

What are the perspectives for open spaces in urbanisation projects touching the large cities of the Maghreb?

Comparative approach between Grand Tunis and the Sousse Coast

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Everywhere around the world the management and organisation of open spaces within peri-urban zones around small and mid-sized cities have not, for a long time, been part of any specific and rigorous policy. Because spatial conflicts and social tensions brought forth by peri-urbanisation have begun to expand, it is only very recently that, in certain so-called developed countries (United States, Canada, Germany, France, Italy, etc.), public authorities and urban planners have attempted to react in favour of a better containment of urban sprawl over peripheral green/open spaces. Alternative policies concerning peri-urban land management have thus been put into place. The battle against the breakdown and depreciation of the peri-urban territories forms the major issue of these policies.

In the Maghreb countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia), the time when the *medina* was surrounded by huge *sours* (ramparts) has passed. With the contemporary urban explosion, the *sours* have disappeared and the urban countryside has become the city's area of expansion. When a city spreads out to the point of generating a real urban region, in Rabat, Algiers or Tunis, for example, recessing adjacent green/open spaces and particularly agricultural land is such that their importance as landscape is reduced to several interstitial parcels. Where urban pressure is stronger, agriculture, which occupies most of these spaces, is marginalised. It is excluded from territorial production and is weakened by the urban sprawl phenomenon. In Tunisia, this phenomenon is not only found in the peri-urban ring surrounding large Tunisian urban areas, such as Grand Tunis, but also along the Sahelian coastal barrier. In the Sousse region, for example, seaside urban development, which spreads from the centre of town to the village of Chott Mariem, and soon to Hergla, continues to destroy anterior rural landscapes, the fundamental element of which is open agricultural land.

Yet, within the framework of a new regional planning policy, initiated in 1991¹, we have seen the beginning of a desire to contain urban expansion in such large cities as Sfax, Gabes, Sousse, and Grand Tunis. With the two latter ones, in which an important part of the urban *rif* (rural area) is almost intact although greatly threatened by urban sprawl, urban expansion is apparent everywhere: introduction of a new habitat outside the old city, peripheral relocation of public facilities, extension of tourist zones, etc. Open agricultural spaces have largely regressed in parallel to this massive and rapid urban development. Henceforth, the expansion of these two large cities poses the fundamental problem of competition between the various types of use of the land, entailing a depreciation of rural territory in favour of urban expansion.

As a case study of Tunis and Sousse, this article raises the question of open spaces in urban zone planning and structuring programmes in Tunisia. It reveals an analysis of the evolution of the city-countryside relationship as linked to the growth of the peri-urban phenomenon, in the case of Tunis, and to the development of seaside urbanism, in the case of Sousse, and presents the characteristics, the uses, and the amenities of the countryside surrounding these two large urban regions.

¹ Date of the creation of the *Ministère de l'Environnement et de l'Aménagement du Territoire*.

1 / Open agricultural spaces: a new instrument for the construction of Grand Tunis?

1.1/ Grand Tunis, new territorial meaning

Following Independence in 1956, important constitutional, legislative, jurisdictional, economic, political, and even urbanistic changes occurred. After several years (1957-1975), Tunis' physiognomy and identity as an urban centre had dramatically changed.

Contrary to the European city, which has not seen profound mutations, the Arab city has gone through a complex process of evolution: destruction of the *sours* (ramparts) that surrounded the old city to implant important peripheral highways, demolition of the old Kasbah which was replaced with an important administrative centre, etc.

After restructuring the medina, the urban development of Tunis and of its suburbs was elaborated. Numerous projects, some privately-funded, others state-funded, enabled the capital to stretch out. The first ones became either one of four types of installations:

- Construction of the residential neighbourhoods at the North-Western periphery of the European city (the neighbourhoods to the North of Belvédère and the El-Manzah I and II neighbourhoods). They were designed to accommodate the new Tunisian bourgeoisie and the wealthy from Tunis who would abandon the old city to move into modern residential zones.
- Development of secondary residences in the Northern and Eastern suburbs, and especially in coastal cities like La Marsa, Sidi-bou-Saïd, Carthage and La Goulette.
- Extension of the small cities along the Southern coast (Rades, Ez-Zahra, and Hammam-Lif) by building summer residences for middle-class families.
- Construction of luxurious hotels along the Northern coast, particularly in Carthage Hannibal, Carthage Amilcar, La Marsa, and Gammarth, within the scope of the regional tourism development programme.

