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# From La Montagne by Jean Ferrat to the Website of the Regional Natural Park of the Mounts of Ardèche (France): Geographical Imaginary and Development of a New Territoriality in the Ardèche Mountains

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## CHAPTER SIX

# FROM *LA MONTAGNE* BY JEAN FERRAT TO THE WEBSITE OF THE REGIONAL NATURAL PARK OF THE MOUNTS OF ARDÈCHE (FRANCE): GEOGRAPHICAL IMAGINARY AND DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW TERRITORIALITY IN THE ARDÈCHE MOUNTAINS

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Since the “cultural turn” of the 1970s, the study of representations associated with places and spatial categories has taken on an increasingly important place in geography. Geographic imaginary allows us to grasp spaces and their dynamics based on immaterial characteristics, their lived and perceived character. Projected on spaces, representations help to characterize and differentiate them. They make up the sensitive relationship between societies and spaces, and participate in the appropriation of territories by the social groups that practice them. The geographic imaginary (Bédard and *ali*, 2011; Dupuy and Puyo, 2014 and 2015), charged with positive or negative values, helps to make the spaces attractive or repulsive. It seems consubstantially determined by the dynamics driving the territories, and determining in these evolutions.

The physical characteristics of the rural mountain area contribute at first sight to singularize it. Relief, slope, altitude, climate, vegetation, adret / ubac exposure, are all physical elements that make up a specific spatial context for the societies that settle there. The appropriation of mountain space induces a specific socio-spatial organization, a physical and ideological geographical object, both the product of the organization of social groups and the support of their organization and activities (Debarbieux, 2001).

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Figure 6.1 Homepages of the web site of the Monts d'Ardèche Regional Natural Park

Translation of the main slogans of each page: Here the flavors are natural / Living here is an opportunity / Here links are woven / Here biodiversity blossoms / Here a generation “park” grows up.

From a diachronic perspective, the imaginary correlated to the mountain has undergone significant recompositions and evolutions (Debarbieux and Rudaz, 2010). Representations have evolved along with the socio-spatial

dynamics that have affected it. This article aims to highlight the consubstantiality and reciprocal construction between the evolution of representations and socio-spatial dynamics animating the Ardèche Mountains from two documents: the song *La Montagne*, written by Jean Ferrat in 1964 and the website of the Monts d'Ardèche Regional Natural Park (PNR).

Directly inspired by Jean Ferrat's stay in Antraigues-sur-Volane, *La Montagne* evokes the rural exodus and the agricultural rejection that the territory experienced during the first half of the 20th century. The geographical imaginary that it translates is both socio-spatial representations that one can think is *a priori* shared by emigrants and representations peculiar to the singer. Moreover, the latter has in many respects an anachronistic dimension which prefigures the reconstruction of the imaginary associated with the mounts of Ardèche. The website (mainly its homepage) of the Monts d'Ardèche Regional Natural Park, a medium mountain area of the eastern foothills of the Massif Central, at the heart of which is the commune of Antraigues-sur-Volane, will constitute the contemporary "counterpoint" of this analysis. The result of a collective approach, the site conveys representations, which are certainly the result of a social consensus, but whose purposes are promotional.

## **The geographic imaginary “Territorialization operator”: from representations to the territory's construction**

### **Perceived space, lived space: towards the notion of territory**

In geography, the study of spatial representations is at the origin of the concept of "perceived space". Constructed subjective or collective, it is the product of representations, affects, concrete experiences, images or even memories that are "projected" by an individual or a social group on space. The spatial representations then constitute a relational, sensitive and dynamic beam between a space and an individual or a social group. The degree of proximity which the author, who projects his representations, maintains with the space he represents, can constitute a new element of distinction. The concept of "lived space" refers to a space that is both perceived and practiced in a more or less intense way. This "lived space" corresponds to the superposition of the living space (i.e. a subjective construction generated by a concrete experience) and the perceived space,

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associated with the imaginary necessarily influenced by the practice of this space.

