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[Workshop n°2], [Session n°2]

Reclaiming space in the mountains, between land blockages and diversification opportunities. Comparative experiences in Corsica, Cévennes and Northern Alps

This presentation aims to show that the possibilities of reclaiming mountain areas are hampered by land tenure obstacles inherited from the history of local practices and land tenure organisation, as well as from the contemporary views of local actors (especially landowners). In order to overcome these obstacles and to redeploy agricultural activities in the new economic and social context of the mountain (in particular the multiple uses of space), our hypothesis is that the inherited land arrangements (both physical and social) must be taken into account and can serve as a support for a development policy based on diversification.

Indeed, the variety of soils, the staggered climates and micro-climates, the exposure (adret, ubac) are factors favourable to a diversity of productions. On the other hand, the representations carried by public agricultural policies have long chosen the model of intense modernisation based on specialisation and the enlargement of farms, both of which guarantee modernity (Bastien, 1988).

Our examples show, however, that micro-parcels, family joint ownership and tree properties were conceived and organised on the basis of qualitative and operational criteria that corresponded both to the crop-livestock balance and to what mechanisation was at the time (Casanova, 2008). These forms of land tenure persist today (Mériaudeau, 1986; Jean, 2018) and present opportunities for contemporary projects.

In this presentation, the first part presents the old agrarian systems against a background of almost continuous abandonment from the mid-19th century to the 1960s. The second part explains the family land strategies in the areas we have chosen to explore (Corsica, Cévennes and the Northern Alps), before the third part outlines the prospects for reclaiming land based on the mobilisation of existing land and on peasant strategies.

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