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Call for papers
Catalysing worlds :
Towards a deepening of territories
through agriculture
Conference organised by the
Espace Rural Projet Spatial network
Ensa de Paris-Est
Proposals are due by
November 12th 2023

École d'architecture
de la ville & des territoires
Paris-Est



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Observatoire de la condition suburbaine

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ERPS network
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Deadline : **2023.11.12**

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<https://paris-est.archi.fr/la-recherche/reseau-espace-rural-projet-spatial>

Catalysing worlds : Towards a deepening of territories through agriculture

Conference organised by the Espace Rural Projet Spatial
(ERPS) network

Spring 2024

École d'architecture de la ville & des territoires Paris-Est
*under the scientific direction of Mathieu Delorme,
Sébastien Marot and Frédérique Mocquet*

Scientific Committee

Members of the Ensa de Paris-Est network

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Guests

Sabine Bognon (Institut d'Urbanisme de Paris, Université Gustave Eiffel)
Sébastien Bonthoux (École de la nature et du paysage de Blois, INSA Val de Loire)
Matthieu Calame (Fondation Léopold Mayer pour le progrès de l'homme)
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The Espace Rural Projet Spatial (ERPS) network has been examining rural areas and their future for some fifteen years. This interdisciplinary and interprofessional group of academics, researchers and practitioners questions the overly urban-centric nature of spatial thinking and action, and of the teaching of architecture and urban design: it is often in an urban/rural binarity, in a city oriented perspective, and with the tools of « urbanism », that rural territories and their functions are envisaged and designed (Guillot, 2010 and 2011). ERPS sets out to explore the possibilities of a dialectical relationship between urban and rural spaces, and pursues the hypothesis of the need for a turning point in approaches to spatial planning and a re-evaluation of a set of assumptions on which planning pedagogy is based. For its next biennial conference, it wishes to explore the theme of agriculture.

1. Agriculture: from the extension of cities to the deepening of territories

The most serious analyses of the contemporary environmental situation and the considerable challenges it poses for present generations largely converge on the observation that a theoretical and practical revolution is needed in all areas, from the techniques for acquiring and transforming resources to the ways in which they are exchanged and consumed. This revolution (in the full sense of a return and reversal) clearly calls for a recomposition, a reweaving, a fleshing out, even a deepening of environments and landscapes. Moreover, it makes this deepening, and the recognition of the metabolisms that unite all the human and non-human components of territories, the cause, **the true meaning** of the life and collective survival of societies today. Central to this issue are the activities that we now generically refer to as agriculture, i.e. the arts and techniques of raising and harvesting living resources, which are the matrices and foundations of « culture ».

As Wes Jackson, founder of the Land Institute, wrote almost thirty years ago: "If don't get sustainability in agriculture first, it is not going to happen, and for this reason that agriculture alone, ultimately, has a discipline behind it. It is the synthetic discipline of ecology-evolutionary biology. Nature's ecosystems are ancient. They are real economies. The law of return described by Sir Albert Howard operates. They can be trusted."¹ The Catalysing Worlds conference: "Towards a deepening of territories through agriculture" is based on this dual premise of the need for a paradigm shift - from the extension of territories to their deepening - and of the fundamental role of agriculture in this regard. It will seek to cultivate this from and with the disciplines of design - architecture, urban planning and landscape - all of which deal with matter, soil and space to shape our ways of inhabiting and "making worlds". Generally speaking, and echoing the intuition formulated by the American botanist and agronomist Liberty Hyde Bailey more than a century ago, when he observed that urban planning was only dealing with the consequences of the rural exodus, and not its causes, it might be time to finally complement (or even correct) the urban planning ethos of design disciplines with the emergence of an authentic **ruralism**.

2. Enacting a paradigm shift while dealing with the legacy of an agro-industrial system, or how to deal with the "negative commons"?