As for the state initiative, it was implemented as a new two-part urban policy, called the “*degourbification*” of Tunis. The first part consisted in eradicating the shanty towns or “*gourbivilles*”, considered as the most deplorable sign of under development in an independent Tunisia. The second part consisted in relocating their inhabitants in new social housing estates called *melja* (rehousing estates or regulated popular estates). Between the early 1960's and the mid 1980's, more than 10 *melja* have been built entailing the expansion of the constructed surface of the Tunis commune and the creation of a new type of urban landscape.

To avoid high land expenditures, they were installed on more than 1500 hectares of State-owned farmland.

Following this massive and rapid development of urbanisation in the Northern, Eastern, and Southern suburbs of Tunis, agricultural spaces that once characterised this land and insured a supply of perishables for the capital have considerably regressed. Only the Western suburb, with its *jnan* (market gardens) and its Manouba and Oued-Ellil orchards, has preserved its agricultural function.

Within a rather short period of time, the city has seen a 55% rise in population (873.515 inhabitants in 1975 versus 561.117 inhabitants in 1956²) while its urban sprawl took a hold of more and more land.

- To the North, it reaches the cities of El-Manzah and l'Ariana,
- To the West, it reaches the new urban centres of Bardo, Manouba and Hay Ez-Zouhour,
- To the South, it meets the new industrial zones of Megrine and Ben Arous,
- And to the East, only a few agricultural spaces separate it from Soukra and other coastal cities.

The territory comprised of these urban developments, as a whole, constitute what we call today Grand Tunis. The transition from Tunis to Grand Tunis occurred with the creation of four administrative units called *Gouvernorats*. They are the Gouvernorats of Tunis, l'Ariana, Ben Arous and Manouba.

1.2/ Peri-urban construction and marginalised rural land in the Tunis countryside

² Paul Sebag, *Tunis: histoire d'une ville* (Paris: l'Harmattan 1998), 683 p.

Between the city and the countryside lie large open spaces with scattered urban centres, dominated by the presence of agricultural land characterised as rural landscape. These interface spaces between two distinct environments are presented as a territorial entity possessing no particular identity. It is this lack of identity that often leads to an urban occupation, generally done in a diffuse and heterogeneous manner.

Even if the specificity and socio-spatial modalities of this process have already been defined in a few countries, such as the United States, France, Canada, and the Netherlands, they remain to be defined in the rest of the world where they have barely or simply not been identified.

In Tunisia, few areas concerned by this process have been identified. Their specificities have been very sparsely defined, and their limits remain vague.

However, to pinpoint them and to distinguish them as a spatial category of urban territory, urbanists, planners, and urban administrators use the following neologism, “peri-urban”, a term borrowed from contemporary geographic sciences of the Western world. The process in which they are engaged is called peri-urbanisation.

This obviously does not mean a simple extension or additional spreading of Tunisian cities. It also does not entail a “natural” phenomenon of residential areas overflowing into the peripheral rural space, no more than the “classic” mechanism whereby a loosening of urban activities affects this space. Peri-urbanisation represents a long, complex, and progressive process that is produced within the scope of several systems interacting with each other: social, spatial, economic, and political.

In Tunisia, Grand Tunis is the first urban centre where the peri-urbanisation phenomenon has appeared. Urban occupation of the open green agricultural spaces surrounding Tunis began in the 1960's and has gained momentum since 1975; the urban fringe of Grand Tunis continues to spread at the expense of the fertile land around Tunis.

