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*New “pays” (little countries) as local level of the process of Territorial Intelligence in France.  
Comparative study of the Pays Basque and the Couserans*

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**Summary**

The laws of 1995 and 1999 on planning and development of territory, extended in 2003, allowed the assertion of the “pays” (local countries) which constitute territories having a geographical, cultural, economic and social cohesion carrying joint projects (territories of projects). They met certain success. On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007 France counted 334 recognized “pays”. The “pays” are in the heart of the policies of sustainable development of the territory. However, this common denomination hides realities very different, so much on the level of the political situations, cultural, economic and social and on the level of the projects of territory which approach varied fields. They have different competences, various resources and very different budgets. The examples of the Pays Basque in Aquitaine and Couserans in the Midi-Pyrénées region offer significant illustration. These two examples are used to analyze the “pays” within a process of Proximity Territorial Intelligence centred on the identity, the construction of the convergence of the actors’ representations, the social networks, the projects culture within the framework of the new uses of ICT and the economy of the immaterial.

**Résumé**

Les lois de 1995 et 1999 sur l’aménagement et le développement du territoire, étendues en 2003, ont permis l’apparition des « pays » qui constituent des territoires présentant une cohésion géographique, culturelle, économique et sociale tout en étant porteurs de projets communs (territoires de projets). Ils ont connu un certain succès puisqu’au 1<sup>er</sup> janvier 2007 la France comptait 334 « pays » reconnus. Les « pays » se trouvent désormais au cœur des démarches d’aménagement et de développement durable du territoire. Pourtant, cette dénomination commune cache des réalités très différentes, tant au niveau des situations politiques, culturelles, économiques et sociales qu’au niveau des projets de territoire qui abordent des domaines variés, disposent de compétences, de ressources très différentes et de budgets qui n’ont pas de commune mesure les uns avec les autres. Les exemples du Pays Basque en Aquitaine et du Couserans en Midi-Pyrénées en offrent une parfaite illustration. Ces deux exemples nous servent à situer les pays au sein d’un processus d’Intelligence Territoriale de proximité centrée sur l’identité, la construction de la convergence des



représentations des acteurs, les réseaux sociaux, les cultures à projet dans le cadre des nouveaux usages des TIC et de l'économie de l'immatériel.

### **Resumen**

Las leyes de 1995 y 1999 sobre la ordenación y el desarrollo territorial, extendidas en 2003, han propiciado la aparición de los "países" que constituyen territorios de proximidad que presentan una cohesión geográfica, cultural, económica y social además de compartir proyectos (territorios de proyectos). Han conocido un cierto éxito puesto que, el 1 de enero de 2007, Francia contaba con 334 "países" reconocidos. Los "países" se encuentran de ahora en adelante en el centro de las iniciativas de ordenación y de desarrollo sostenible del territorio. No obstante, esta denominación común esconde realidades muy diferentes, tanto al nivel de las situaciones políticas, culturales, económicas y sociales como al nivel de los proyectos de territorio que abordan distintos ámbitos, disponen de competencias y de instrumentos diversos y se benefician de presupuestos que no tienen nada que ver los unos con los otros. Los ejemplos del País Vasco en Aquitania y del Couserans en Midi-Pyrénées ofrecen una perfecta ilustración de ello. Estos dos ejemplos nos sirven para situar los "países" en el seno de un proceso de Inteligencia Territorial de proximidad centrada en la identidad, la construcción de la convergencia de las representaciones de los actores, las redes sociales, las culturas de proyecto en el marco de los nuevos usos de las TIC y de la economía de lo inmaterial.

**Key words:** neighbouring territory, territorial intelligence, project, network, representations, identity.

**Mots clés :** pays, intelligence territoriale, projet, réseau, représentations, identité.

**Palabras clave :** país, inteligencia territorial, proyecto, red, representaciones, identidad.

# New “pays” (little countries) as local level of the process of Territorial Intelligence in France.

## Comparative study of the Pays Basque and the Couserans

### INTRODUCTION

Territorial Intelligence develops gradually in France, in particular following the key points of Carayon’s report about *Economic Intelligence, competitiveness and social cohesion* (2003) which highlighted the importance of the regional level. Significantly, in 2006, the DATAR (*Délégation pour l’Aménagement du Territoire et l’Action Régionale*), created in 1963 at the time of voluntarism of general de Gaulle’s government, became the DIACT (*Délégation Interministérielle à l’Aménagement et à la Compétitivité des Territoires*). The laws of 1995, 1999 and 2003 defined a new local framework of country planning: that of the “pays” (local countries). In this paper, we propose to study the assertion of this new level of proximity then to illustrate its diversity by the comparative study of the Pays Basque (Aquitaine) and Couserans (Midi-Pyrénées). We wonder about the future of these “pays” before analyzing the way in which they can constitute the local level of a regionalized process of Territorial Intelligence.

