments against an airport are sometimes similar to those against the construction of a highway. For example, local population of the Trièves plateau, in the southern periphery of Grenoble, fights against the construction of a motorway section trough their territory. The A51 motorway was to open up the Southern Alps, but the rural dwellers consider that it will create a "dormitory suburb" of Grenoble on the plateau (Subra, 2007). They want to protect the rural and natural character of their territory, which they see as exceptional.

The protection of natural heritage is often the key-element of an opposition line. It brings attention to the media and it helps more people be aware of the situation. Indeed opponents are mobilizing to save a specific species, a threatened ecosystem, or even to fight against a global problem (to reduce the air traffic to limit the climate change for example). The aim of the mobilization can also be the desire to protect a landscape, regarded as an element of local heritage, as the result of centuries of rural traditions and specific agricultural practices. The CPRE activists thus to maintain a certain ideal of rurality. Its vision can be regarded as a kind of cliché, the cliché that everybody can represent when we speak about the English countryside, although the organisation denies a traditionalist or conservative line (Matless, 1998; Salomon Carvin, 2006; Spiers, 2009). Its will to protect a traditional and historic rural landscape in peri-urban areas around London is very similar to arguments of other organisations in other fringes of cities in Europe. Indeed campaigners against the airport project of Notre-Dame-des-Landes, near Nantes, activist to defend the specific rural landscape of *bocage*, described as both an exceptional natural environment and a rural heritage built by generations of particular agricultural practices.

5. Conclusion

This paper has shown a very specific kind of territory, the peri-urban areas, which is very hard to strictly define. They are now economically and socially closely linked to the city but were previously agricultural territories. The approach of heritage is particular and essential in these areas, which are under the pressure of urban sprawl. The protection of the natural, historical and cultural heritage, built by centuries of rural life and agricultural practices, is at the heart of campaigns to preserve a certain local identity.

The rapid evolutions of these peri-urban areas generate very specific but very fierce geopolitical local conflicts. The main motivations of these conflicts are: the different perceptions and expectations of the inhabitants of the territory; the ideals of ecology and sustainable development; the pressure on the prices and the value of the land; the need to set up new infrastructures and new equipments to address the demographic renewal and the phenomenon of urban sprawl. The defence of the territorial identity and the landscapes is often the key of these conflicts. The heritage is at the heart of the controversial arguments in these debates for the best planning in these sensitive territories in peri-urban fringes. As a result, this analysis shows that the agricultural heritage has a basic and a very specific role in the evolutions of the peri-urban areas.

Planners and political authorities in Europe take into account the specificity of this agricultural heritage in the urban peripheries. Special policies, areas of protection, legislations, etc., have been created and implemented to protect these territories. The main model is probably the British Green belts. Nevertheless these plans are not always totally efficient. For example, the Green belt status has certainly controlled and regulated development projects, but it has not stopped the movement of peri-urbanisation and urban sprawl around London, especially since the commuters can jump over the Green belt by the increased availability of private cars. Murdoch and Lowe (2003) have even shown a “preservationist paradox”: the protection of rural areas has made them more attractive to many city dwellers who have decided to leave the city. The status of Green Belt may even therefore enhance any further the development of the peri-urbanisation.

Moreover economists and geographers have shown that this containment policy has also contributed to a number of less desirable environmental, social and economic effects (Hall, *al*., 1973; Gilg, 2005; Barker, 2006). An inflationary effect on land prices has been noted in the Green belt since 1970’s (Hall, *al*., 1973). The evolutions of land prices have created social divides between urban and peri-urban, protected and non-protected areas in and around London. These social discontinuities have undoubtedly impacts on planning conflicts in the peri-urban fringes of London.

Similar examples of limited success exist for other policies in other European cities. They reveal again the specific character of these peri-urban territories, and show the need of targeted measures to protect this sensitive and evolutionary heritage.

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