Barely fifteen years ago, consumption of this land did not seem to worry decision-makers working directly on the Tunis area as a whole. There were several reasons for this:

- owners benefited from betterment,
- farmers profited from often important eviction indemnities,
- industrialists took advantage of the proximity of urban infrastructures (roads, highways, airports, ports) and an easier access to the markets in the large metropolises,
- and finally, public authorities stretched out built up spaces and the necessary infrastructures without being confronted with land ownership difficulties.

The actions of these players as a whole had the effect of creating a new urban policy. Its main characteristic is well known: urbanise to a certain distance from the city and push adjacent agricultural and rural zones farther away. To compensate the loss of open green spaces and regulate social and spatial problems caused by the compaction of the urban fringe and the demographic development of the peripheral communes, urban planners implemented the classic principles found in the “green” policy, inherited from the protectoral era. It involves the creation of ventilation spaces for the city and recreation areas for the residents, such as parks and public gardens.

The implementation of such an urban policy more often than not results in a weakening of agricultural activity and consumption of an important portion of cultivated land. As it spreads, the city imposes its own rules of operation, incompatible with those that underlie the rural environment and agricultural activity. The impact of the effects induced by this expansion over the management and development mechanisms touching peri-urban agricultural enterprises is generally irreversible; it concerns the loss or the deterioration of an important part of the agricultural and landscaped heritage in the peripheral rural environment and the marginalisation of urban agriculture.

To talk about marginality when looking at this form of agriculture is to posit the hypothesis that, even if it seems dynamic, developed, and productive, it is either endangered or weakened by urbanisation, excluded from the modes of planning, organisation and development of the city's territory.

In Grand Tunis, just as in the Grand Sousse we will bring up in the following pages, the future of urban agriculture is uncertain because it is not part of the city's territorial production system. Where

urban pressure is highest, agriculture is marginal. It is marginal not only because of real estate and financial pressure imposed on the peripheral zones, but especially because urban space planning programmes regularly exclude it from planning and new spatial model creation projects. Examples of the progressive disappearance of agriculture in La Marsa, around the villages of Sidi-Daoud, Bhar-El-Azreg, and Tabeg, as well as in the Soukra plains, are particularly revealing.

Despite its economic, dietary, environmental, ecological, and landscaped utility, peri-urban agriculture continues to weaken. The destruction of the spaces it occupies is getting worse, and questions remain, among which the most important are:

- Does agriculture have a sustainable place in spaces marked by different urban installations all the while retaining a rural character?
- What would be its role in social development and peri-urban spatial planning policies?

Faced with these interrogations, politicians, and urban planners are looking, as we will see hereafter, to define a new well-balanced management and planning policy aimed specifically at peri-urban environments.

1.3/ Acknowledgement of the multifunctional aspect of urban agriculture and the necessity for a new landscape organisation strategy

With the creation of the Department of Environment and Territory Planning (*ministère de l'Environnement et de l'Aménagement du Territoire*) in 1991, the public authorities testified to a new realisation that the consumption of unbuilt spaces has harmful consequences. The country is also worried by the shrinking of the cultivable area per inhabitant, which is due to population growth, loss of agricultural land, and inadequacy of certain land parcels when confronted to modern agrarian production techniques.

Indeed, during the “*Urbanisation et Agriculture*” international symposium held in Tunis in 1994, the Environment and Territory Planning minister declared: “*Like many other countries, Tunisia went through development experiences that had not taken into account a well-balanced environment and that generated problems we are trying to repair today. Among the most salient problems we face are those generated by conflicts between agriculture and rapid urban growth. [...] The importance of the issues and challenges posed by these conflicts appears through the negative and profound effects of the extension of urbanisation on the region’s potential in agricultural land and natural resources. [...] Today, this anarchic extension constitutes one of the main factors behind the regression of fertile agricultural and irrigated land capital.*” In conclusion, the minister added: “*To put an end to this, the Department of Environment and Territory Planning deploys major efforts in order to guarantee the objective conditions and put into place adequate instruments to contr l urban growth at the national, regional, and local levels.*”³.