### 1. A NEW TERRITORIAL LEVEL OF PROXIMITY

#### 1.1. The assertion of a new territorial level

As soon as the 1970s, contracts of country development were concluded between the regional level and proximity territories of variable size, especially in the West of France. Then, during the following decade, tourist countries were constituted to develop the tourist economy and to organize the offer and the promotion. The law of February 4th, 1995 of orientation for the development of territory (LOADT), known as law Pasqua, considers the “pays” as “an organization of the territory based on the concepts of basins of life, organized in specific territory, and of networks of cities”. The law does not impose any obligation of legal structuring of the territory to respect the diversity of the local forms of cooperation. Nearly 120 initiatives of “pays” existed in 1999.

The law of June 25th, 1999 of orientation for the sustainable development of territory (LOADDT), known as law Voynet, constitutes a determining step in the organization of the “pays” as territories of projects. It reaffirms the “pays” by redefining its scale (that of the basin of employment), by pointing out its role of reinforcement of solidarity between cities and rural areas and by specifying the goals and the methods of development of its “joint project of sustainable development” which must be formalized in a charter. In order to organize the participation of the actors, it envisages the creation of the Council of Development with representatives of the economic, social, cultural and associative levels. In spite of the late publication of the decree about “pays” (in September 2000), the law Voynet starts again the dynamics of creation of the “pays” which had been blown after 1995. After the legislative elections of 2002 and the change of parliamentary majority, the policy of the “pays” knows a certain undulation.

We must wait until the law of July 2nd, 2003, about Urbanism and Housing operating a synthesis between the law Pasqua and the law Voynet for a revival of the policy of the “pays” with a procedure of simplified constitution.

The “pays” defined in 2003 is a local territory having a cohesion geographical, cultural, economic or social on a basin scale of life. It expresses the community of economic interests, cultural and social of its members. It constitutes the framework of the development of a joint project of sustainable development intended to develop the assets of a territory and to reinforce reciprocal solidarity between urban and rural spaces. It does not have vocation to constitute a specific administrative level but is an actor for dialog with the municipalities and the groups of municipalities (*communautés de communes*) which compose it. The programs carried by the “pays” have different goals linked with sustainable development with other administrative levels (European Union, National State, Region, Department) and can be implemented within the framework of multiannual contracts.

#### 1.2. A rebirth of a strongly identity territory

Actually the development of the “pays” corresponds to a rebirth. The word corresponds, before 1789, at the zone of life of a rural population. At the beginnings of the French Revolution, in 1790, the representatives, who wanted to break the politico-administrative organization of the *Ancien Régime*, deleted its territorial frameworks (provinces, communities of valleys, etc.) to create new ones in a levelling point of view (abolishment of specificities or *privilèges* and imposition of the same law and legal competences on all the national territory) in

dividing the national territory in new administrative frameworks : *communes* or municipalities (36 000) and *départments* (83 on all the national territory).

The concept of “*pays*” then takes an other meaning: a national one, becoming the territorial framework of the sovereignty of the Nation-State which had gradually developed since the XIII<sup>th</sup> century. With the wars of the Revolution and the First Empire, the “fatherland” is the territory of sovereignty of the Nation-State with a strong policy about linguistic unification (French language against regional ones).

At the end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, the word “*pays*” meets again a local meaning, in particular through works of geographers like P. Vidal de la Blache. So the rebirth of the “*pays*” can be regarded as a revenge of the history and geography on the administrative egalitarianism of the political Jacobinism.

## **2. AN EXTREME DIVERSITY ILLUSTRATED BY THE CASE OF THE PAYS BASQUE AND THE COUSERANS**

On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007, France counted 334 recognized “*pays*”. But they are very different. Their diversity is illustrated by the case of Pays Basque and Couserans.

