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Reassessing the Importance of Agriculture in the Greater Paris Project

Réévaluer la place de l'agriculture à l'heure du Grand Paris

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Abstract Agriculture tends to be marginalized in reflection on development in the Greater Paris region. Studies on several areas of the green belt with a large proportion of agricultural land suggest this should not be the case and provide other outlooks. This article reviews historical development plans for the Paris region and distinguishes four periods in the relationship between Paris and its agricultural hinterland. It then discusses the results of over six hundred interviews with people living in agricultural areas. Their attachment to agricultural spaces in the green belt is significant yet undervalued, and cannot be explained by a NIMBY reaction. Instead, practical and identity issues account for this strong attachment. Lastly, the article argues that open agricultural spaces of the green belt help give meaning and identity to large portions of the greater Paris region, and can be critical assets for designing sound sustainable development plans.

Résumé La réflexion ouverte par les autorités publiques autour du Grand Paris n'accorde qu'une place mineure à l'agriculture. Des travaux entrepris dans plusieurs espaces à forte composante agricole de la ceinture verte suggèrent une autre réalité et d'autres perspectives. En analysant les différents documents de planification et d'aménagement de la région francilienne, l'article distingue quatre périodes dans l'histoire des relations entre Paris et sa périphérie agricole. Après cette lecture à dires d'experts, la parole est donnée aux acteurs de terrain. Leur attachement aux espaces agricoles de la ceinture verte s'avère aussi considérable qu'il est méconnu. Des raisons motivées le fondent, aussi bien utilitaires qu'identitaires – et non seulement un prétendu réflexe Nimby. Finalement, les espaces ouverts agricoles de la ceinture verte se révèlent stratégiques pour redonner sens, identité et projet à de vastes portions de l'agglomération parisienne.

Keywords Île-de-France metropolitan area; Greater Paris; green belt; urban spaces; open spaces ; attachment to agriculture; multifunctionality; identity; inter-community collaboration

Mots-clés Métropole francilienne ; Grand Paris ; ceinture verte ; espaces urbanisés-espaces ouverts ; multifonctionnalité ; attachement à l'agriculture ; identité ; territoires de synergies.

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Introduction

> "We must take a new approach to urban development. We need to see far and wide, and do everything possible to make our metropolises more livable, appealing, sustainable, and human." (Excerpt from the French President's speech at the *Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine*, April 29, 2008).

The revision of the SDRIF (Île-de-France Regional Development Plan) called for by the President of the Île-de-France Regional Council, and the international consultation process on the future of Greater Paris launched by the French president both point to an overall context marked by multiple and interweaving crises: the ecological crisis (now firmly planted in the collective consciousness); the growing energy crisis; the economic and financial crisis which has had dire impacts in recent years; the deepening housing and transportation crisis; the profound social and political crisis punctuated by jarring upheavals such as the 2005 suburban riots; and finally, the crisis in development policy and political decision-making. We are told the future is full of uncertainties and threats that need to be foreseen and preempted. The Paris metropolitan region is particularly vulnerable due to its population density and spatial layout. Public officials agree on the urgency to act and to adapt the metropolis to the new global context in order to maintain viability and avoid problems that might soon be too big to solve. New ideas are emerging in this quest for a "new model."

However, the task is not easy. As Michel Lussault (2009, 256) – co-president of the scientific committee facilitating the international consultation on the future of the Paris region – said, this area is "incredibly complicated."

This paper proposes new ideas for the Greater Paris project. These ideas are based on the results of several years of research about open agricultural spaces on the outskirts of the Paris region. This approach acts on the advice of Stephen Jay Gould, who recommended "sneaking up on generalities instead of assaulting them head on" (1997, 14). At present, discussions about the status and future of the Paris region tend to take a one-way approach: from dense urban areas outward to the edges. Due to the heavy focus on densely populated areas, agriculture is often treated as an aside. The research local inhabitants asked us to conduct in certain areas of the green belt points to a need to invert this thinking: to approach the urban issue through the lens of forests and fields and to reassess the place and meaning of agriculture in the future of Île-de-France. In fact, the need this research points to is not theoretical, but is grounded in the expertise of several hundred local individuals.

This paper is broken down into two sections. The first defines the place agriculture currently has in the official development masterplan for Greater Paris. It provides a review and detailed analysis of the major planning framework documents. The second section turns it around and voices the views of people living in and around open agricultural spaces. These views provide new insight about what it will take for the Greater Paris project to succeed.

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1 The Evolution of the Relationship between the Metropolis and Its Agricultural Hinterland through Four Key Periods

In recent years, many metropolises have undergone explosive and sometimes chaotic development. However, the local officials of Paris and its suburbs early on recognized the need to contain urban sprawl. Few cities have accumulated as much experience about large-scale urban planning as Paris, and the current master plan for the entire Île-de-France region has no equivalent abroad. It is thus possible to examine the role agriculture played in the construction of the Paris region by looking at framework documents compiled during half a century of urban planning and at the works of authors such as Charvet (2003) and Charvet and Poulot (2006). This documentation reveals four distinct periods in the relationship between the metropolis and its agricultural and rural hinterland. The *narrative* of that relationship neither reconstitutes actual history nor documents all the details and minor points. Rather, it provides an overview of the visions of the institutions and experts working in the area of urban planning and development. This review will be followed by an assessment.

1.1 From Scarcity to Abundance: The Heyday of Agriculture in Île-de-France

Paris was a major center of consumption at the end of the Middle-Ages. In fact, it was the largest belly of Medieval Europe. Agricultural resources from the areas around Paris were insufficient to feed the city's masses of officers, legal professionals, judges, and clerics of various affiliations. However, these resources were substantial. The nearby valley floors supplied legumes, peas, and broad beans while orchards dotted the hillsides. Montreuil and Vincennes produced cheeses. From Vitry and Bourg-la-Reine to Nanterre and Neuilly, many of the hills to the south and west of Paris were covered with vineyards. The forests of Boulogne, Saint-Cloud, Sèvres, and Rueil supplied wood for the city. Wheat, however, was harder to come, and the areas around Paris only met a small portion of demand.

