

Appendix 11: Toulouse metropolis (France, NE4)

Organising partner:	CNRS	Innovation Type
Practice:	The Versailles Plain's Association and peri-urban agriculture diversification (France, FR5A)	
Practice context:	Versailles Plain, Yveline department - Predominantly urban	
Confrontation context:	Toulouse metropolis, Nouvelle Aquitaine - Predominantly urban	
Workshop location:	Online	
Date:	November 25th 2021	

Summary

The confrontation made it possible to confront two metropolitan contexts where the issues of land pressure and the installation of new farmers are important. In Toulouse metropolis, initiatives have been taken (with an objective we could call “rural regeneration”) but no facilitation structure has emerged as in the case of Versailles Plaine Association (VPA), i.e. an associative organisation structured in three colleges which brings together all the stakeholders of the plain and builds a space for exchange between actors of the city, the agricultural sector and the countryside. This confrontation highlighted several critical factors: agriculture diversification for new installations; scale up; organisation of collective and multi-actors works with common projects and representations; support of political actors at different scales. But it also underlines main barriers and issues as the metropolitan context, long-term vision, financial means, organisation and dialogue between very different actors. Finally, we identified several key measures and actors: involvement of political actors and search for funding; a space to meet; actors with facilitation skills; collaboration with researchers.

Context

We choose to confront the Case study “Versailles Plain Association” (FR5A), located in the Ile- de-France region, with rural Toulouse Metropolis context. Toulouse Metropolis, as Ile-de- France region, is a very urbanized context with a relatively high population density but still with agricultural and natural areas. In this context, agriculture is under strong land and economic pressures, and new generations of farmers have difficulties accessing land. Nevertheless, if the issues are comparable, the confrontation was a

challenge, because the two contexts do not offer the same forms of ruralities and the same specificities: they have two different settlement systems. On the one hand we have a well-structured and geographically delimited association (the Versailles Plain Association) and on the other hand various associative actors who do not yet have a fixed and organised structure.

Toulouse metropole is an area that brings together 37 municipalities where 756,000 inhabitants live; it has a density of 230 inhabitants per km². It has an UAA of 11,000 hectares where mainly field crops are grown, which represents 24% of its territory, a figure that has been decreasing sharply for several years. Agricultural areas only allow 3% of the population's food needs to be met, as food crops and livestock farming are not very well developed. Solagro study²⁴ showed in 2015 that the proportion of land used for arable farming is double the national proportion and there is four times less land than at national level for fruit and vegetables. Conflicts of use are very strong, since the metropolis hosts many industries, particularly in the aeronautics sector. As in the Ile-de-France region, daily work migration is significant, with 30 to 40% of the metropolis' employees living in neighbouring municipalities, which contributes strongly to the urban sprawl and to the disappearance of agricultural land.

This geographical context led us to the hypothesis that it was interesting to compare this situation to the context of the Versailles Plain Association (VPA) promising practice, since the same land pressure and strong land competition are observed. However, the department where the Plain of Versailles is located (the department of Yvelines located west of Paris) includes 50 municipalities for 145,000 inhabitants. Thus, even if the Ile-de-France is largely more populated (18% of the French population), the local context of the Versailles plain offers a more preserved and lower population density context. Furthermore, the plain of Versailles is an agricultural and landscape area that extends into the west of the Greater Paris metropolis, whereas the agricultural area in question for Toulouse metropolis is located all around the metropolis. And, while in the plain of Versailles, urbanisation seems to be partly controlled (through VPA actions and creation of a landscape charter etc, as previously analysed in our case study), the metropolis of Toulouse is still very dynamic with constant demographic development and the conflict over its development is relatively tense insofar as the PLUI (Local Intercommunal Urban planning Plan) has just been cancelled (in May 2021) by the administrative court (which were referred by local associations) because the analysis of the consumption of natural and agricultural areas and the justification of the objectives for moderating this consumption were inadequate.

In the rural Toulouse context, local political actors and associations began to mobilise several years ago. In 2004, a joint working group was set up by the Greater Toulouse Region and the Agriculture Chamber to develop a peri-urban agricultural policy. A year later, the two partners joined the Terres en villes network: this membership accelerated the process. In 2015, the inter-municipality set up a group of elected officials dedicated to agriculture to monitor the progress of the metropolitan agricultural project. That same year, the Solagro consultancy firm carried out a diagnosis of the agricultural situation in Toulouse. It showed that in addition to the disappearance of land, there was a decline in agricultural

²⁴ <https://solagro.org/index.php>

employment: in ten years the region has lost 50% of its agricultural work units and currently there are 346 farms that employ 1.15 full-time jobs on average. In 2018, a Territorial Food Plan (Projet territorial alimentaire in French)²⁵ is signed but it now faces reluctance from neighbouring farmers and rural political actors to commit to collaborating with Toulouse stakeholders.

