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RESEARCH IN ECONOMICS AND RURAL SOCIOLOGY

Prospective for the French rural space by 2020

Given their diversity of uses and functions, the future features of the French countryside may take on many contrasted appearances. Using a summary and a rereading of the established knowledge on rural space the prospective group set up by the French land planning agency - DATAR - suggests 4 potential scenarios for the French countryside by 2020.

Three features of the countryside under pressure

To understand the perspectives (dimensions, prospects) of the French countryside, we favour an entry through the uses, functions and representations of the space. Their diversity is organized in three great features of countryside:

- The **countryside-resource** covers the productive uses of the rural space, regarded as the support for economic activities, those that use soil, natural resources and other specific resources proper to rural areas.
- The **countryside-living environment** or landscape covers the rural as a residential and recreational space, as a space used by housing and leisure activities. It includes the whole residential economy sector in the rural areas.
- The **countryside-nature** is that of an "objective" nature, which has its own ways of functioning, which are not necessarily in accordance with the individuals' environmental preferences (amenities, charm of the living-environment are a component of the countryside-living environment). It includes resources - water, soil, biological diversity - and functions of cycles, climatic or eco-systemic adjustments. The countryside-nature mainly concerns the biological diversity preservation, the preservation of the constituents' quality of the vital natural resources, the prevention of the global nature risks like climate warming.

The global rural dynamic is the result of tensions between these features, which use the same resources, and of their linkages. The prospective exercise first supposes to identify the heavy trends in movement, the emerging processes and the breaking factors in these different components of the rural.

Heavy trends and present dynamics

The residential development of the rural space has been one of the major happenings of the French countryside since the 70s. Until now, it mainly relied on the periurbanisation, the urban spread of the population towards the nearest countryside going together with the daily home-to-work commuting. Today, the less intense periurbanisation tends to give way to a more general development of the urban spread in the whole rural area rather than to a periurban densification. The French still express a very strong willingness for countryside: nowadays, a good quarter of the urban population declares that they plan to move out to the countryside in the coming years (Perrier-Cornet, 2002). The countryside-living environment became the main theme in the French people's topical representations of the rural. In parallel, we must underline new emerging forms of populations' mobility towards rural areas: the migrations of the retired, the settling of European people in the French countryside...

The productive rural is first stressed by the ongoing farming decline, though this one almost maintains its influence over the territory. In parallel, there is an increasing demand for nature goods, which partly concerns agriculture and chiefly tourism. The industry meets contrasted changes: the traditional rural industry resists better in a context where the metropolisation processes of activities is strengthening, in principle not in favour of rural settlings. Lately, we have witnessed an industrial deconcentration movement towards the periurban. Indisputably, the nature question gained ground in the whole rural area: with regard to collective goods, it first relies on public policies the development of which has been active for fifteen years and is the source of local controversies (see Natura 2000). These systems lead to a new way of dividing the rural around natural objects, in a context of environmental policies internationalization. The preservation or protection actions are no longer in confined special zones (preserves, remarkable sites). They are carried over wider and wider territories and potentially concern the whole rural areas.

Four scenarios for the French countryside by 2020

This key for understanding is the basis for the rural area prospective: adopting the methodological approach of the morphological analysis, we regard the three features of countryside as the components of a "rural system".

The scenarios rely on differentiated assumptions on the respective weight that these various features will take on in the future, according to the previously identified trends and their global environment development. They also differ in the way these features link together. Four scenarios were built on this basis:

The generalised residential countryside

It is an underlying scenario in which we prolong the actors' behaviours and the factors which permitted periurbanisation. The logic, which gained ground during the last thirty years, is taken as far as the end: the living environment organizes the rural area and is generalized to the greater part of the territory.

In terms of actors, this first scenario is that of individual preferences, especially that of the population's middle classes who, in France, are concerned by residential mobility, preferences for the periurban life style and desire to live both in the town and the countryside (dissociation between workplace and living place). More generally, it is the scenario of the "desire for countryside" that various categories of urban people can effectively fulfil (retired people settling in the countryside, weekly or seasonally bi-residentiality, flows of Europeans towards the French countryside...).

Such an assumption of evolution supposes a societal context in which economic policies absorb the liberal options and the satisfaction of individual preferences. The society environmental concerns do not challenge the continuum of "the car dependency", the medium classes concerned by mobility keep on having the means to do so, and so on.)