Paris's population was generally well provisioned. However, during periods of climate extremes or wars, the price of foodstuffs spiked and scarcity ensued. In the first half of the fifteenth century, those two factors converged to create several severe crises. After 1440, thanks to a prolonged period of peace, surpluses from neighboring regions were able to compensate for poor harvests.

Maintaining the food supply of the kingdom's largest city was thus a key objective of the king and his officers. Parisians' food security was an affair of State (Favier 304). Charles VII and Francis I both enacted legal and regulatory measures to this effect. Tax exemptions were enacted in a ten to twelve league radius around Paris in order to reduce the costs of foodstuffs and other essential agricultural commodities (wood, straw, etc.), and farmers were granted the right to sell their goods directly to consumers without going through Les Halles or middlemen. These special legal measures – which remained in effect until the mid-twentieth century – also benefited farms, making them more lucrative and

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stimulating their growth. In turn, the market-gardening belt gave horse manure, sewage, and sludge commercial value (Donadieu 1998).

In his thesis on the social geography and economy of rural life in the Parisian suburbs, Michel Phlipponeau (1956) claims that the interdependency between local agriculture and the city proper peaked in the late nineteenth century. Afterwards, the overall trend toward modernizing agriculture, combined with the introduction of new transportation infrastructure, altered the context. Gradually, a system that had formed over centuries was undone. Symbol of an era, the Arpajonnais – a famous train route linking Les Halles in Paris to the farming hub of Arpajon – was shut down in 1937.

1.2 Managing the Rapid Growth of Greater Paris: Diverging Trajectories

In 1960, fifteen years after WWII, France's reconstruction efforts were in full swing. The economy and population were both experiencing solid growth (+5% annually); the agricultural sector was being modernized; and 8 million people inhabited the greater Paris region.

However, new housing was not being built. Additionally, infrastructures and grids (sanitation, electricity, etc.) had not been designed to accommodate such a large population. Vast bidonvilles sprang up around Paris. In order to "straighten all that out,"[1] a more aggressive strategic plan was needed. In 1958, the government drew up a development plan for the Paris region (PADOG). However, this plan was too narrow with regard to areas targeted for urban development and was widely criticized despite making some significant improvements (RER and bypasses). Soon after, Paul Delouvrier spearheaded a new development plan for the Paris region (SDAURP). It was based on the assumption that the population of the Paris region would double by the end of the twentieth century (14 million). It also foresaw sustained economic growth, which meant more housing would be needed. Developers and planners reached the conclusion that chaotic urban development was snowballing. The answer to the problem was to export growth to new cities.

The decision to create new urban centers on the grain-producing plateaus outside the metropolitan area departed from the earlier principles of urban development that sought to preserve agricultural spaces. Food abundance enabled this change of direction. In fact, agricultural space, which had always been depicted as a blank white space on maps,[2] was for the first time deemed "free for development" (Fleury 2005). The SDAURP thus put agriculture on the backburner. However, the same cannot be said of forests, valley floors, and lakes. Their role changed with the advent of leisure-seeking society.

1 Statement usually attributed to De Gaulle.

2 Not until the masterplan of 1994 was agricultural space depicted in light yellow. As a sign of the growing recognition of the importance of agricultural space, the SDRIF (2008) depicted these spaces in brighter yellow.

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Agriculture in Île-de-France – mostly grain farming on plains and plateaus – was predominantly intended for export. A sign of the times, the Les Halles market – nicknamed the "belly of Paris" by Émile Zola – was shut down. It was replaced in 1969 by the *Marché d'Intérêt National de Rungis*, which, covering 200 hectares, was the world's largest produce market.

1.3 Urban Planning "Goes Green"

The economic slowdown following the two oil crises in the 1970s coincided with slower than expected demographic growth for the Paris region. Approved in 1976, the masterplan for the Île-de-France region (SDAURIF) closely mirrored the earlier plan for Paris, but was extended over a larger area (namely, the Île-de-France region).

While it continued to pursue ambitious objectives for economic development, housing, and transportation, the 1976 plan focused on designing different solutions for new cities and for the central urban area. For the first time, rural, agricultural, and wooded spaces were recognized as being positive factors in the overall development of the Île-de-France region. The concept of green infrastructure was introduced. One of its key components was designating large open spaces[3] known as "natural balance zones." As multiple studies conducted during this period clearly showed, urban dwellers prized agriculture more for its visual landscape than the food it produced. According to Hervieu and Viard, this was still the case in 1997.

In the following years, the regional authorities – newly established by the decentralization laws of 1982 – continuously worked to refine and improve the theory and applications of this green infrastructure, especially as spaces labeled "neither urbanized nor urbanizable" were the only areas under their jurisdiction. Experts on the Regional Council were particularly concerned with the future of open spaces within a 10 to 30km radius of Notre-Dame (the notion of the "green belt" emerged in 1983). In the early 1990s, the revision process of SDRIF, which still fell to the State, was marked by intense exchanges with regional officials. A new plan was adopted with three priority concerns: urbanization, transportation, and environment. For the first time, agriculture was given an important place and its economic and cultural value was recognized. It was agreed that the "rural ring" around Paris needed to be preserved and that new regional natural parks would be created in it. One serious bone of contention between State and regional officials concerned the space where dense urbanity and countryside met. Nearly two thirds of the areas the SDRIF marked for urban development (43,450 hectares) were inside the green belt. These areas underwent a residential boom, intensifying urban sprawl. Therefore, the Regional Council did not approve the 1994 SDRIF and published its own planning document the following year known as the Regional Green Plan (1995).