So, Toulouse is an interesting context where challenges of preserving agricultural land and generational renewal of farmers are particularly important. In this context, the promising practice of the VPA may be interesting, since despite several types of practices, the Toulouse context has not seen the emergence of a facilitating structure such as VPA.

To remember:

- Toulouse and Versailles plain face similar rural-urban and agricultural issues but specific situations, so the confrontation was a challenge (successfully met).
- Toulouse has serious agricultural land and renewal problems but no real facilitation structure (as in Versailles plain), although there are many actors who wish to be mobilised on these matters.

Results of the confrontation

In the rural Toulouse metropolis context, there is a group of 6 associations with complementary skills that operates as a cooperative called “Nourrir la ville” (“Feed the city” in French). This collective would like to disseminate its expertise by addressing other actors, in particular local elected officials, in order to offer support modules for farmers who want to set up in business, but also for the growing number of municipalities that now want to set up farmers on their territory in order to meet the objectives of the Egalim law (which wants school canteens to be supplied with 50% local and quality food products by 2022). In this perspective, stakeholders met during the confrontation are interested in the VPA's approach, which has a very original internal organisation with 3 colleges and which makes it possible to bring together very different actors on the issue of agricultural land protection and which has succeeded in creating a dynamic allowing new entrants into farming installations since 2012. Indeed, in brainstorming and focus group Toulouse stakeholders underlined the need for more structured organisation and more human resources to carry out their actions. Thus, they were very interested in the VPA promising practice.

Critical factors

The confrontation highlighted several important and critical factors. The first factor is the definition of local agriculture's functions and fundamental characteristics, which in the Versailles plain is reflected in the promotion of the agriculture's diversification. In fact, diversification is one of the common causes for concern of all the stakeholders who participated in the confrontation. It is well developed in the case of the VPA promising practice, but it is conditioned by the availability of land, and therefore by the sale of

²⁵ Territorial Food Plans (TFP) are territorial policies implemented in France from 2014 to promote territorialized food systems and short food supply chains. These territorial food plans are structured, first, at municipal or regional level, second, based on a shared diagnosis of agriculture and food in the territory between the stakeholders concerned; third on a quality objective in terms of ethics, environment, health, nutrition, etc., and fourth, on its interconnectedness.

farms, but also by the goodwill of cereal farmers (very present in the Versailles plain and also in Toulouse) who can sell or rent small areas on the fringes of their farms in order to establish market gardeners or tree growers. In order to allow this diversification, several factors are therefore crucial: the availability of land for small farms, with specific needs and practices that differ from those of cereal farmers; dialogue between organic and conventional farmers; dialogue between cereal farmers and market gardeners; dialogue between the agricultural world and local elected officials; a common vision of what agriculture is and what are its objectives. In fact, agriculture is often perceived as a private matter for farmers (who rent or own land) and local authorities often think that it is not within their jurisdictions to get involved in agricultural issues.

In order to stimulate a real dynamic of diversification and the installation of new entrants into farming, it seems essential in Toulouse to think about how to work as a collective. Several associations are already working together, but the question arises of the collective organisation of actions: what types of co-construction and exchange of know-how are possible between different associative structures that all have different habits, specificities, objectives and representations. Thus, it is also a question of knowing what expertise can be shared. For the moment, the actors participating in the confrontation do not know exactly how to move forward with this pooling work.

Furthermore, although actors in Toulouse claim that they already have one or two examples of successful installations of young farmers, the question of the leverage effect and the change of scale arises. It is crucial for them to find an approach, a global operating methodology for all the Toulouse Metropole territory.

Finally, local political actors (mayors, the elected representatives of the region or inter-municipalities, the Agriculture Chamber or the SAFER²⁶) have a key role to play in accelerating a practice and helping to generalise it or, on the contrary, blocking or slowing it down.

Key issues and barriers

The metropolitan context is a strong barrier, as land pressure and land prices considerably complicate the installation of new farmers and encourage the urbanisation of agricultural land, with conflicts of use being particularly important. But there are also a lot of opportunities for farmers to sell their products. The balance is complicated to find.

The change of scale between a successful installation case and a more global policy or dynamic is difficult. Referring to the case of the VPA, it can be said that this scale up takes place over time, when actors have become used to work together and when several key actors, (mobilised farmers or food artisans acting as examples) form a system, a collective dynamic where farmers work together, disseminate information and encourage the installation of others.

There are still "hostile territories" as several stakeholders put it, or rather recalcitrant people insofar as they themselves do not see a solution and are therefore reluctant to participate. What emerged from the

²⁶ Land development and rural establishment company.

focus group is that this *a priori* mistrust is erased when actors show them proof of efficient practices and do not position themselves directly in opposition or conflict.

The dialogue between agricultural institutions and political actors is an important issue that raises the question of the legitimacy of local elected officials and urban actors to take up the issue of agriculture and food as their main challenge.

