

## AGRICULTURE IN URBAN PLANNING IN ILE-DE-FRANCE

Roland Vidal, André Fleury

*Urban Agriculture, ENSP Versailles, France<sup>1</sup>*

*Members of CERAPT<sup>2</sup>*

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### ABSTRACT

Since over 30 years, the region of Ile-de-France is working on a new urban development concept, in which extended unbuilt spaces play an increasingly important role. During a long period there was a dominant perception that only nature could serve as compensating element, in order to reply to cultural and amenity aspirations or urban dwellers. However, after long and tedious discussions, agriculture started to be recognised as a legitimate partner in the urban environment, in taking care for specific crop and production systems. Agricultural systems produce fundamental characteristics of landscape and participate in the preservation of cultural heritage, but the slowness of the acceptance of agriculture as urban development partner can be explained by the fact that mainstream agriculture is inserted in the specific governance of big industrial production chains. The policy of urban planning has progressively taken into consideration farming, in the first place by demarcating in 1994 the «Ceinture Verte» (Green Belt) in the periphery of the dense core urban zone, later on also by the incorporation in the urban master plan under development of the necessity to preserve large stretches of urban, forest and nature land, because of their potentials for sustainable urban development. The collaboration between local elected politicians and farmers generates an original form of governance «projets agriurbains de territoire» (agri-urban territorial projects). This collaboration is being confirmed also in the «parcs naturels régionaux» (natural regional parks) established by the Region, although in essence this park system was originally designed as a tool for nature conservation.

**KEYWORDS:** urban planning; green open spaces; agriculture; Ile-de-France; governance.

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<sup>1</sup> Ecole Nationale Supérieure du Paysage, 10 rue Maréchal Joffre, F.78000 Versailles  
Tél. 33 1 39 24 62 73. Equipe agriculture urbaine (André Fleury, Roland Vidal), membre du LAREP.  
[r.vidal@versailles.ecole-paysage.fr](mailto:r.vidal@versailles.ecole-paysage.fr) ; [a.fleury@versailles.ecole-paysage.fr](mailto:a.fleury@versailles.ecole-paysage.fr)

<sup>2</sup> Collectif d'Enseignement et de Recherche en Agriurbanisme et Projet de Territoire. Coordinator Roland Vidal, ENSP, [r.vidal@versailles.ecole-paysage.fr](mailto:r.vidal@versailles.ecole-paysage.fr)

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

On top of the impact of globalisation processes, agriculture in the vicinity of modern cities (peri-urban agriculture) is subjected to disruption forces engendered by development pressure. Some city dwellers have taken action to remedy these pernicious effects. They organise and manage social links, attempting the restoration of proximity relations between themselves and producers. Also, they are more and more aware that the nearby farming space can become the site where they can enjoy rural amenities (landscape, etc.), understand the food growing processes, and, last, but not the least, find fresh food.

Farmland provides an essential component in the quality of periurban settlements. Consequently, local authorities have embarked on initiatives towards restoring periurban farming and this at different levels. These initiatives endeavour to increase the sustainability of periurban farming and its involvement in the management of land.

## **2. CHANGES IN RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SOCIETY AND ILE-DE-FRANCE OPEN SPACES**

Up to the sixties, the perception of nature and open space in cities was restricted to parks, public gardens, tree-lined avenues and so on, under the authority of specialised municipal departments. There was no room for agriculture, which was supposed to belong to the countryside. However, there already existed a hybrid and spatially unstable periurban area. There were still agricultural fields, but there was no longer a rural society. On the other hand, this periurban area was not yet a true urban fabric because of the presence and incompatibility of agricultural activities that sometimes generated nuisance for the residents (noise, bad smells, dirt). This hybrid area was also the scene for contrasting ways of life. Within the periurban areas lived people that were not really integrated and frequently without rights (migrants, gypsies, etc.). The periurban areas formed a crown around the city that moved further and further away as the city grew.