The consequences on the rural areas' features of this scenario are contrasted. In the first place, countryside gets more and more populated. The periurban area widely broadens. The periurban suburbs, which until then chiefly concerned large towns, grow around medium-sized towns. The willingness for countryside is also deep among retired people, including those originated from other European countries: most of the Southern rural areas benefit from these migration flows of retired people. The most remote rural areas are busier and busier in season. However, this disseminated tourism remains insufficient to ensure a significant repopulation of these territories. The South-Western - North-Western "*diagonale du vide*" ("diagonal of the low density"), trimmed on its fringes by the periurbanisation growth, gets thinner but does not totally disappear.

In the second place, agriculture meets deep upheavals. In a context of weakening of the CAP and of flows of new population who marginalize farmers in even greater numbers, farmers have the opportunity or are more and more driven to develop service activities linked to their

farm: leisure, tourism, pedagogical farms, up keeping and maintenance of the rural space, direct selling... In parallel, conflicts between residents and farmers or industrials become more intense, in a context where, locally, residents are more and more powerful.

More generally, achieving this scenario leads to an important transformation of the French agricultural landscape in the next twenty years: omnipresence of the agriculture-services in the most periurbanized and residential zones and in the tourist zones; intensive agriculture in crisis in the West and production delocalization (for instance, pigs) into other European countries; possible collapse of meat producers...

In the end, public investments focus on the periurban, partly to the detriment of big agglomerations and town policies.

Sustainable towns and the agro-industrial rural

The whole context of this scenario is that of the maintenance or re-affirmation of the major role of States, of Europe and the central institutions, in a context of strong environmental concerns in the society and on the politicians' agenda. It is simultaneously a breaking and mutating one with regard to topical trends: the residential development of the rural is challenged; the agricultural profession maintains its hold but at the price of an environmental conversion within the frame of a re-oriented CAP. The key actors are the big towns and their elected representatives, and in the countryside the farming profession.

The elected representatives of the metropolis and big towns, organised in powerful town districts, implement public policies for sustainable towns, which, as a priority, mobilize public funds. Priority is given to the redevelopment and social treat of suburbs, which start to become safer places; to new generations of public transports, which link the whole territory of the town districts, to the struggle against urban pollutions and nuisances linked to the individual car and so on.: Town planning policies are focused on sustainable and safe towns.

Town spreads out but as a town and immediately nearby, by integrating the fringe of the first periurbanized surrounds. The farther periurbanisation and the "car dependency" have a deterrent effect and are even stigmatized for their energetic and social cost.

The residential function focusing on towns, a greater room for manoeuvre is again given to productive activities in the countryside. In a context of maintenance of a strong and environmental CAP, agriculture and agrifood industries seize the opportunity and integrate all the society's increasing environmental requirements. More than farming countryside, first presented like an alternative to productivism, it is an accurate, capitalistic and modernized farming, with high technology eco-certified firms, which implements this orientation. The mobilisation of biotechnological progresses, the needs for more and more accurate knowledge on plants and animals... lead to limit, then, reduce the use of classical inputs (fertilizers, weedkillers and pesticides). The opinion ends up agreeing about GMO, the elaboration conditions of which are under control and have been the subject of wide debates.

In this scenario, the rural becomes less populated and the contrast grows between town and countryside. Denser and

served by urban transport networks, the first periurbanized suburbs melt into the spread town. Their outskirts changed into a function of green lungs for big towns, natural areas close to leisure activities and relaxation... What previously brought together town and countryside - the residential function and population mobility between both - becomes blurred. Again Countryside becomes agricultural by taking an active part in the objectives of natural resources preservation and good health of natural habitats.

In the mean time, the planning and regulating logic of the public action will lead to favour a functional segmentation of the areas rather than a territorial integration of functions. Regulation, norms, zoning... The geographical statement of the scenario rather goes with a logic of specialisation of the areas: natural and recreational spaces, green lungs for sustainable towns, agriculture territories, forest spaces, zones and parks for touristy concentration, areas and natural reserves preserved from all human activity, remote zones possibly dedicated to risky industrial activities...

Sustainable towns and countryside-nature

This scenario is seen as a new direction from the previous scenario, liable to appear in a second time: it takes up two of its structuring aspects: the weight of big towns and the sustainable town, the importance of the environmental stakes and the nature issues in the concerns of the societies and on the politicians' agenda. But it takes place in an international liberal context of states' withdrawal and reduced intervention capacity, of extension of market regulations to all the fields of the society. This eventually leads to a dismantling of the PAC and generalisation of the nature markets that public action stimulates, its role being more focused on the private agents' incentive than on the market organisation and regulation.