Since then, urban land-use planning policies try to clearly redefine the role of agricultural space within urban landscape organisation. They also try to set up a body of strategies pushing towards a more sustainable structuring of urban agriculture alongside other components of the city. It is within this context that the “Sch ma Directeur d’Am nagement du Grand Tunis” (SDA) was drafted. The urbanists in charge of elaborating this document announce, in the final report of the first phase of the SDA, that the urban expansion of Tunis results in the annual consumption of 400 to 500 hectares of land with high agricultural potential.⁴ Conscious of the threat facing agricultural spaces in the Tunis countryside, planners specify that “*an arbitration between urban expansion and agricultural development must be defined. This arbitration must henceforth insure the preservation of strategic agricultural spaces for which incentive measures inciting conservation must be specified*”⁵.

³ Mlika, 11.

⁴ Minist re de l’Environnement et de l’Am nagement du Territoire, “Etude du Sch ma Directeur du Grand Tunis, rapport final de la premi re phase” (Tunis, 1997), 95.

⁵ in SDA du Grand Tunis, 98.

In fact, around Tunis and small neighbouring towns, an important part of the *rif* (countryside) still shows signs of active agriculture, greatly threatened by urban expansion. Peri-urban farmers (*fellahs*), however, are experiencing multiple difficulties: real-estate pressure, cohabitation with city-dwellers, problems selling their products, etc. Today, the dietary function of the Tunis *rif*, supplier of fresh products, seems weakened by competition from other farther agricultural regions. If it were recognised as necessary, the preservation of peri-urban and intra-urban agricultural spaces would satisfy urban needs, beyond strict agricultural production. The first new function is the sustainable management of the urban entity (green belt, green spaces, etc.); the others take on a social (walking, leisure activities, relaxation, educational farms, etc.) and ecological (preservation of the biodiversity, recycling green urban waste, etc.) role. This proposition appears admissible as long as the future of agriculture in Tunis seems to preoccupy public authorities and that there be more and more public awareness. Diversification of agriculture is its consequence.

The authors of SDA note that the Tunis countryside is composed of large spaces that have an economic function as well as a certain natural value enabling it to respond to the citizens' need for recreation, adding that: "*with all its components, the countryside presents itself next to the urban centre as a green space and, as such, insures that citizens looking for natural landscapes and a healthy environment have a space they can enjoy*"⁶.

Concerning the current relationship the residents of Grand Tunis entertain with the *rif*, and especially the peri-urban space, an enquiry has been carried out to better identify them and determine their nature⁷. It was conducted as a semi-direct interview with 150 people. Without claiming to accurately represent the population of Tunis, the sampling was determined so as to reflect a real cross-section of the city's social diversity. The main lines of enquiry centred upon an evaluation of the rural landscape and its projection as a place in which to settle.

The nature of the relationships first concerns aesthetic concerns since a majority (58%) consider the *rif* a quiet, beautiful, natural healthy, and pure place. In terms of favourite place of residence, 63% of them would prefer to live in the *rif* rather than in the city. Among them, 11% would like to settle in the farthest reaches of the Tunisian countryside and 52% would live in a residence surrounded by various types of farmed land in a *rif* close to the city, the peri-urban *rif*.

These results encourage us to think that this is a rather recent social phenomenon, appearing in all likelihood in the last fifteen years, and caused both by the spread of new lifestyles and the appearance of new possibilities in accessing the provincial *rif* in general, and peri-urban *rif* in particular. The era when the *rif* was perceived as dirty and repulsive seems to have passed; this is an entirely new development because just 20 or 25 years ago, the *rif* seemed simply unattractive⁸.

While demonstrating a new or renewed attraction of city-dwellers for the rural/agricultural space, social recognition of this space is only beginning, and the new attitude of city-dwellers towards the urban countryside has yet to be well identified by institutional authorities and urban planners, as the preservation of the interdependence that exists, still today, between Tunisian urban centres and their rural surroundings depends on their will.

Within Grand Tunis, agricultural space has long been ignored by urban zone production programmes, but there are now several factors that come into play to assist in the birth of a new urban agriculture, that is, an agriculture which is "nourishing" and economically feasible while being landscaped and administered as city/countryside interface spaces. However, this can only succeed if developers, planners, and institutional authorities adopt the necessary measures to protect and appreciate open agricultural spaces within the Tunis *rif*.

