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PSDR4 -Presentation of the "Rural-urban link: land, attractiveness and well-being" cross-cutting group

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Summary: The "Rural-Urban Link" cross-disciplinary group brought together a dozen PSDR4 projects from all over France, which were interested in rural areas in their relationship with urban areas. Its aim was to identify in regional projects the signals of innovation and social experimentation specific to the urban-rural interface. Our collective has organised exchanges between projects on our approaches in seminars, colloquia and a series of webinars.

The group has been able to capitalise on a series of research results relating to the relocation of agricultural production, the measurement of well-being, the governance of agri-urban areas and the implementation of environmental policies.

1. A forum for inter-project exchanges on territorial governance

The work of WG1 addressed issues of territorial governance, land use and regional attractiveness. It has enabled the link between rural and urban areas to be re-examined by addressing two main issues:

1.1 How are these areas interconnected today?

We believe that a systemic approach to regional development enables us to think about the interconnections between urban and rural areas in a way that is different from an opposition. Indeed, far from the idea of an undifferentiated continuum, the notion of interface suggests exploring the potential of these transitional spaces between urban and rural areas.

1.2 What new forms of coordination between players are emerging?

The research projects discussed by the group share the common objective of gaining a better understanding of the potential for innovation in initiatives that bring together urban and rural areas.

The cross-disciplinary group provided a forum for exchanging views on common themes and, above all, for capitalising on the results. There are three main areas of focus.

Firstly, the identification of innovations in terms of governance of agricultural land at the rural/urban interface. We have identified practices in terms of land purchase or building diversification for innovative agricultural projects that show the strong involvement of local authorities and associations. Secondly, we worked on the revival of domestic food production: several projects converge, for example, to show the contribution of vegetable gardens to household nutrition and biodiversity in areas on the fringes of the city, such as suburban housing estates. Finally, we have compared different methods for assessing the attractiveness of different areas: studies of well-being indicators and surveys of people's perceptions of their living environment are all observation tools that highlight situations of spatial inequality, but also the assets that rural areas have to offer.



2. The main findings of the "Rural-Urban Link" group

2.1 Encouraging social innovations to relocate agriculture

WG1 projects have helped to identify and support innovations to improve the territorial integration of agriculture and foster relations between rural and urban areas.

The innovations we have discussed relate, for example, to **new governance tools for land purchase** aimed at supporting new entrance in agriculture for short supply chains projects, but also to the revitalisation of old legal tools for the joint management of pastures or the setting-up of young farmers without the purchase of buildings (USUS and CAP IDF projects). We also looked at innovative ways of working with civil society, such as participatory diagnosis and collaborative mapping for agricultural projects. One area of study in particular caught our attention: the new forms of agricultural diversification that are emerging at the urban-rural interface (market gardening projects on arable farms, mixed use of agricultural buildings).

Another dimension of social innovation in the rural/urban interface is the **link between land and food** (FRUGAL and AGRIGE projects). The consolidation of land diagnostics in food projects appears to be a major challenge in order to reconcile agricultural new entrance projects and local authority expectations in terms of local supply. Over the past few years, local authorities have become more involved in land portfolios as a means of relocating food supply, and are making new demands of agricultural land stakeholders: the land agency SAFER (market interventions and land monitoring), Terre de liens (associative portfolios for organic farming start-ups). These dynamics are leading to new coalitions of stakeholders that are reconfiguring the local governance of food systems: multi-stakeholder colleges (local authorities, farmers, residents) in agri-urban associations, social aid stakeholders.

2.2 Assessing regional inequalities and attractiveness

Several PSDR4 projects have helped to define new territorial indicators that reflect the dynamics of the urban/rural link.

First and foremost, these indicators enable us to better **characterise the assets of our regions**. In terms of regional development, rural attractiveness is assessed through the prism of access to various goods and services (food supply, landscape amenities, employment and local sociability). In terms of agricultural development, an analysis of social and land ownership structures can also be used to construct indicators of the fragility of land transfers. Finally, in areas under urban influence, research has identified the dynamics of agricultural diversification to provide fresh produce for the towns (market gardening).

A second category of indicators that we discussed within the group relate more specifically to **the attractiveness of rural areas**. In fact, objective and subjective well-being indicators need to be taken into account together in order to assess the assets of rural areas: the representations and needs of local residents need to be taken into account. To help public action target support, local indicators need to incorporate different forms of inequality: inequality of access to services (health, local shops), but also to community life (associations, meeting places).

3. Renewing territorial public action

The work of WG1 has shown that various levers exist in local public policy to renew relations between urban and rural areas.

First and foremost, these levers involve **renewing the territorial planning framework**. Many local authorities are rethinking the relationship between urban planning and food planning, by mobilising all their skills (economic development, tourism, transport, waste management). In this respect, food supply planning needs have been identified as strategic (location of retail facilities and food justice issues).



Another series of levers for public action lies in the **combination of tools for environmental action**. The research discussed by the group has made it possible to propose diagnoses on the use of existing measures (agri-environmental measures) and to support the development of a range of complementary land tools whose use can be combined. These may be regulatory tools: for example, the definition of priorities for access to land (as part of the regionalisation of land structure control) allows environmental and social imperatives to be integrated. But contractual tools are also being considered: the development of environmental farm leases or conservation easements, which encourage the involvement of landowners in the implementation of agro-ecological objectives.

4. A strategic role for cultivated areas in the urban-rural interface

The cross-disciplinary group focused on research into the dual contribution of cultivated areas at urban/rural interfaces to food production and biodiversity. There are two main conclusions to be drawn from this.

First of all, it appears that **on the peri-urban fringes, cultivated areas are reservoirs of biodiversity**. Work in urban ecology (the DYNAMIQUES project) and urban planning (the ASTRAL project) has shown the positive role played by these heterogeneous spaces at the interface between urban and rural areas, and has enhanced the environmental value of low-density areas. Peri-urban farms and gardens in suburban areas make an important contribution to cultivated and wild biodiversity (particularly pollinating insects). It is recommended that these areas be protected in local authority planning documents.

In addition, cultivated areas on the outskirts of towns and cities appear to be vectors for relocating the food supply. In suburban areas, home gardens play an essential role, although their importance has long been underestimated (CAP IDF and FRUGAL projects). Self-production areas remain a key element of the food supply for working-class households. What's more, the model inherited from the "urban" vegetable garden is spreading to peri-urban villages, where it now rubs shoulders with "rural" vegetable gardens, inherited from peasant gardening practices, helping to renew the links between urban and rural areas.

5. Conclusions

Responding to the challenges of social innovation, territorial inequalities and the renewal of local public action were at the heart of the recommendations arising from the work of the "Rural-Urban Link" cross-cutting group. Questioning the link between urban and rural areas requires an understanding of the behaviour of farmers and landowners, an explanation of the local choices made by local authorities, and an understanding of land market dynamics. It is the systemic dimension of territorial issues that raises a challenge for research and for public action. The knowledge produced by partnership research illustrates the diversity of skills that need to be mobilised to grasp all the dimensions of issues relating to territorial governance of the rural-urban interface.

Ethics

The authors declare that the experiments were carried out in compliance with the applicable national regulations.

Declaration on the availability of data and models

The data supporting the results presented in this article are available on request from the author of the article.



Declaration on Generative Artificial Intelligence and Artificial Intelligence Assisted Technologies in the Drafting Process.

The authors used artificial intelligence for the English translation.

Declaration of interest

The authors declare that they do not work for, advise, own shares in, or receive funds from any organisation that could benefit from this article, and declare no affiliation other than those listed at the beginning of the article.



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