### **2.1. The French Pays Basque**

The Pays Basque was recognized as “*pays*” in January 1997. It covers 2995 km<sup>2</sup>. The employment level is better than in other French areas, because of a demographic and economic dynamism. Its growth in population (+10,8% between 1982 and 1999) is due to migratory balance. The creation of new companies illustrates the economic development: rates of creation of companies are higher at the Pays Basque than in the Hexagon: 55 companies created for 10 000 inhabitants in Pays Basque against 45 companies created in France between 2001 and 2004. Consequently, 13 500 jobs were created between 1994 and 2004. The companies of the service sector are majority (63%). The 2/3 are located on the littoral zone where the population and the infrastructures concentrate. They are above all small units, the companies of more than 100 employees are few: 102 out of 26 400. In the field of higher education, the Pays Basque counted 4506 students in 2003, including 2445 at the University of Pau and the Countries of Adour (UPPA).

This territory is characterized by the dynamism of its culture. The 1990s corresponded to two major tendencies: the assertion of the Basque cultural expression in the local cultural landscape and the taking into account of the cultural fact as factor of development. That in particular resulted in the constitution of an intercommunity association of support for the Basque culture and the installation of many cultural operators. The Basque identity rests largely on a very specific language, which is not an indo-european one, unlike French or Castilian. The situation is contrasted enough. The increase in the number of children provided education in bilingual teaching do not balance the loss generated by the decline of the family transmission. However, the Basque language is very strong in the audio-visual media, public education, especially in the primary and secondary education, the public and associative spaces, through the information panels near the roads and that of public services and companies.

The Pays Basque is characterized by its strong local identity and the revival of political claims. Since 40 years, the nationalist parties became the third political one with 15% of the votes, which enables them to have representatives in the municipal councils and playing a part of referee in second turns of elections. The claims of creation of a department Pays Basque, of a University of full exercise or development of bilingual teaching became a majority in the population.

The Pays Basque is also characterized by its frontier situation which favours the exchanges and the cooperation between French and Spanish sides, cooperation resting on a common mentality and linked story. The will of the local actors to create a European metropolis (project of *Eurocité* Bayonne-San Sebastian) and, beyond, a Basque Euroregion implies to build a common project based on a shared history and a shared identity.

### **2.2. The “*Pays*” of Couserans**

The “*pays*” of Couserans counts 27.980 inhabitants divided in 95 municipalities and 7 “*cantons*”, on a surface of 1.639 km<sup>2</sup>. Couserans corresponds to the basin of river Salat (tributary of the Garonne) with the convergence of 18 valleys (which constitute specific identity territories) on two towns distant of 2 km: Saint-Lizier, capital of the Gallo-Roman city and bishopric until 1790, and Saint-Girons, seat of a viscounty, then sub-prefecture, important economic and trade centre.

The “*pays*” of Couserans was recognized in April 2002 and a contract of “*pays*” was firmed in January 2004. It is coordinated by an association (*syndicat de pays*) with an executive team of 10 permanent employees. There exists a Council of Development. The diagnosis of territory carried out for the project of Regional Natural Park (PNR) of the *Pyrénées Ariégeoises*. Its area, larger than that of “*pays*” of Couserans is centred on Couserans. It covers 2468 km<sup>2</sup> and concerns 42 000 inhabitants. The diagnosis of the territory (2006) insists on the assets: an

exceptional natural heritage with the presence of emblematic species (*isards* or Pyrenean bouquetin), water quality of the rivers, quality of the life. With also an interesting cultural heritage (churches particularly roman, castles), the specificity of the ancestral relations with near Spain, and an industrial inheritance (mines).

The main economic activities are the building (23%), the trade (22%), the activities of manufacture (18%), the hotels and restaurants (10%), the services to companies (9%), agriculture and wood (5%), the services to population (5%) and transport (3%).

If there exists since ten years a certain stability of the population, the ageing and the depopulation of the mountain areas near the frontier zone are very alarming. Unemployment rate is higher than the levels national and regional. The weakness of the financial means is shouting. Couserans is the poorest district of Ariège, department which counts the strongest proportion of recipients of the RMI (*revenu minimum d'insertion*). The rate of non-taxable families is roughly 60% (49% in average in France). In spite of the efforts of many associations, are also underlined the weakening of the local culture, the difficulties of communication and in particular the absence of connection towards Spain, public services with uncertain future, conservatism, even sectarianism against non natives inhabitants, the need "for injecting elixir of will to them"; without omitting the problems of disagreement between the municipalities and the self-centredness. In housing, the second home (*residences secondaires*) accounts for 39% of the dwellings of this territory project and more still in mountainous area.