⁶ in SDA du Grand Tunis, annexes, 85.

⁷ Moez Bouraoui, "L'agriculture, nouvel instrument de la construction urbaine ? Etude de deux modèles agri-urbains d'aménagement du territoire : le plateau de Saclay à Paris et la plaine de Sijoumi, à Tunis", Doctoral thesis (Paris: ENGREF / ENSP, décembre 2000), 442 p.

⁸ Pierre Signoles, "L'espace tunisien : Capitale et Etat-Région", Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches URBAMA, Fascicule de recherches n°14-15 (Tours, 1985), 1041 p.

2 / The Sahelian coast

Along the Tunisian coast, where urbanisation does not come from an expansion of cities caused by population growth as much as from the development of tourism, the conditions surrounding the meeting of city and *rif* arise in a rather similar way when one considers the marginalisation of agriculture. The Sahelian coast, in the Sousse region, is particularly interesting to study from this perspective because agriculture was traditionally developed near the sea, on land that is now coveted by seaside urbanisation.

This urbanisation has, in the last thirty years, taken three different shapes:

- Series of big hotels implanted on vast parcels of land and isolated from each other.
- A seaside resort, Port-el-Kantaoui, which is part of a vast planning programme involving the territory of Hammam-Sousse.
- Holiday zones where individual and collective constructions are juxtaposed according to real estate availability and without a concerted organisation of the land.

These three types of urbanisation, whether they be planned or not, contribute to the formation of a linear conurbation which is practically continuous between Sousse and Hergla, a situation that imperils seaside agriculture because it suffers not only from intense real estate pressures, but also from the consequences of the breakdown of land-use brought forth by a more or less anarchic urbanisation process.

2.1/ Series of big self-sufficient hotels

In Sousse, as in Hammamet, Monastir, Djerba, or many other points on the Tunisian coast, the considerable development of seaside tourism beginning in the sixties is characterised by the opening of vast tourist zones as defined by a national policy. Found only several kilometres away from airports to attract an international clientele, these tourist zones have been implanted with big hotels who, side by side and reflecting the Club Méditerranée (which opened in 1954 in Djerba), always seek isolation and a certain form of self-sufficiency. Built on 20 or 30 hectare parcels, serving as both real estate reserves and buffer zones insuring some isolation from neighbouring hotels, they are designed as areas of autonomous life in which the client can find whatever he needs in terms of leisure activities, shops and services. Tunisian culture is not entirely ignored, but it is present only in folkloric form (traditional bread making, Berber dancing, etc.) and is organised within hotel boundaries. Outings are rare, besides swimming and sun bathing, and are always organised by the hotel (or an entity under its control), and usually directed towards reconstituted areas specially adapted for tourists. Access to the beach itself, even if it is not entirely private – Tunisian law forbids this –, is entirely managed by the hotel whose presence on the beach is insured via concession stands enabling it to install its own equipment (beach umbrellas, deck-chairs, etc.) reserved exclusively to its clientele.

This conception of tourist accommodation by which clients are enclosed in what some consider a “deluxe ghetto” has several consequences on the organisation of the coastal landscape. The first comes from a major consumption of space, due to the size of the parcels, which can be interpreted as a form of waste since most of the land is unused. The second comes from the fact these tourist “enclaves” have not contributed to organising the landscape because the hotels have only generated a mono-functional road system designed solely to bringing clients to and from the airport instead of an improvement of the public road system as a whole. In fact, access to the sea is getting more and more difficult for the locals, when it is not simply prohibited, and farmers that still own seaside parcels of land often have problems accessing it.

Early on, the resort business encountered many problems related to competition around water resources. Water from the water table showed an increase in salinity affecting agriculture, even when farms were several kilometres away from the shore. Serious pollution problems sometimes added to the loss of quality in irrigation water, when the enthusiastic building of hotels brought

saturation in wastewater treatment plants, or when unscrupulous real estate developers evacuated their hotels' wastewater without thinking about the consequences this would have on the environment.