The representations projected by Jean Ferrat's song are those of the space experienced by the author. Indeed, the song was inspired during his stay in Antraigues-sur-Volane. This concrete experience helped to build his representation of the Monts d'Ardèche. Shortly afterwards, the singer finally settled in the commune.

Another parameter makes it possible to slide from the individual sphere to the collective sphere. The "occurrence" of socio-spatial representations within society, the way in which these are shared, from within or without in relation to the space considered, makes it possible to make the link with the notion of territory. Defined by Guy Di Méo (1994) as the appropriate portion of space by a social group, the territory corresponds to the superposition of a relative space organized by society, a living space composed of concrete experiences, and a lived space, fruit of representations and shared values. The representations conveyed by the website of the Monts d'Ardèche correspond to this collective and territorial prism. The selection of the elements visible on the site depicts an imaginary "common" to the local society. This imaginary, mobilized as a tool to promote the territory, thus has a collective dimension, identity and policy.

These two rural scripts (the song and the website) are thus positioned on different planes: two different eras, differentiated "positions" from the imagined object and a variable "occurrence" (an individual scale for the Song by Jean Ferrat, a collective scale for the Monts d'Ardèche website).

### **Symbolization of places and socio-spatial representations: operator of territorialization**

The symbolization of places on the basis of spatial representations is at the origin of the process of territorial construction. According to Bernard Debarbieux (2009), two main dialectics contribute to territorialization from spatial representations. The dialectic "genericity / singularity" contributes to the creation of a symbolization of space, itself at the origin of the construction of a socio-spatial metaphor. Genericity is the symbolic game that leads to the apprehension of objects in a similar way. In this context, objects or places are apprehended in common, due to an assimilable form or function. Conversely, the process of singularity distinguishes objects or places which may have a sacred dimension for the social group at the origin of their specification. Selection operator, the process of singularity is a construction which isolates "objects" within

their environment. In these objects symbolically common and shared values are inscribed.

The construction of the territory on the basis of this symbolization of space by socio-spatial representations is carried out according to a dialectic "differentiation / aggregation". Differentiation consists of a symbolic game that combines a form of spatial organization and a form of social organization, both specific. This game, which can be carried out endogenously or exogenously, singles out one space among others, in a comparative essence approach that distances it from otherness. The aggregation process also participates in territorialization by assembling and pooling spaces characterized by similar objects or systemic functioning.

### **The territory of the Monts d'Ardèche sung by Jean Ferrat**

In Jean Ferrat's work, the symbolization of places on the basis of spatial representations makes it possible to construct a social metaphor of the traditional peasant and mountain society, threatened and deeply disrupted by the rural exodus. In terms of genericity, different elements can illuminate the analysis.

*Avec les mains par dessus leurs têtes,  
Ils avaient construit des murettes  
Jusqu'au sommet de la colline*

The lines refer to the presence of terraces, a generic form of adaptation of peasant agriculture to the constraints engendered by the slope, which has an important impact on the landscape. Their evocation is accompanied by social representations linked to the traditional agrarian system, to the harshness of the conditions of life implied by this mountain environment.

*Les vignes, elles courent dans la forêt  
Le vin ne sera plus tiré*

The evocation of abandoned vineyards constitutes another element of genericity. Testimony of a traditional activity, their abandonment is symptomatic of the agricultural disavowal consubstantial to the rural exodus. These various elements compose the poetic and social metaphor of the peasant society woven by Ferrat. It emphasizes with tenderness the traditional and antiquated aspect of this society:

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*Les vieux, ce n'était pas original,  
Quand ils s'essuyaient machinal,  
D'un revers de manche les lèvres,  
Mais ils savaient tous à propos,  
Tuer la caille et le perdreau,  
Et manger la tomme de chèvre*