The positive aspects are the strong mountain identity and the relations between the generations, strong community life, sport, social or cultural field, which can make it possible to maintain or develop services, the proximity of Toulouse and Spain as well as the strong potential in terms of formation-teaching: 64 schools, 4 colleges, 1 *lycée*, 2 LEP, 1 university centre in Foix specialized in tourism and rural development. The diagnosis also insists on fears: on change and about the uncertainties of the future with the risk of reinforcement of territorial oppositions and the exclusion of most fragile people.

### 2.3. Common points

Pays Basque and Couserans constitute frontier zones with Spain. The two "*pays*" corresponded to areas of dissidence, in particular with smuggling. But the evolution was very different. In Couserans, with the depopulation of the high valleys, accentuated by the arrival of the railroad, the mountain became a hard barrier with Spanish Catalonia whereas Bidassoa, if it marks the limits of the national territories, does not separate from an economic point of view and daily relations the two Pays Basque (Spanish and French). In a similar way, the two areas enjoy a strong collective identity (cultural and linguistic). But in Couserans, the Gascon (dialect of the Occitan) is hardly spoken by elder people while the French Pays Basque continues to speak the Basque, although to a lesser extent that in the close Basque autonomous Community.

### 2.4. Many differences

The comparison of the Pays Basque and Couserans illustrates especially the very important heterogeneity of the 334 countries. Indeed, there is few in common between a Pays Basque, strong of its 260 000 inhabitants, in full economic dynamism and which should be a department if French representatives of 1790 had not been opposed, and Couserans and its 27 000 inhabitants. If the district of Bayonne counted 114 000 inhabitants in 1901 and that of Saint-Girons counted 83 000 in 1880 (95 000 in 1846), the evolutions were radically different, the rural migration and economic development having played in favour of the Pays Basque and against the Couserans. The difference also is very marked in terms in dynamics of projects.

The Pays Basque is helped by a federative project of territory which began in 1992 with the project Pays Basque 2010, continued in 1997 with the Plan of Development of the Pays Basque, to concretize in 2000 with the adoption of Specific Convention Pays Basque 2001-2006. Thus, the Plan Development of the Pays Basque presented to the CIADT on December 15th, 1997, gave place, on behalf of the State to a Convention of Development to initiate and support operations in waiting of the Plan contract State-Region 2000-2006.

On the other hand, apart from the project of regional natural park which exceeds the area of the "*pays*", Couserans does not have a federative project. In the past, Couserans lacked many appointments: the railway tunnel of Salau towards Spain at the end of the XIX century, the thermal baths of Audinac in the years 1945-1950, a service of the National Library in Saint-Lizier in 1980-1981, and, always in 1980-1981, a project of National Park.

In the framework of the dynamics of the networks of health with the law of 2002, *Echo-Santé* is network of health dedicated to the elderly who gathers within an association, with cooperation public-private, located in the hospital of Saint-Girons, with the role of general doctors and liberal nurses. The buildings of the old hospital become thus a gathering centre of associations of service to the person like the network of health *Echo-Santé* or the association of assistance to home (ACMAD). Seeking to give more legibility to its actions and to support the cooperations between the territorial actors, the *syndicat de pays* de Couserans, after the diffusion of a newspaper,

booklets, logically came to a project of Internet site. The ICT can constitute (Bertacchini, Dumas) a lever of territorial development which supports the construction of the territorial capital. This meeting of the territory of proximity and the ICT concerns the economy of immaterial (Levy-Jouyet, 2007). But Couserans is far from the interactions and the collaborative exchanges which make the force of the Pays Basque or areas like Sophia-Antipolis. The construction of the territorial immaterial capital is there only at its beginnings.

### **3. WHICH FUTURE FOR THE “PAYS”?**

#### **3.1. A limited success**

“Pays” do not cover all the national territory (only 73%). They are numerous in the North-Western quarter of France (Poitou-Charentes, Basse-Normandie, Brittany, Picardy, Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Pays-de-la-Loire) but do not exist in the Paris basin. They are above all rural territories gathering only 41% of the national population. The “pays” must also face the strong competition of the communities of municipalities and the federative initiatives which come from them (SIVOM). The communities of municipalities born in February 1992, that is to say three years before the law Pasqua which correspond to the official rebirth of the “pays”, in the prolongation of the laws of decentralization of 1982.

The defenders of the “pays” insist on the contrary on their complementarities, presenting the “pays” as a federation of communities of municipalities, which is the case in Couserans. We must also wonder about the too great diversity of the territorial levels in France: municipalities, “cantons”, “pays”, “arrondissements”, departments, regions.