Today, stricter, and better controlled, regulations require hotel developers to link their infrastructure to the national networks, whether it be the drinking water supply (taking water from the water table is now illegal) or waste water evacuation. However, the damage caused by older hotels incurred consequences that are still perceptible today; some farms were never able to get over this (citriculture in the Hammamet region, for instance).

The phenomenal growth of tourism on the Tunisian coast, while being a veritable economic "performance"⁹, will have had consequences on coastal lands that have greatly contributed to imperil agriculture. Even if the farmers, in return, could benefit from certain positive repercussions, notably in terms of local services (banks, telephone, upgrading of some roads, etc.), they have been able to succeed only by becoming pluri-active, often undermining their main agricultural activity. Their agricultural enterprises survive only as a secondary activity, and the parcels on which they work are often seen by them as real estate reserves, waiting for the best offer.

2.2/ Planning development around a seaside resort

A vast development project for the Northern coast of Sousse was launched in the early 1970's with the creation of the "Société d'étude et de développement de Sousse-Nord". The preliminary study, led by an urbanism firm in collaboration with a landscape architect, had highlighted the region's qualities as landscape, notably those touching the olive-groves of the hinterland. The project did not really integrate economic, social, and spatial relations between the worlds of agriculture and tourism, but taking into account the options chosen in the main lines of development, we can consider that it harmed agricultural activity less than the large tourist zones did, at a comparable level.

The El Kantaoui tourist zone is actually built around an urban centre that, even though it does not possess all the qualities displayed by a true city, acts as a centre; therefore, it does not encourage a strictly coastal urbanisation. Set around an artificial yachting harbour, the resort is developing towards the interior, indeed following its own logic, but all the while building or reinforcing an entirely public road system, not exclusively reserved to tourist activities. The importance of open spaces within the urbanised zone, even if they are in great part composed of a huge golf course, and the fact that many olive trees have been either kept or transplanted, confers to the resort an urban feel, which appears, at least symbolically, much less like a territorial enclave than those large isolated hotels. In fact, and contrary to the latter, Kantaoui is not a place of spatial segregation but rather a place of cultural cohabitation since it is a place visited by both foreign tourists and Tunisians themselves¹⁰.

Obviously, this is not enough to protect local agriculture from the competition exerted by tourist activity, notably because the price of land parcels has risen considerably. But, the world of tourism is less isolated from the Tunisian territorial reality and if, in the coming years, tourism should integrate a growing interest for agricultural landscapes, and even for its economic activity, the resort would accommodate this better than the deluxe ghettos found in other tourist zones.

Moreover, trips to olive groves are getting more popular around Kantaoui, thus showing the new interest is beginning to develop. For now, they consist in camel, carriage, or quad rides, and are still seen as more playful activities. But, they do bring tourists to agricultural landscapes and get them to

⁹ Jean-Marie Miossec, "Les acteurs de l'aménagement touristique tunisien: les leçons d'une performance", in *Le tourisme au Maghreb: diversification du produit et développement régional et local. Actes du cinquième colloque maroco-allemand de Tanger*, Mohammed Berriane and Herbert Popp, ed. (1998), 65-85.

¹⁰ Roland Vidal, Hichem Rejeb and Karim Dhaou, "Espace privé, espace public et espace ouvert; les conditions de la construction d'une urbanité touristique sur le littoral tunisien" in *Actes du colloque international "Les mondes urbains du tourisme"*, (Institut de Géographie de Paris, janvier 2005), to be published.

eat locally produced food. They could mark the beginning of real cultural tourism in the rural environment.

2.3/ Tunisian holidays

The success engendered by the “first garden-port of the Mediterranean”¹¹ is not limited to the world of international tourism, as we have seen. The resort is prized by the Tunisians themselves who, in the last 10 or 20 years, have been increasingly numerous to travel in their country.