### **2.1. Since 1970, another conception of nature**

In the sixties, nature emerged as a new principle of spatial organisation due to a rapidly rising environmental awareness. At first, the focus lied on unspoilt nature or wilderness far away from cities. The public policy answer was the creation of national parks. Since halfway the seventies, there has been a growing demand for natural spaces in local neighbourhoods to host various activities, recreational areas and homes. From then on, periurban areas became considered as the entity where middle-class dwellers could enjoy a lifestyle apparently closer to rurality and nature.

More recently, the urban and rural types of residence have fused within the periurban area essentially under influence of improved transport facilities. From then on the periurban area housed a combination of a rural setting (calm, picturesque views, nature, etc) and urban amenities (jobs, education, etc).

Two new urban models appeared. New towns, designed in the early seventies, are green and spacious (Pachaud, 2005); they encompass housing, employment and public services. Their greenery consist of: **i/** usual urban green spaces, **ii/** existing forests, traditionally devoted to leisure and recreation, and **iii/** natural parks, without much ecological value but easily accessible for visitors. Besides these towns, rural villages emerged: rural villages not far from towns where urban dwellers chose to live alongside the farms.

## **2.2. Agriculture becoming a form of urban nature**

In the eighties, urban dwellers became more interested in open air recreational activities like sports (hiking, jogging, riding and biking) or educational walking (getting to know rural systems). This expanded the social basis for the appreciation of the countryside. Urban dwellers turned into defenders of the rural environment against other new uses like motorways, housing, and even new inhabitants. They wanted to strengthen local democracy by means of specialised associations. Henceforth the open space forms a part of their territory, whether it is natural, farmed or forested. Local community felt a stronger sense of solidarity and became more sustainable. Words such as ‘identity’ and ‘local heritage’, which imply differences from other communities, are suitable to define this new frame of mind and the new local policies.

Since about two decades, agriculture is overcome by security in various meanings: food quality, freshness and self-support. Due to this, new linkages can appear between farmers and city dwellers.

## **2.3. And what happens nowadays?**

Nowadays, two forms of urban agriculture must be taken in account. The first one is carried out by city dwellers. It assembles environmental or social considerations funded in utopic ideas related to the design of future cities and the effects of collective imagination. For instance, the concept of community supported agriculture or Tei Kei (Amemya, 2007) is occurring more frequently. The second form of urban agriculture is carried out by farmers who sell their produce through the regular commodity chains, either on the global market (cash crops such as cereals, oleaginous crops, etc.) or on local markets (especially market gardening). Both forms integrate images and values related to both the traditional countryside and the urban heritage.

Globalisation has decreased the supply of fresh food largely under influence of modern commodity chains (hypermarkets, very big wholesale market, etc.) and modern diets delivered by the deep-freezing food industry. Recent reforms of the European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP, Treaty of Rome, 1966) are essentially an implementation of globalisation and liberalisation. The European Commissioner in charge of Agriculture argued on 29 December 2006 that:

- Many European farmers shall have to look for a second source of income;
- Almost all the market imbalance measures will be abolished;
- Public aids shall be reserved for agro-environmental measures.

This last point will be under discussion: it must include issues concerning the living environment and landscape. From the point of view of the PeriUrban Regions Platform in Europe (PURPLE - a lobbying association of European major cities), there would be other priorities in periurban areas. The quality of green open spaces for example is nowadays a factor of competitiveness.

### **3. WHAT IS TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN URBAN PLANNING**

The first master plans of the Ile-de-France region included in their scope only the current and future town. Agriculture was not mentioned. From the mid-seventies on, the organizational scheme became regional in scale, covering all of Ile-de-France.

#### **3.1. The master plan of 1976: the quest for a balance between city and nature**

Due to laws intended to modernise agriculture, French agriculture has become more dynamic. The CAP boosted this upward trend. Also the awareness of environmental pollution, which led to the creation of the Environment Ministry in 1971, showed society's increasing interest in nature. A new political project consequently took root to stop separating the Paris population from nature. The balance and the mixture between open and built areas had to be maintained.

To this end, planning aimed to counteract the spontaneous tendency towards continuous expansion of the urban areas. Clear boundaries separate some urban development axes along the large valleys and north-south axes. Between these axes lie zones of natural balance. These are i/ areas devoted to woodlands and nature areas, managed for the leisure of town-dwellers and conservation of noteworthy ecosystems, and ii/ farming areas recognized for their economic interest; farms are considered as *enterprises*.