3 Open spaces refers to wooded, agricultural, and natural areas (i.e. without buildings). These spaces are not always "open to the general public" (hunting preserves or farmland) or visible (forests) (IAURIF 2005).

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Owing to globalization, agriculture in Île-de-France shifted to industrial grain production. The number of farmers dropped while the average farm size increased sharply. Due to the heavy traffic around Paris, slaughterhouses moved further and further away before eventually disappearing from the region altogether. Likewise, silos and other storage facilities deserted Île-de-France. In simple terms, in a few decades, Île-de-France went from being a highly attractive and advantageous agricultural region (rich land, tax exemptions, major hub of both processing and consumption) to being a disadvantaged one, a status that had previously only applied to mountainous and swampy areas.

1.4 Turn of the Century: Age of Uncertainty and Post-Kyoto

The 1994 SDRIF was designed to span a minimum of 15 years. However, less than six years after this framework document was adopted, the Regional Council – now in charge of SDRIF revisions – decided to go back to the drawing board. Several major changes occurred that made this revision necessary. Firstly, the document did not take the concept of sustainable development into account. Accordingly, issues like biodiversity, reducing greenhouse gases, soft transportation, and renewable energy were absent from it. Additionally, the 1994 plan failed to reverse negative trends already underway. For example, urban development continued inside the green belt due to its not having a clearly defined and recognized status. Out of its 70,000 hectares, 18,000 were urbanized between 1982 and 1994 and an additional 9,500 between 1994 and 1999. The land designated for development over a period of 25 years was all urbanized in the 1990s. At that pace, twenty years down the road, what would remain of the green belt and its intended function of containing urban sprawl? Moreover, "shifts and major crises linked to climate change and the rising cost of fossil fuels"[4] loomed large. In short, the urban development model being implemented in the Île-de-France region needed an overhaul. The SDRIF approved in 2008 took a sweeping approach to these challenges that can be summed up in one word: densification. The idea was to achieve a compact and resource-efficient (in terms of space and energy) metro area (SDRIF 2008, 39).

This new masterplan aimed to "complete the polycentric spatial redesign of the Paris region" and create "a solid and contiguous ecoregion in North-West Europe" (Regional Council 2006). Open spaces – namely those of the green belt – acquired even more importance. Their preservation and enhancement became one of the guiding principles of the plan, as illustrated by the following statement: "Regional officials now consider it equally important to enhance open spaces and developed areas. The goal to achieve density and diversity in the city and the goal to promote the multifunctionality of nature are now two sides of the same coin" (Regional Council 2006, 90-91). The language became more systematic. The SDRIF now referred to a "regional system of open spaces" organized in

4 That is the language used in the SDRIF to describe the second challenge (2008, 35).

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a concentric and radial way (SDRIF 2008, 93). It also planned to "strengthen the strategic network of agricultural, wooded, and natural entities of the green belt closest to the metro area…" and to "enhance the five main agricultural and wooded thoroughfares linking the rural ring and the green infrastructure of the metro area" (Regional Council 2006, 101).

At the same time, the State commissioned a series of reports that all attested to the fragility of periurban spaces and the farms they contained (Larcher 1998; Deswartes 1999). The agricultural law of 1999 introduced legal protection for real estate under agricultural use (a type of present-use program applicable to "protected agricultural zones").

1.5 Assessment

With the industrial revolution, new means of transportation, and globalization, the mutual dependency between Paris and its agricultural spaces gradually faded. The phenomenon peaked in the 1960s as Paris proper underwent rapid growth in a context of relative food abundance. Later, as the shift occurred from a quantitative approach to a qualitative one, more focus was placed on open spaces, agricultural spaces included. For reasons related to lifestyle, leisure, and landscapes, the city proper regained an interest in its agricultural and rural hinterland. Indeed, recent trends show that agriculture is being given a more diversified and meaningful role, which has resulted in policies and specific measures. Some official documents now even give strategic importance to agriculture – particularly in the green belt. However, justifications for doing so remain quite shallow. Their sole reference point is the multifunctional nature of agriculture (SDRIF 2008, 95).[5]

In short, agriculture remains marginalized in development plans for the Greater Paris region (see box below). Residents and leaders of various institutions tend to be more concerned with issues of transportation, employment, housing, work, noise, and air quality, to name but a few. In addition, besides competitiveness clusters (*poles de compétitivité*), agriculture has to contend with major urban planning projects and operations of national interest (*opérations d'intérêt national*), the construction of which is given priority. Compared with these clusters, justifications rooted in agricultural multifunctionality, although certainly convincing to specialists, carry little political weight. Agriculture is thus of secondary importance in the spatial planning of the Île-de-France region. Is this situation inevitable, or can it change?

5 SDRIF breaks these functions (or roles) down into five categories. The first three are traditional: economic function, environmental function, and social function. That is not the case of the other two: one gives farmland a role in land use planning (seen as critical in the green belt) instead of treating it as a simple land reserve; the other refers to its role in adapting to the energy crisis and climate change via the development of energy crops and farm-to-table initiatives (or short supply chains).

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THE ROLE OF AGRICULTURE IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF THE PARIS REGION

Michel Lussault (2009) reviewed the ten proposals for the Greater Paris project and grouped their similarities and differences under ten keywords. In his work, the word "agriculture" appears only twice and only under the keyword "undeveloped spaces (brownfield/abandoned/vacant land and countryside)." The geographer notes that these spaces are abundant and often so large that the most pressing task might be to integrate these empty spaces, this countryside, this nature, and this agriculture into an urban development framework (257).