We therefore postulate that the necessary deepening, particularly through the prospect of a ruralism, would involve agriculture, even though for 60 years, agricultural policies and systems, at global, European, national and local levels, have been increasingly disconnected from their territories². Our food systems, now deterritorialized, no longer convey a way of inhabiting spaces and producing places. The same applies to our building materials. In France, the modernisation project that took off during the so-called « Trente Glorieuses », at the same time as it shaped unprecedented industrial, urban and metropolitan structures, profoundly altered agricultural practices and spaces, by subjecting them to the productivist standards of industry. The agricultural landscapes of Ile-de-France, for instance, with their large cereal-growing areas, are now the standardised landscapes of a globalised economy. How can we take up the challenge of reconnecting production (for food, energy and construction, for example), inhabitation and consumption in integrated milieux that would reclaim the territories, structures and know-hows of agriculture ? How could

¹ Wes Jackson, *Becoming Native to This Place*, 1994. And he added: "The materials sector, the industrial sector, is recent. It has no time-honored discipline to draw on. Skyscrapers, freeways, and suburbia have been made possible due to our discovery and use of fossil carbon, not any organising concept. Soils and forests have fed and sheltered us, but they too are in decline even with the subsidy of fossil fuels."

² The European Politique Agricole Commune (PAC) had its sixtieth anniversary on July 30th 2022

these worlds be catalysed ? What roles could architecture, architects, urban planners and landscape architects play in this transformation ?

Agriculture is now becoming a relatively popular subject in schools of architecture and landscape design. It is more and more often a design topic for students involved in food or ecological issues, who wonder about the role of architecture and urban planning in addressing the societal problems linked to food, building materials, energy and environment, and who address agricultural practices and spaces as vectors for enriching ecosystems and cohabiting with living organisms. Beyond schools, the subject is also the subject of academic reflection or work at the intersections of knowledge and projective experimentation, as demonstrated by the exhibition organised at the Pavillon de l'Arsenal in 2018 entitled *Capital Agricole, Chantiers pour une ville cultivée* (Rosensthiel, 2018).

While it is often through the lens of the metropolis and by means of so-called “urban agriculture” that the issue is considered – as if once again the urban gave a framework and legitimacy to the action of the architectural project (Cahiers thématiques, 2011) –, we assume that a wider change in the profession and its practices is at work, which is initiating transformation in both theories, pedagogies, and professional practices. One of the aims of the symposium is therefore to take stock of the knowledges and skills that deserve to be cultivated in our schools to prepare students for a world in which the polycultural techniques of acquiring, caring for and maintaining living resources should return to the forefront of arts and culture.

The ERPS collective takes as its starting point the specific characteristics of each region and the tangible reality of experiments in order to produce knowledge. This new edition has taken this route and built its reflection on agriculture on the basis of analyses developed in various disciplines (history, environmental history, geography, agronomy, economics, etc.), as well as discussions with several protagonists of research and initiatives involving the renewal of agricultural practices. On 18 November 2022, we discussed various diagnoses and scenarios with the *Paysages de l'Après-Pétrole* collective (Gaëlle Des Déserts), the *Atelier Paysan* association (Jérôme Sergent), the *Réseau pour des Alternatives Forestières* (Jesse O'Scanlan) and the *Greniers d'Abondance* association (Philippine Delattre). The discussants, Pierre Janin (architect), Matthieu Calame (agronomist) and Sébastien Bonthoux (ecologist), tried to identify with these players the difficulties, challenges and prospects of combining agriculture and architecture, based on the shared assumption that agriculture has a central role to play in the development of territories. The podcast recounting the day's discussions (<https://paris-est.archi.fr/agenda/catalyser-des-mondes>) represents the first milestone in this collective interdisciplinary and interprofessional research.

In addition to a shared diagnosis, the discussions highlighted a number of cross-cutting themes which will be the subjects of the discussions at the conference:

1. Agriculture as a vector for inhabitation :

Agriculture is the vector of a culture of living in the land, and is even one of the essential conditions that strongly shape the landscapes. However, farming is not widely identified today as a driving force behind land development nor for its ability to generate spaces of quality³. How can architecture work with agriculture and farmers to help produce a different way of looking at the landscape and new landscape relationships? Several questions can be asked from historical as well as analytical and prospective perspectives, for example:

- Reterritorialisation, relocalisation, and therefore the reduction in the scale of production/transformation/consumption systems for materials and energy

³ See Pierre Janin, *Latent Futures*, lecture at the EPFL, November 29th 2022

are themes that unite the analyses of players in various scenarios: how can changes of scale be achieved?