However, the main part of the periurban area is not yet included in a well-defined project. Social practices fashion the policy decisions, except in a new experiment that adapts the concept of Regional Natural Parks (in French abbreviated as PNR – see below) for the protection of green open spaces. By the use of this framework, the expectations of farmers are not really met; nevertheless the guarantee of agricultural areas in the vicinity of towns is necessary for them.

#### **3.2. The implementation of the Green Belt in 1994**

The master plan of 1994 wanted to answer these expectations. This scheme created a Green Belt around the dense city of Paris, occupying Paris and the close suburbs. The woodlands and farmlands which occupy half of the area are rigorously protected as *green* and *landscape spaces*. This was a twofold innovation in so far as:

- this belt must be legally strong enough to prevent further urban sprawl;
- green open spaces are encouraged to meet specific urban needs: rural amenities including landscape (cited for first time in a planning document), market gardening and community gardens.

Inside the green belt, agriculture is clearly multifunctional: it produces agricultural goods but also rural amenities. Outside this belt, agriculture is only considered as an economic activity.

### **3.3. In 2010: a new green border**

In 2006, the region President promised to make from Ile-de-France the first eco-region in Europe (Nascimento, 2006). The concept of an 'ecoregion' encompasses a large area with uniform ecological characteristics: environment, natural resources, population, way of life, etc. The challenge for urban planning in Ile-de-France with respect to the ecoregion concept is to combine socioeconomic development with respect for the environment at the regional scale by means of keeping green open spaces (both natural and farmed land), promoting social mixing (housing, access to work market, etc.) and public transport, etc... That is why the 2010 master plan<sup>3</sup> keeps the major part of the regional area in its present green state. In view of this, various kinds of territory frameworks can be used:

- PNR: new PNRs can be implemented and present PNRs enlarged;
- Pays: a kind of a district, based on common historical or ethnical features.

Moreover, agri-urban projects (see below) can receive a legal statute.

As a consequence, the key concept becomes 'restoration of agricultural functionality' in the whole regional area:

- Safety of agricultural traffic and of rural goods;
- Agricultural infrastructure, either inside region or outside, with convenient links.

## **4. AGRICULTURE IN LOCAL TERRITORIAL PROJECTS**

Characterized by an association of agriculture with the city, these territorial projects can only be durable within the scope of shared governance between the urban and rural worlds. These urban-rural relations are usually formalized within the "charter", a contractual document.

### **4.1. Regional natural parks**

The new territorial entity of PNR was created in 1967 under a national heritage policy. Its purpose was to protect endangered rural areas. It responds to three requirements, founded at distinct subsidiarity levels: it is a regional initiative that must be accepted by the concerned communes and approved by the Ministry of Environment. Hitherto, nature conservation has been the main argument.

It responded to the threat posed by the abandonment of farmland, which has been going on for quite a long time in much of the French territory. This was essentially due to advances in farming productivity: the demand for fresh produce could be fulfilled using less land. The increase in productivity was accompanied by a desertification of the rural world as its inhabitants migrated towards cities. Regions where farms have the most

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<sup>3</sup> The 2010 master plan is now in the draft process.

difficulties with the adaptation to modernized agricultural techniques are the first to be affected. Since 1870 on, nearly 100.000 hectares per year have been abandoned by agriculture. A third of this abandoned agricultural land is taken over by urbanisation, while the other two thirds are shared out between managed reforestation and fallow land conversion (which eventually becomes forest). Regional reservation areas have been created to stop this abandonment. They are managed by farmers under contract, under the umbrella of a charter. Within this charter, farmers agree to respect a number of rules to help maintain the park's landscape and environment. They receive compensation for their efforts. At the same time, these parks form the infrastructure for new economic expansions, especially tourism. However, these PNRs protect agriculture by assimilating it to "nature". This was also the case for the first periurban regional reservation area created in 1985 (*Haute-Vallée de Chevreuse* PNR in Ile-de-France).