In reality, these proposals take substantially different views on agriculture. Some proposals (Winy Maas's team, Djamel Klouche's team, and to a lesser extent Yves Lion's team) are urbanity-centered and hone in on reducing greenhouse gases and say little to nothing about agriculture. Instead, they prioritize forests, which they see as carbon sinks, and recommend expanding them. Others see the main purpose of green spaces (agricultural spaces included) as being a boundary to contain urban sprawl. For instance, Richard Roger's team cites this as the main reason for doing more to protect the green belt. Although they recognize that green spaces are good boundaries, two teams (led by Jean Nouvel and Bernardo Secchi/Paola Vigano respectively) attack the very notion of green belt, claiming it goes against the principle of free circulation at a time when it is important to go beyond zoning, partitioned parks, and the sterile monospecificity of spaces. In addition to serving as boundaries in spatial layouts, green spaces generally refer to the principle of spatial multifunctionality and diversity several teams want to strengthen by, for instance, stimulating the relationship between city-nature or city-countryside (Jean Nouvel, Geipel/Andi, or Secchi/Bernardo).

The proposals of Secchi/Bernardo and Roland Castro's team see agriculture as being useful for the development of Île-de-France only for the geography and landscape entities it produces.

Only the proposals of De Portzamparc's team and especially Antoine Grumbach's team give agriculture a decisive role.

In his rhizomic development model for the metropolis, De Portzampac cites the example of the Saclay Plateau – which he sees as "a giant 'glade' devoted to nature and agriculture" – to illustrate the importance of open agricultural spaces. He also points out that, "Surrounding all university and research facilities with park-like green spaces would foster different human qualities and offer a living environment not usually found in urban settings" (Le Grand Paris 2009, 113).

Crumbach goes even further, advocating an overall, structural principle of solidarity between urban and rural living. He claims this principle would remedy the loss of identity caused by the radiocentric city since the "feeling of belonging to a metropolitan area is inseparable from a geographic identity." All the same, it must be pointed out that the space Crumbach designates for this project and identity is the Seine Valley. "The Seine Valley has the unique potential of being able to give everyone a feeling of belonging where they live, a 'topos' without which the 'logos' cannot take root" (130).

2 Change of Perspective: Agricultural Spaces as Seen through the Eyes of Those Living on the Outskirts of Greater Paris

This section switches tracks entirely and takes the opposite route from what has been stated above. Instead of starting inside the metro area and branching out,

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it starts with the outskirts – where most agricultural spaces are located – and then moves inward. This section also presents the views of those who live in these areas.

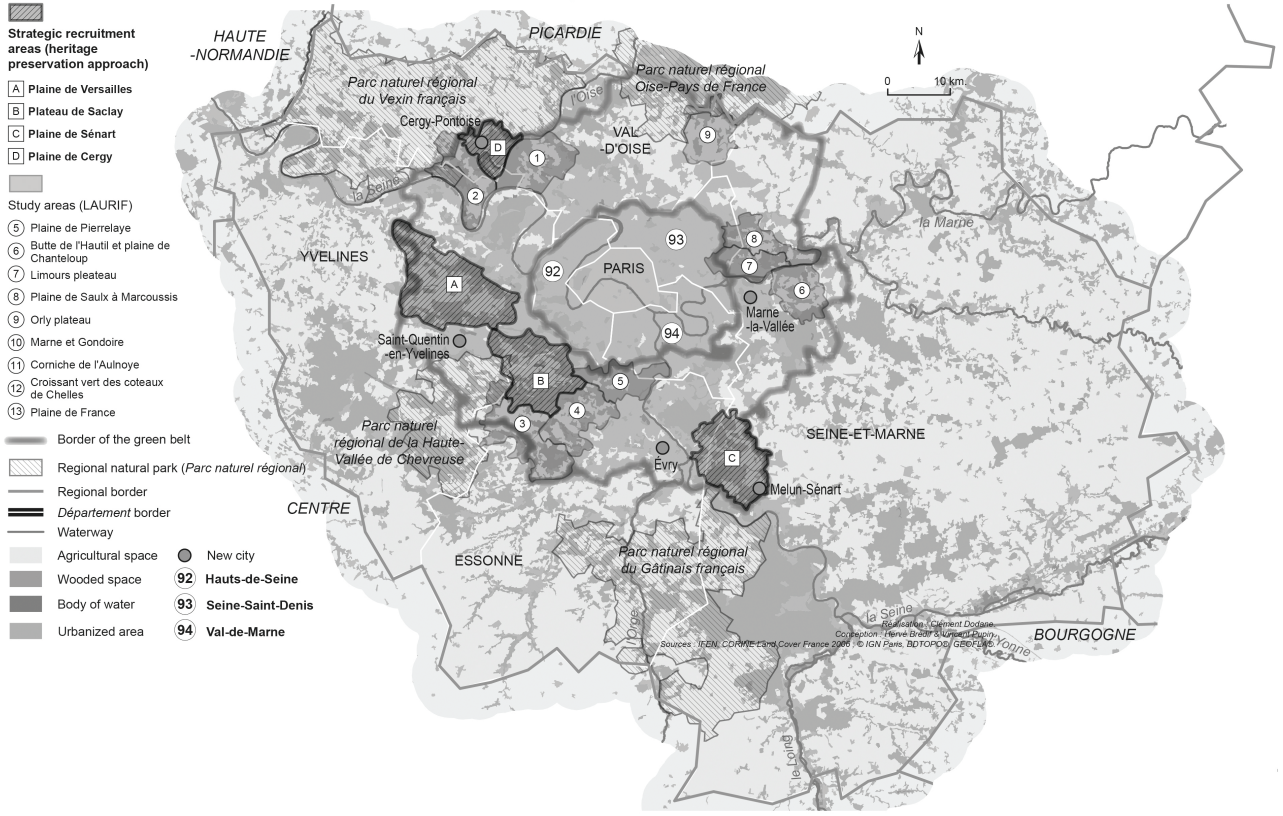
What follows is based on more than 600 in-depth interviews (Fig. 1). These interviews were conducted in the framework of two different projects. Sponsored by the Regional Council of Île-de-France, the first project used a facilitative approach and covered four areas that applied for a spot in the project by creating a local association. Between 100 and 120 people were interviewed in each of these areas about a precise topic: "ways in which fostering agricultural activity would improve quality of life in the Greater Paris region." The authors of this article oversaw the interview process in two regions: the Plain of Versailles (Pupin et al. 2008) and the Saclay Plateau (Brédif 2003; 2008; 2009). The second project more closely resembled a study. It was carried out at the request of the *Département Environnement Urbain et Rural* (DEUR, Urban and Rural Environment Department) of IAURIF (Institute for Urban Planning and Development of Île-de-France). Led by Hervé Brédif and Catherine Carré (2006), graduate students conducted some two dozen interviews in each of the nine non-urbanized spaces covered by the study (Fig. 1 shows the areas used in each of these projects). Interviewees were asked these questions: "What are the issues of non-urbanized open spaces? What are their local and regional benefits? What courses of action would you recommend?"