The main idea here is that the rural space will be more and more mobilised in order to master the environment quality, in a context of problems and strong environmental stakes and relative diminution of the public intervention. Hence, the generalization of environmental markets. Weakened by the reduction in protection by prices and the freezing of direct aids, farmers will not be the only operators present on these markets. Rural development agencies will set up, implying intercommunity institutions and private capital, water agencies will be reorganized and industrials will create financing banks for the tree-planting of arable lands or of other carbon wells in order to meet the reduction in their rights of greenhouse gas emissions. Other private firms of public services of equipment, as well as specialized banks, will finance the rehabilitation and up keeping of the natural environments in compensation for the environments affected by operations of development. This development of rural environmental facilities will increasingly become an investment source for capital holders in search for fiscal incentives or for an "environmentally correct" public image.

Industrious and competitive countryside

This last scenario is that of the rural local initiatives from businessmen and territories. In parallel, it is that of the town and concentration crisis.

It relies on three components, which go together: the efficiency of a productive model, alternative to that of big companies and metropolises; the rising weight of the regional or local authorities and the weakening one of central institutions; the statement of identity values (territorial belonging, entrepreneurship), which modify the individuals' social positions in the society.

The alternative productive model is carried by firms, mainly small and medium businesses and individual businessmen for whom the belonging to a same territory is an important element of competitiveness. They function in network and locally mobilize specific resources and common knowledge while they are turning to world markets. So, around rural hubs or small towns, territories build their economic collective identity, and local or regional specialisations appear or are reinforced.

In the regions, the corollary of the central power weakening is the craze for decentralised development and local town-and-country-planning. At the scale of country-territories, local authorities function in support and synergy with local economies. Some of them are true laboratories of local initiatives and innovations.

This politic and economic configuration goes together with the values of entrepreneurship, work for one's own benefit, endeavour to work and firm. Innovating minds, creators are attracted by these local successful productive systems, where they can express their potentialities better than in the big hierarchical organisations. On the contrary, relatively protected in the past decades, the salaried medium categories are weakened: the huge central administrations are challenged (dismantling of the National Education into regional bases, increasing presence of businessmen and socio-professional organisations). The guarantee of employment in the big private or semi-public groups is no longer granted.

At first, in rural areas and small towns, this scenario stimulates employment. It is attractive for dynamic and skilled workers.

The rural foremost develops on a productive basis within the country-territory. It partly loses its dominant image of residential space, living environment for urban populations working in town and living in the countryside. Populations' mobility between town and countryside are more and more professional mobility: those who go and dwell in the countryside also move to work there (or nearby in the small and medium towns, which bring life to these territories). We go from a *town-countryside* problematic to a problematic of *living and working in the countryside*.

The other side of the coin is that this scenario brings most inequalities between rural territories. Some regions win... but others lose, with very limited redistributive, readjusting potentialities. The search for competitive advantages within an economic organisation, strongly territorialized, inevitably leads to development disparities between territories. In the search for comparative localized advantages, all regions are not on an equal footing. The weakness of the central institutions limits

the potentialities of transfer and readjustment potentialities to correct the regional development inequalities.

There are various plausible futures for the French countryside. According to the context and politic choices,

the public action will have to face different problems to be solved. The prospective exercise must help assess the consequences of the orientations and strategies implemented today and anticipate the resolution of future problems in the public choices.

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Methodology

Principles of implementation

How elaborate development scenarios for the rural, at national scale and by 2020, according to the following principles.

Building scenarios

- *The Components of the rural*: We build scenarios in several stages, the first one consists of dividing the subject into analysed components. We kept four components of the rural: living environment, resources, nature, and context.

- *The Variables and the assumptions about their development*: Each component is itself divided into elementary processes called variables. The variables analysis helps formulate assumptions about development. 20 key-variables and 60 development-hypotheses. Partial scenarios. Then, these assumptions about development were combined within each component.

- *Overall scenarios*: the 14 scenarios obtained were combined into 4 overall scenarios meeting the principles of coherence and equilibrium.

For further information

Perrier-Cornet, Ph. (dir.) (2002). *Repenser les campagnes*. La Tour d'Aigues, Ed. de l'Aude, 280p.

Perrier-Cornet, Ph. (dir.) (2002). *A qui appartient l'Espace rural?*. La Tour d'Aigues, Ed. de l'Aude, 137 p.

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