#### **3.2. A too strong heterogeneity? ...**

A “pays” counts on average 79 municipalities and 74 300 inhabitants. The differences are very important: number of municipalities, inhabitants concerned and covered surface. The “pays” less populated, Vesubie (close to Nice), account 5103 inhabitants, whereas the population of the “pays” of Rennes (Brittany) is of 419.559 inhabitants. There also exist important disparities in terms of policy, economic, demographic and cultural situations, as in the Pays Basque and Couserans cases.

The reaffirmation of the “pays” also concern Spain and in particular Spanish Catalonia. In 1987, *Generalitat* made of the 41 “comarques” the basic cells of its provincial administration. Their heterogeneity is even stronger than in France: Barcelonès is at the same time the more populated “comarca” (2 216 000 inhabitants) and the smallest (145 km<sup>2</sup>). The less populated “comarca” is the Alta Ribagorça, around Pont of Suert (4431 inhabitants for 427 km<sup>2</sup>), and the largest Noguera, around Balaguer (1784 km<sup>2</sup> with 37 565 inhabitants).

#### **3.3. ... or a privileged framework of an identity of proximity?**

In a world in full upheaval, with European construction, the opening of the borders, the globalization of the exchanges, the increasing mobility of the people, the acceleration of time and the diffusion of information thanks to ICT, the people search for reference marks and belonging to a community. The local territory answers this anguish and this search for meaning. The “pays” constitute strong identity markers. They are the land of the ancestors, the place where much of “exiled” come during the holidays and where they will return to finish their days when retired.

The emotional attachment can even grow with the distance. The Basque identity remains very strong, even if it must integrate newcomers more and more. The Gascon identity of Couserans, although it is more difficult to materialize within a precise geographical framework, is also marked. The evolutions different from the Pays Basque and Couserans show nevertheless that if the identity constitutes an important asset, a necessary condition for the development, it is far from being sufficient.

### **4. THE LOCAL LEVEL OF A REGIONALIZED PROCESS OF TERRITORIAL INTELLIGENCE?**

#### **4.1. Territorial Intelligence within a regional framework**

The Carayon report (2003) showed the importance of policies of Economic Intelligence within a territorial framework (the region level) to ensure competitiveness of companies and social cohesion. These stakes join those of the economy of immaterial (Levy-Jouyet) and of sustainable development in a context of proximity and territorial networks.

#### 4.2. Territory construction by the convergence of the concepts of projects and networks accelerated by new uses of the ICT

We share the assumption of B. Pecqueur and J. - B. Zimmermann (2004). According to them “the territory must be regarded as construction, a result of the practices and representations of the agents”. G. Colletis and M. Salles work in particular on the stakes of the convergence of the representations in Midi-Pyrénées region. The concern is increasing the interactions between all the actors of the territory, to learn how to appreciate themselves for better working together for the construction of collective intelligence of the territory, the “pays” constituting a possible privileged territorial level for these goals.

The ICT can be used as lever for the meeting of the identity and economic development by creating the conditions of the development of a formal territorial capital. Newcomers can also give dynamics to the areas with loss of economic and demographic vitality. We must also be aware about the potential of the diasporas. In this field as in much of others, Couserans has to learn much from the Pays Basque (solidarity). With the municipalities, the new “pays” are territories with strong identity which can find its place in the new territorial grid which is constituted gradually in a regionalized European Union.

#### CONCLUSION

The laws of 1995, 1999 and 2003 allowed the development of the “pays” as territories having a geographical cohesion, cultural, economic and social, while being carrying federator projects. However, this common denomination hides very different realities, so much on the level of the situations policy, cultural and socio-economic that on the level of the projects of the territory, about the competences and financial resources. The examples of the Pays Basque in Aquitaine region and Couserans in the Midi-Pyrénées illustrate this extreme diversity.

The rise of the “pays” is hindered by various obstacles and competition with other local territories.

The comparison between the French Pays Basque and the “pays” of Couserans has enabled us to better perceive the extreme diversity of the “pays”. It also allowed us to better measure the importance of the stakes: vital need of identity, stakes of durable economic development, need for solidarity linked with search for meaning. In a world in full change, the inter-connected people seek reference and identity marks. The “pays” can provide this. They also constitute a suitable territorial framework to apprehend the networks of actors and the cultures with projects as a first step of Proximity Territorial Intelligence, the new “pays” being above all defined as territories of local projects. So much tracks for new works.

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