Identified measures and actors to overcome the obstacles and succeed in the implementation of the practice

In order to overcome the obstacles and to respond to the challenges mentioned above, the confrontation brought out several key actors and interesting measures.

The key actors are the political actors at different levels, in particular at the regional or departmental level, who can become valuable supporters and help to obtain funding and recognition from other local actors. The impetus of national policies, such as the Territorial Food Projects, can also support emerging dynamics and good practices.

However, the support of these actors must also be complemented by the possibility of having more long-term means and human resources, as most of the key actors for the installation of new farmers and for the protection of agricultural land are, in both contexts, employees or volunteers in associations. Thus, in order to have a sustainable and wider impact, it is imperative that actions are supported by financial means while being reinforced by political will at local, regional and national levels.

More broadly, the VPA practice shows that a place (physical as well as symbolic) is needed for different actors to talk to each other, get to know each other and debate on an equal footing in order to come up with common actions. This place needs to be strengthened by people with strong facilitation skills in order to build links between seemingly diametrically opposed stakeholders and thus propose a real common project.

Further innovative ideas to foster rural regeneration and development

An idea was suggested and discussed in one brainstorming and in the focus group: the impact and role of researchers in generating good practices for rural regeneration. In fact, the confrontation was initiated by the research project itself and several actors highlighted their willingness to enter into research partnerships and exchanges in order to have feedback on their practices, to know other experiences elsewhere and thus enrich their repertoire of actions and finally to establish methodologies that could generalize the good practices put forward or, on the contrary, underline things that do not work and determine the positive and negative factors.

For confrontation participants, the involvement of researchers and their role in the dissemination of good practices over time is important, because they allow actors to combine reflection and practices in the field. Several participants in the confrontation also emphasised their recent or long-standing formal (with funded action research programmes) or informal collaborations with several research laboratories at regional level in Toulouse region or in Ile- de-France region.

More generally, the confrontation allowed for a moment of self-reflection of the actors' practices. Indeed, Versailles plain stakeholders present at the confrontation, who were able to make a detailed presentation of their actions, welcomed this exchange organisation because for them recognition is also important.

To remember:

- In order to answer rural regeneration issues, agricultural diversification and dialogue with conventional farmers and political stakeholders are the key factors. To conduct collective actions and reflections and to build relationships between actors who do not talk to each other, stakeholders need a good structural organisation.
- Moreover, a symbolic and physical space is needed to build a concrete facilitation process. This space needs to be planned by people with facilitation skills.
- To go further than the successful case, it is necessary to scale up by building a global methodology. Actors also need political support and financial means in the medium and long term.
- Public policies do not respond to the problems of the actors encountered, which explains their desire to work with researchers and thus to take a step back from their actions.

Lessons learned and recommendations

To some extent, the specific organisation of VPA and its process of facilitation could be applicable in the Toulouse context because this area has an active microcosm of small associations that already link local actors and new farmers. Contacts with some former and/or conventional farmers are also partly made but it remains to better structured exchanges and networks between actors in order to weave more systemic relationships.

However, the VPA has a particularity: the achievement of a common and ancient representation of the plain of Versailles as an important heritage space, which helped to federate the current network of actors and which led to a landscape charter. This specific heritage aspect is not necessarily reproducible in its current state in Toulouse, since the agricultural context and its historical roots are different.

The confrontation of these two contexts and the interrogation of the replicability of VPA practice can provide a more general reflection on the drivers needed for rural regeneration in a metropolitan context. Thus, it can be added that the proximity of the city is not necessarily to be seen only as a danger for agriculture. This proximity implies a growing interest of the urban actors for food and thus for the question of the installation of young farmers and also allows small farms and new entrants into farming to find outlets more easily, as the case of the Versailles plain shows very well.

Further consequences for the context

The next step for Toulouse associations is a more structured organisation of their collective and the definition of the skills that each associative structure can bring. The collective wishes to create a real ecosystem of actors and associations to get out of the position of marginal agriculture. Beyond the few cases of successful farmer installations, it is now necessary to go further to create a global dynamic while

knowing the complexity of the territory. In addition, the more social aspect needs to be developed in order to be able to offer quality and local food not only to the wealthier populations but also to the poorest.

In these future steps, the place of political actors and institutions is important, as they can offer political and financial support. Researchers are also central, as they can provide theoretical background, context confrontation and diagnostics to the actions implemented.

To remember:

- Toulouse context has a rich associative microcosm with actors who are already mobilising on the issues of farmers renewal and agricultural land preservation, so a facilitation structure like the VPA could be created there.
- Context specificities must be taken into account so that good practices are properly implemented. The metropolitan context is not only negative, it offers opportunities that must be seized.
- Social aspect has to be integrated in the development of new agricultural projects to be more inclusive.
- Politics and researchers' implications but also allocation of financial means are the next steps to implement VPA practice in Toulouse context.

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