Although they pursued different end results, these two projects used very similar methodologies. In fact, all participants were selected for their expertise on the areas in question. The issue was not to find the average opinion by surveying various statistical categories, but rather to gather input from local community leaders. Interviewees were selected on the basis of their professional responsibilities and their degree of influence in an area or because they had specialized knowledge. The selection process also took into account representativeness, socio-cognitive diversity, and relevance to the study topic. Elected officials, administrators, business leaders, and other people with substantial roles in the areas under study were prioritized.[6] In both instances, these interviews, which were conducted anonymously, were based on the asset audit procedure established by Henry Ollagnon (1987). Each interviewee provided his/her expertise throughout a semi-guided interview process consisting of: (i) giving his/her own view of the area, including its features and associated problems; (ii) providing an assessment of the initiatives underway; (iii) predicting their outcomes; and (iv) proposing ideas with regard to planning and action. This "thread" then served as the basis for an analysis and comparison of the interviews in order to identify similarities and differences. The following five points emerged from this analysis of interviews.

6 More precise information about these methodological aspects is available in the articles published on the Saclay Plateau and the Versailles Plain (Pupin et al. 2008 and Brédif 2003; 2008; 2009).

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Responses from interviews conducted with local stakeholders in four areas of strategic recruitment (heritage preservation approach) and nine study sites



Map 1 Why preserve open agricultural spaces in the green belt around Île-de-France?

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2.1 Significant and Undervalued Attachment to Agricultural Spaces

Farmers from these areas were surprised to learn how supportive urbanites living near their farms claimed they were of agriculture in open spaces on the outskirts of the metro area. These farmers reported receiving mostly negative feedback about agriculture. They are disturbed by criticism directed at farmers (monopolizing space, polluting the air and water, dirtying the roadways, and slowing traffic). However, they are most upset by the overall indifference shown by people towards farming. They feel invisible: they receive little attention in local debates, municipal council meetings, and, more generally, in the everyday life of developed areas nearby.[7] When city planners need space for an urban development zone or a new neighborhood or when the State wants to build new roadways or decides to support one of the competitiveness clusters, agricultural space always serves as a land bank that can be tapped at will. For these reasons, farmers feel their only purpose is to manage land temporarily until the right urban development project comes along. In other words, they feel municipal authorities can do away with them whenever it wants to.

Interviewees – particularly elected officials and local leaders – did not always bring up the issue of agriculture without prompting. These individuals spoke freely about the value and importance of open spaces. However, they had to be explicitly asked what these open spaces should be used for and who should manage them before they broached the topic of agriculture. At this point in the interview, many claimed they thought themselves to be the only person or one of the few who thinks agriculture should be prioritized. When asked if they had talked about agriculture with other local stakeholders, the answer was almost always "no." Agriculture is an excluded outsider. While few dare to even speak its name, when prompted to speak about agriculture, nearly all interviewees said that farming must absolutely be preserved in open spaces. That is a remarkable finding given the interview procedure (anonymity, open-ended and not explicitly focused on agriculture, semi-guided interview process) was designed to let interviewees speak freely on the importance of preserving open spaces and the role of agriculture within them. A few – only a handful, but some important elected officials – even said they thought farming in these areas was doomed to decline or disappear in a more or less foreseeable future. In summary, surprisingly, most interviewees see agricultural activities as being of prime importance for preserving and enhancing open spaces on the outskirts of Paris. The fact is, however, that this position is rarely voiced.

The misconception is compounded by another that is no less detrimental. Many wrongly perceive farmers operating in these coveted open spaces to be speculators at heart who are eager to sell their land at exorbitant prices or to be expropriated and receive hearty compensation for it. These are groundless

7 There are only 6,000 farms and 11 million inhabitants in Île-de-France. That is one farmer for every 2,000 urbanites. That "balance of power" becomes even more skewed the closer one goes to the Paris metro area.

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accusations made by many observers and researchers that neither obvious facts nor our in-depth interviews corroborate. It is true that land sold for development purposes does fetch considerably higher prices. Farmers and market gardeners who own the land they cultivate can benefit from the higher land prices that urban sprawl brings. Whether they keep their house or move away, income from selling land can be farmers' primary source of retirement income. However, the farmers we interviewed have, against all odds, stayed in the periurban area and chosen not to sell their land. With a few exceptions, none want to give it up. They are rooted in the land. In many cases, their families have been farming the same land for generations. They are attached to it and freely admit it. They devote their lives to it and have future projects, or would like to have. They also have a hard time seeing themselves being anywhere else or doing any other job. Obviously, if the authorities decide to expropriate their land, they want to be justly compensated for the economic and psychological hardships leaving would represent. And this is something that they do not hesitate to point out: so frequently and so loudly, that it is eventually perceived that receiving compensation is the desired outcome for the farmers, if not a development policy in itself.