Heir to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century vacationers, the majority of inhabitants are in pursuit of the quaint countryside landscapes. They consider the PNRs territory as their own and mainly want to make it a "natural sanctuary". This underlies the rejection of nuisance, resulting from economic activity, waste treatment facilities and modern cropping systems. Agriculture accepted within the boundaries of the park must reflect the quaint image that the inhabitants cherish. It represents a certain idealistic view of what farms must have looked like a long time ago. Through this narrow conservation filter, the inhabitants do not want the agricultural landscape to evolve along with the ever-modernising agricultural techniques.

The valuable label of 'Regional Natural Park', issued by the National Nature Conservation Commission, however has normally not been assigned to open spaces very close to the cities, considered as hostile to nature. So, open urban fringes, even included in green belts, would have remained without any management programme. Subsequently, farmers would have moved away. Today however, this fixed point of view seems to be evolving, notably with the creation of new parks in the periphery of Paris. As a remark, it should be stated that farmers must be more involved in the PNR governance and be free to choose their own farming and cropping systems. After all, farming remains an economic business.

#### **4.2. Agriculture in the green belt: agri-urban projects**

Some citizens and representatives came up with another local public farming policy: agri-urban projects (in French 'Projets Agri-Urban – PAU'). Often being professional experts in city planning, these citizens and representatives are sensitive to environmental issues. They know enough of agriculture to fathom its corporate dimension. The main stake of urban agriculture consists in maintaining rural amenities and urban utilities. This local public farming policy appears as a civil-conscious initiative in urban spaces that aims at maintaining open. To be efficient, the project size must be modest for keeping a true nearness between city and rural space: as much in open spaces (from 1,000 to 2,000 ha, from 10 to 30 farmers) as to cities characteristics (some municipalities, some dozens of inhabitants). This concept comes close to the garden city urban model designed by E. Howard.

The main objective of PAU is 'keeping the agricultural framework' because of its landscape value, patrimonial or evolving with the farming dynamics. Other expectations are fresh produce, pedagogical action, leisure-oriented and social care oriented agriculture. Agriculture also gives meaning to protection areas against hazards due to natural facts (fire, floods etc), urban and industrial developments (factories, airports, highways etc) and social malfunctions (illicit settlements, uncontrolled refuse dumping, etc.).

The first step in an agri-urban project is the signing of an Agricultural Charter, fruit of a participatory approach, by different stakeholders. A co-building action programme gives the Charter a concrete content and shows that agriculture is really backed by the communities. The key-concept is "freedom for farmers". This means the wiping out of every kind of urban constraints to maintain farming near the city. Last but not the least, the whole community (farmers included) must set up a new governance that opens a way to other economic orientations of farming, notably towards the local markets (fresh products, services, etc.). The most difficult task often consists in convincing people, and especially local representatives, that urban and agricultural projects do not have the same temporality. Urban projects can change at each election while agricultural projects are regulated by the investment paying off duration (about 10 years) and the generational family rhythm (about 30 years).

The participation of local public authorities in local agricultural development cannot be considered as a hindrance to competition. Agri-urban projects are at first an urban strategy for keeping the green open spaces. The task devolved on the community, in a spirit of subsidiarity, is to assure the development of open space for a sustainable and multifunctional agriculture. The choice of the production systems and cropping patterns will remain under the responsibility of producers. In order to prevent the risk of instability of local land policies, specific procedures are requested.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Initiatives like the local territory projects affect the city's sustainability by improving the citizens' awareness and responsibility at the local level. This prevents social segregation between farmers and city dwellers. PAU and PNR bring a new conception of common belonging of land: two populations, but one unique territory. Within the frame of reference of PNR and PAU, agriculture produces more than food. It also supplies a landscape; it is considered as a life framework and passes a development infrastructure for agriculture itself and other civil parties.

These principles are in line with modern urban planning conceptions of city-nature, but with a nature concept that does not overshadow agriculture. There is a real renewal of the links with farmers, considered in the same time as food and rural amenities suppliers. Such policies also enable city dwellers to better understand agriculture's logics of action.

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