The development of national tourism, despite its scale, has not been studied much by tourism specialists nor has it been taken seriously by institutional authorities on account of the fact it does not directly affect the national economy, because it is not a purveyor of currency¹². It has nonetheless enabled Tunisia to absorb the brutal fall of international tourism in the South Mediterranean during the summers of 2002 and 2003 relatively better than other countries, thanks to the additional business brought by Tunisians to many hotels.

But, domestic tourism should be closely studied for another reason. It accompanies a renewed interest for holidays, bringing forth the need for specific urban development, more or less spontaneous, which is progressively conquering the remaining available land parcels along the Sahelian coast. Though it does not create “tourist enclaves” as tightly sealed as the big hotels, this form of urbanisation still seriously disrupts the spatial operation of seaside agriculture.

With no preliminary planning, the juxtaposition of individual villas and collective buildings is done on the basis of available real estate and without concern for territorial coherence, if only for the public road system, which has been reduced to a bare minimum. Agricultural land parcels that remain between villas are often enclaved, more often than not transformed into fallow land and, when farmers continue to use them, they are used precariously.

Agriculture along the Sahelian coast is very vulnerable; it is maintained on land parcels that are not yet ready for building, for administrative or judicial reasons (estates awaiting judgement). They become real estate reserves, farmed until they can be sold as building land.

Subjected as it is to the pressures of tourism urbanisation, coastal agriculture is no longer only marginalised; it is seriously threatened to disappear.

Yet, it displays remarkable landscapes, very different from those found in the hinterland, by virtue of the type of farming that is found there, the techniques used to protect crops against the wind (micro windbreaks made of palm leaves and seashore *tabias*), as well as the irrigation systems that use surface wells found only on these seaside land parcels¹³.

Because of their specificity, these agricultural landscapes, where are grown the famous “chotts vegetables”¹⁴, very much appreciated locally, have an undeniable asset value that could, provided they do not entirely disappear, constitute a resource able to respond to an eventual demand in cultural agritourism. This is a developing sector in Europe, following North America’s footsteps, and is today emerging in Tunisia, as it has been seen on the Sahelian coast.

Were it accompanied by the development of a specific local market, and supported by a labelling policy, it could be the means by which agriculture might find its place as an economic and spatial component in development plans concerning the coastal regions.

¹¹ Name given to Port-el-Kantaoui on the Web site dedicated to it (<http://www.port-el-kantaoui.com>)

¹² Hassouna Mzabi, “Introduction à l’étude du tourisme intérieur en Tunisie”, in *Revue tunisienne de géographie* n° 27 (1996), 167-181.

¹³ Roland Vidal and Moez Bouraoui, “Évaluer et préserver les paysages agricoles périurbains, le cas du littoral sahélien en Tunisie”, in *Actes des Deuxièmes Rencontres du Végétal* (INH Angers, 2004), 63-64.

¹⁴ A farmer from Hammam-Sousse told us that his products informally labelled “*légumes des chotts*” sell for three times the price in the Sousse market. Such a label, were it to be instituted, could find its place in the tourist market if restaurants would create the corresponding culinary demand.

Conclusion

The Grand Tunis and Sousse coast examples have shown us that agriculture, as a spatial component of the large Tunisian metropolises, should insist more clearly on its participation in the planning of peri- and intra-urban land-use, as it should to be taken into account by urban planners and local authorities. The risk in letting agriculture be separated from the local economic context and the expectations of residents and visitors is finding itself in a position of rupture towards the land and landscape it occupies and contributes to create.

The analysis of these two case studies has highlighted the importance of the political and statutory conditions touching the development of urban/peri-urban open spaces. This analysis also shows that the appearance of multifunctional peri-urban agricultural spaces currently presents numerous problems to planners. It is important to take into account the ecological and social functions as well as the economic vocation of green/open agricultural spaces subjected to urban influence. It is then all about a new form of agriculture that produces both food and urban services. Therefore, the agricultural space could become an urban infrastructure, similar to parks, gardens, and urban afforestation. Agricultural practices will be as much a product as the products of agriculture themselves.

The major issue in agri-urban policies is not simply to feed city-dwellers, but it is the creation of conditions leading to a livable and sustainably adaptable city.