2.2 The "NIMBY Effect": An Inadequate Explanation

The diversity and richness of the interview results call for a thorough revision of numerous discourses about periurban agriculture. Firstly, they challenge the rhetoric of planners and developers, which tends to belittle open spaces where farming is practiced by referring to them as empty spaces in which no one has an interest. People who use such rhetoric think the only way to redeem these "non-spaces" – which are, in fact, open agricultural spaces – and make them useful is through urban development projects. They think the only reason these "pointless" spaces have not yet been developed is due to opposition from a handful of affluent and self-centered locals who want to keep their bucolic lifestyles intact. In many cases, even social scientists unquestionably endorse this pre-packaged explanation, citing umpteen indications from surveys that suggest that citing attachment to agriculture is a way of masking peoples' real desires to repel urban development and all the nuisances it brings (social housing, roads, noise, safety concerns). According to them, citing attachment to agriculture is, in reality, just a NIMBY reaction, which they see as harmful since it stymies development and curbs the potential for agricultural development (Poulot 2006). While the NIMBY reaction may not be absent altogether, most people are certainly attached to agricultural spaces for much deeper reasons. In fact, all the people interviewed admitted that they were not opposed to urban development in principle. What they want is a balance between the preservation of agricultural spaces and social/economic development. They think such a balance can be achieved through collaboration and partnerships between stakeholders and the various sectors who occupy the same areas. This is a necessary condition for finding room to maneuver in a system subject to various constraints.

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2.3 Moving beyond Two Overly Simplistic Concepts: Landscape and Multifunctionality

As specialists at the IAURIF (Institute for Development and Urban Planning in Île-de-France) and AEV (Agency on Green Spaces in Île-de-France) point out, no rigorous study has been carried out in over 30 years that pinpoints Île-de-France residents' views on and expectations of open agricultural spaces, including the green belt. Not surprisingly, public action is founded on two generic ideas: the first (rooted in an old social context) is that, among urbanites in dense areas, agriculture evokes visions of landscapes and a lifestyle more than anything else (including food production); the second utilizes the concept of multifunctionality to spotlight all the goods and services agricultural activity brings.

However, according to the interviews on which this analysis is based, local stakeholders rarely refer to the concept of function, much less multifunctionality. The principle of distinct functions merely describes things from the outside and groups them into prefabricated categories. Since it does not take into account local stakeholders' opinions (problems, fears, aspirations), this interpretation is unable to identify the issues unique to each area and its agriculture activities. Multifunctionality may offer advantages in terms of universality since it uses categories that apply across the board, yet it ends up being irrelevant because it separates things that, in reality, are interrelated, and it fails to view problems through the eyes of local residents. Further, instead of supporting agriculture and open spaces, the inventory of functions can actually harm them. In fact, some developers think any "alternative solution" to land-use is acceptable as long as it meets a set of predefined functions. For instance, they might claim that a golf course, an urban park, or an HQE development (a development that meets a "high quality environmental standard") is just as good if not better than agriculture at preventing rainwater runoff, serving as "green space," or even promoting biodiversity.

On the other hand, expert opinions are almost always used to formalize the major issues of vast areas (and always touted to be in the public's interest) for entire segments of the Île-de-France region, or even the whole area. These issues are tailored to each area and each open space. As pointed out, the case of the Saclay Plateau is quite remarkable. The four groups of attributes and issues identified here do take local residents' opinions into account, but this could not have occurred through a function-centered approach alone.

Moreover, the approach used in the Saclay Plateau selects developers and projects likely to foster collaboration and mutual enrichment on the local level. Another good example of this is the development of equestrianism in the Versailles area (Pupin 2008). Here, horses link various activities and issues, including social cohesion, education, rural development, cultural heritage, and more. The project to commercialize horse manure alone is reestablishing ties among grain farms, equestrian centers, elected officials, INRA (French National Institute for Agricultural Research) scientists, and other producers of organic matter. As a result, the issues of transportation, urbanization, employment, leisure, and social ties are framed in a new and less sectarian perspective. In the Saclay Plateau,

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relationships among local stakeholders are being deepened through a short supply chain in the form of delivery of local agricultural products to restaurants and cafeterias. The initiatives in the Saclay Plateau and Versailles – horses and short supply chains – both enhance people and businesses' relations to each other and their community, and they both serve the interests of various stakeholders in these areas. Merely going by a list of functions – no matter how exhaustive – could not have achieved the same results.

2.4 Utility Cannot Override Identity

Another limitation of promoting the multifunctionality of agriculture is that the concept is concerned exclusively with utility. However, the reality is that it is human factors that are of prime importance.

In fact, the vast majority of our interviewees claimed the most important value of open spaces is what they represent in terms of identity.[8] To them, these spaces embody things to which they have become profoundly attached over time. They also invoke particular *feelings*, an aspect Cyria Émelianoff (2003, 51) rightly points out has been neglected. Additionally, they mark peoples' geographical space and situate them in relationship to other spaces. In this respect, open spaces are bearers of meaning because they meet an existential need and one we might, along with Augustin Berque, call ontological (2000). Lastly, they are key factors of identity because, thanks to them, people experience a relationship with the natural world, and are immersed in the ebb and flow of life on earth, in tune with the changing of the seasons, and the history of humanity.