- Land issues, both legislative and economic, are also at the heart of the concerns: what are the obstacles and which levers are possible or might be invented?

- The diversification and multi-functionality (food, energy, construction, etc.) of agricultural activities, also seen as inhabited landscapes, appear to be necessary developments: what are the potential roles of urban planning and architectural tools and players?

- What lessons do alternative theories and practices (permaculture in particular) hold for the design and management of inhabited landscapes? What do architects have to learn in terms of design? We propose here to explore the premise that confronting rural areas as the focus of new observation and design tools transforms the very logic of design.

2. The transformation of design practices and teaching methods:

We postulate a fruitful link between architecture and agriculture, but also note that the dominant culture of architecture and its pedagogies are ill-equipped to formulate this link seriously. We will therefore be looking at:

- The skills of design practices in terms of synthesis, projection and spatialisation; but also the social role of architects in supporting the design of transformations; and the need for architects to know how to mobilise the other disciplines that are also active in the general processes of fashioning territories (economics, law, etc.).

- The transformations are material, but they are also cultural: transformations in the imaginations and representations of what makes up the territories and of the 'agricultural world' are essential prerequisites: what useful know-how do designers have at their disposal to represent and think through new imaginations of food, agricultural practices and territories?

- We would also like to study the educational experiments carried out in conjunction with local areas and/or those involved in transforming agricultural practices: while schools of architecture are taking an increasing interest in agriculture, few courses seem to involve exchanges with schools of agronomy, vocational training courses in agriculture (Janin, 2017), or even groups involved in the agro-ecological transition.

3. The legacies and reclaiming of « negative commons » :

Transitions or transformations in agricultural practices and systems, and in relationships with territories and living things, must take built and unbuilt material legacies into account. The term "negative commons" refers to realities that we no longer want - or that some no longer want - because they threaten the planet's habitability, but which we need to take charge of in order to move away from them more effectively: polluted soils, obsolete infrastructures, fossil fuel extraction systems, regional development models and agro-industrial systems are all part of our common heritage⁴.

- We need to address these legacies and transform the 'negative commons' that are still currently produced by the agro-industrial complex.

- The reclaiming of buildings, sites and landscapes, mechanisms, objects and techniques by those who produce and consume are also levers for transformation, which will need to be addressed in the discussions. Current struggles to oppose major resource and land grabbing projects, such as the demonstrations against the megabassines (in the Deux-Sèvres region in

⁴ Emmanuel Bonnet, Diego Landivar, Alexandre Monnin, *Héritage et fermeture : pour une écologie du démantèlement*, Divergences, 2021.

particular) or the struggle against the housing project that led to the emergence of the Lentillières neighbourhood in Dijon, also highlight the need to reclaim buildings, sites and landscapes.

3. Expected contributions and format of the Spring 2024 conference

The conference will be held in Seine-et-Marne, at the École d'architecture de la ville et des territoires de Paris-Est, as well as at various sites that will be visited. The inaugural conference will be held at the Pavillon de l'Arsenal in Paris. The event will take place in a variety of formats, combining lectures, plenary sessions and round-table discussions at the School of Architecture, as well as onsite tour of several initiatives and experiments.

These meetings are open to a variety of audiences. Researchers from the fields of architecture, urban planning and landscape, as well as from agronomy, political science and other disciplines (both established researchers and doctoral students) are invited to attend. Local players from all areas of expertise and action will also be represented in the discussions. The aim of the conference is to bring together knowledge, expertise and, above all, experience around the common issue of agriculture, and to encourage dialogue between different professional backgrounds.

Call for papers :

- papers will be invited to cross-reference two or more of the themes set out here, or even make other proposals.
- proposals are due by **12 November 2023** in **French or English** in the form of a 2,500 characters text with title, keywords, selected bibliography and biography.
- Based on the proposals received, the event's scientific committee will propose formats to those selected (papers, round tables, etc.).

Proposals should be sent to

ocs@paris-est.archi.fr et en cc : isaline.maire@paris-est.archi.fr

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