In short, our interviewees said these spaces serve as markers of who they are, what they love, and what they really need: that is, to be part of the world, to live in the here-and-now while remaining open to and connected with life and consciousness on earth. These people live and work in these spaces and to them agriculture defines the spaces as much as it defines the people living in them. One elected official, a few leaders of associations, and researchers claim that when agricultural land becomes fallow (due to farmers moving out, for instance) a "light goes out in the darkness." These individuals do not look favorably on – and in some cases reject outright – turning farms into golf courses, forests, or urban parks: "If that's what has to happen, if that's the only way to keep buildings from covering everything, then I'll have no part in it." Similar versions of that statement were repeated in all the areas where we conducted interviews.

Nonetheless, the degree and type of identification with these open agricultural spaces is not the same in every area. It varies from one area to the next, as well as within single areas. Someone who decided to move to a small village in a periurban agricultural space and someone who lives in a dense urban area but nonetheless sees the evolution of croplands everyday from a train or car window can both feel attached to agricultural space, albeit in different ways.

8 Several specialists of periurban areas do mention identity in passing, but do not expound on this aspect.

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2.5 Towards a Shared Local Identity

The way inhabitants feel about open agricultural spaces cannot be characterized as a "counter-identity" (counter urbanization). Doing so masks the real factors at work. In reality, their attitude stems from general disapproval of what is perceived as detrimental social policy. We found that stakeholders fear for the future of agricultural spaces and that their future is rarely talked about openly. Future plans are incoherent and based on unrelated and isolated decisions. They follow no overarching goal and are not publicized. Additionally, various stakeholders have no forum in which they can come together to discuss ways to ensure that these spaces are managed appropriately. As a result, no one really knows how others feel about them. This was a common finding early on in our work. That changed substantially during the course of the interviews when subjects were made aware that they were not the only ones who thought these spaces were important. They went from a defensive or defiant stance to a proactive stance based on the idea that open agricultural spaces can play a leading role in building an identity for large sections of the Île-de-France region. This identity is not "counter" but "for"; for cities, local communities, and certain areas, which, without it, would struggle to know where they stand and where they are going; for improving inhabitants' quality of life; for gaining control over the uncertain future of some spaces. It is not an "identity against" but an "identity with": *with* farmers, which up until now feel everyone overlooks; *with* inhabitants of other communities who do not always realize that their proximity to open spaces gives them an advantage in terms of designing future projects and building a shared future; *with* other people and communities who do not live nearby but who nonetheless desire some of the benefits these spaces can afford.

In summary, interview results revealed that open agricultural spaces are much more than green spaces, green lungs, or greenways as the official nomenclature suggests. They can reunite, bring together, or interrelate things that otherwise would be fragmented or in opposition to one another. Several local stakeholders even seem likely to see such spaces as *keystones for development*. They give large areas clarity, coherence, and meaning, whereas the administrative and political approach segments, fragments, and isolates since its only reference point is political, social, and urban data (see map of inter-municipalities on the Saclay Plateau [Brédif 2009]). Basically, agricultural spaces are factors in identity formation and can serve a variety of projects across large geographical areas (Map 2). This is already being seen in several areas. The "Green Triangle" is a good example. In 2003, five communes created an association through which they can exchange ideas and pursue a common goal of protecting and enhancing the agricultural space they share, a space that some have targeted for urban development. Divided into various bodies, elected officials, farmers, and users communicate daily about this project for cooperative living and reinforcing local identities – a project of the heart one might say – despite the fact that the project is being implemented

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across several communities and towns.[9] Such initiatives are "transcommunal." A similar process is underway in the Versailles plain. For a long time, this agricultural space has been seen as a simple physical boundary between three areas: the north-east (an affluent area with upscale houses), the south-east (a poor area with a high proportion of social housing), and the west (a "rural" area with well-preserved villages). Over the last few years, an association[10] has been coordinating a project to protect and improve agriculture in this area. Over time, communes that border this plain have perceived the advantages of being affiliated with the Versailles plain since it represents a wider and more coherent area of belonging that bears identity and even reclassification. The term "Commune de la plaine de Versailles" (Versailles Plain Commune) now appears on some signs. There is no doubt that the Plateau de Saclay has similar potential. Its agricultural space interests many neighboring communes and can serve as a hub or a platform for dialogue and common meaning. In this case, the association *Terre et Cité* (Soil and City) is focusing on fostering farm-to-fork initiatives.

In summary, whereas forests seem to serve as thresholds, gateways, or borders, agricultural spaces serve as a centerpiece, a place for dialogue, and a bridge connecting towns, social groups, and communities. These large agricultural "glades" transcend enmity, fears, and prejudices and instill a feeling of belonging to wider communities. They are symbols in the strictest and deepest sense of the word.[11] They embody the harmony of bringing opposites together. They symbolize the formation of new, growing local hubs rich in diversity and in the synergies they offer. Due to their ability to feed people, they embody the fact that more autonomy (including for the most heteronymous urban systems) is not a flimsy utopic idea. They embody both a new way of seeing what connects people to each other (Micoud 2005) and a new way of understanding that these spaces constitute *shared heritage*. And to think that, not long ago, some claimed these spaces were empty wastelands without any purpose whatsoever…

3 Conclusion

It is extremely difficult to take into account the diverse forces in the Île-de-France region working to better contain the region's development and establish a clear goal for its future. Can this even be done, given the complexity of the region and the diversity of stakeholders involved? The exciting work by the ten teams

9 The communes of Champlan, Saulx-les-Chartreux, and Villebon-sur-Yvette are part of the "Europ'Essonne" agglomeration community. Nozay is part of the "Coeur du Hurepoix" community of communes. Marcoussis has no affiliation.

10 The APPVPA (Association patrimoniale de la plaine de Versailles et du plateau des Alluets) is also composed of three bodies (elected officials, associations, and users).

11 In Greek, *sumbolon* refers to a sign of recognition. Originally, it referred to an object cut in two and divided between two people. Each kept a half and handed it down to their children. Later, the two pieces could be put back together to show that friendly relations were established in the past.

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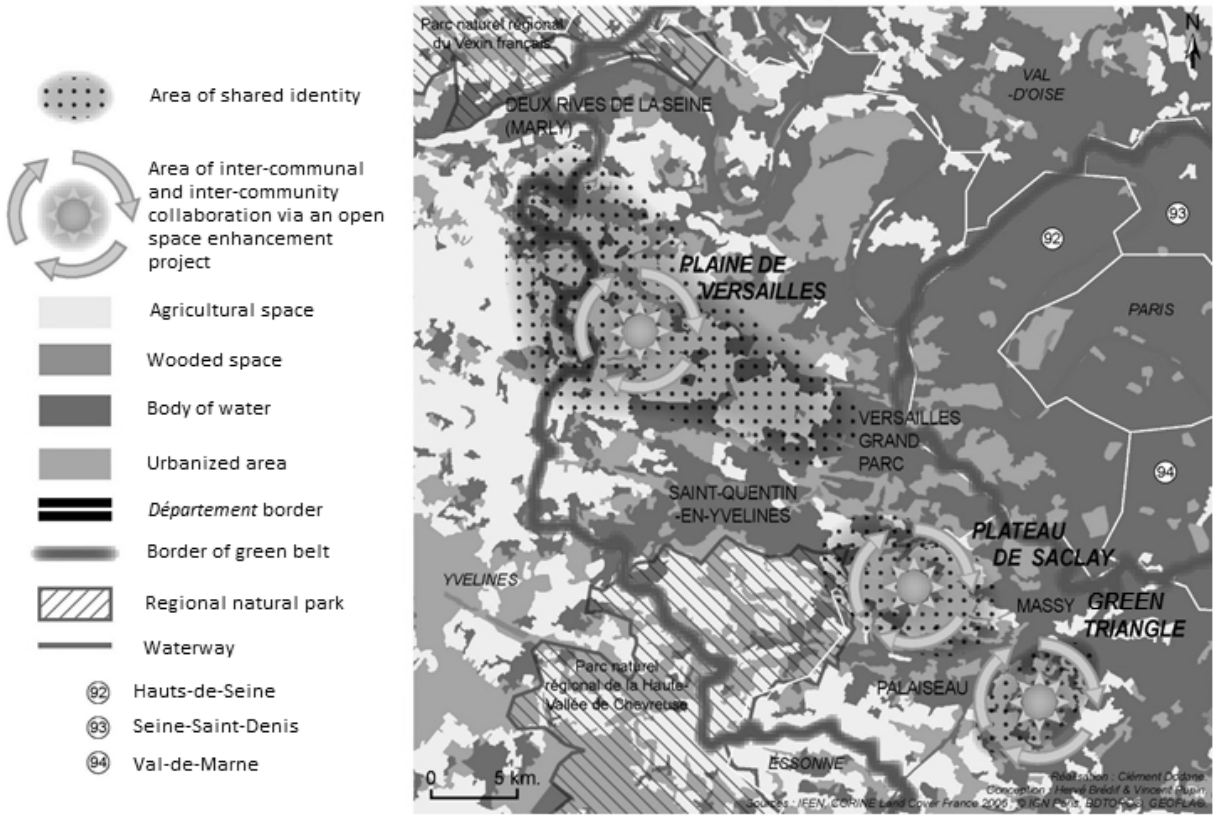
of architects and urban planners chosen to participate in the Greater Paris project teaches us that the metropolitan entity appears differently depending on the analytical framework adopted and the hypotheses put forward. Each perspective highlights certain aspects while neglecting others. This is a perfect illustration of the metaphor of the city, which was dear to the philosopher Leibniz (Deleuze 1988). However, the complexity of this metropolitan region cannot be comprehensively accounted for by any single proposal. No guarantee exists that their implementation or end-goals are really feasible.

That being the case, the interviews and research this article cites about open agricultural spaces on the outskirts of urbanity suggest a different approach is needed. They indicate that part of the future of the metropolis presently hinges on spaces that are too often overlooked. These open spaces where farming is a central activity can promote the emergence of new territorial entities, which carry meanings and identities that can co-exist with and take root alongside those inherent to the city of Paris. They can also enrich the Greater Paris project. The findings of our work on open spaces are in line with those of Guy Di Méo (2010) who claims that identity is now critical for giving cities a competitive edge. They also align with what François Ascher (2009, 309-10) said during an interview about the Greater Paris project with the journal *Esprit*: "We will not succeed in making the region more viable if we continue subscribing to a fundamentally monocentric model of the Île-de-France region. We need to create large clusters – like petals on a flower – and organize the pieces of the Île-de-France region around these large clusters, which will become new centralities." He adds, "These clusters must be located where the inner and outer rings meet because that is the right distance for structuring a megalopolis of a dozen or so million inhabitants." Some political leaders of the region acknowledge that rekindling local bonds and interdependencies would certainly bring greater autonomy, which would offset the high dependence on the Parisian metropolis-city-world. At stake is a healthy balance between autonomy and heteronomy. The American sociologist Saskia Sassen (2007) argues that this may be the decisive factor for making megalopolises strong and resilient in an ever-changing and sometimes unstable world.

We are convinced that inhabitants and local leaders' attachment to these agricultural spaces is undervalued. In reality, they can go a long way toward improving urban development, spatial planning, and, more generally, urban life. The only way to ensure that the Greater Paris project will produce a sustainable co-construction is to foster dialectics between universal approaches and local approaches, between comprehensive projects and highly localized projects.

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Map 2 Open agricultural spaces as sources of local identity.

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