The territorialization modalities, to which the geographical imaginary of the song leads, correspond at the same time to processes of differentiation and aggregation. The various generic elements, symbolized by the imaginary, logically lead to a process of territorial differentiation. This singularization is based on common values ("*Qu'important les jours les années, Ils avaient tous l'âme bien née*") and a form of socio-spatial organization perceived as singular. It should be noted that this process of distancing rests essentially on the opposition built with the city. Territorial aggregation, which pools different spaces within the same territory, is based first and foremost on the landscape coherence conveyed by various natural or artificial elements: relief, forest, terrace, grazing or "abandoned" vineyards. The title of the work, *La Montagne*, also illustrates perfectly the process of symbolic aggregation that the author operates. This aggregation is also based on a description of the peasant society, particularly its agrarian system, which emphasizes a similar functioning for the whole of this space. The description of the recomposition of local society, caused by the rural exodus, contributes greatly to the production of this process of generalization by amalgamating the similar negative dynamics that affect the Monts d'Ardèche. In particular, the author insists on the rupture of the relationship with the land, the meaning of which can easily be extended to "terroir" and "territory", suggesting a process of disintegration of territoriality and a form of identity dissolution of emigrants.

*Ils quittent un à un le pays,  
Pour s'en aller gagner leur vie,  
Loin de la terre où ils sont nés*

### **The territory of the Ardèche Mountains promoted by the Regional Natural Park**

The information on the homepage of the website of the PNR of the mounts of Ardeche is particularly interesting because it constitutes the

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"showcase" of the territory. In a promotional way, it strives to convey an attractive imaginary. The result of a collective approach, it contributes to legitimizing the territorial dimension of the Monts d'Ardèche area and, beyond that, the very existence of the PNR. In terms of genericity, the first valued elements are, unsurprisingly, linked to nature and the environment preserved: use of green color, photographs of fauna and flora, slogan "*Ici la biodiversité s'épanouit*". The awarding of the UNESCO Geopark label in 2014 contributes to conveying these same representations of a unique and preserved natural space. The other generic elements (chestnut groves, terraces, vernacular architecture) carry the idea of tradition and authenticity.

Unlike Jean Ferrat's song, which does not mention any toponym, the site of the PNR highlights in its section "unmissable sites" some emblematic places in the Ardèche mountains. Among these special places, we can mention the Mont Gerbier de Jonc, source of the Loire River, to which are attached multiple symbolic dimensions ("original", "generous", "fertile" character) in which the local society is recognized. The Bridge of the Devil in Thueyts is also interesting because as a symbol of the idea of a link, it can suggest the importance accorded to territorial solidarity. Moreover, the aesthetics and the technique used during its construction enhance here traditional knowledge. The "chestnut trees celebrations" embody strong temporalities that are to be compared with these elements of exceptionality within their environment: paroxysmal moments of community life in the village, they are an opportunity to value a specific product of the territory and testify the importance of the seasons which induces a relation to the peasant society's own time.

As in Jean Ferrat's song, the different natural and landscape elements, "similar" within the Monts d'Ardèche, contribute to perceive it as a territory, by aggregation and differentiation in relation to external spaces. In this logic of territorial singularization, local quality products (blueberries, chestnuts, honey, water, wine, beef Fin-Gras of Mézenc) also suggest the existence of the territory. Products of the specificity of the terroir and local knowledge, participate in promoting authentic quality agriculture: they are therefore the products of the territorial specificity of the Monts d'Ardèche. It is suggested to visitors that the gastronomic quality of these products stems from the quality of the environment: "*Ici les saveurs sont naturelles*". On the other hand, socio-spatial representations emphasize the conviviality of local society. The text emphasizes the values of a model of a society of belonging: "*Ici des liens se tissent*". The local markets help to convey this representation of conviviality and authenticity. This common understanding of social



organization and functioning builds territorial coherence based on shared values, the intensity of interrelations and societal solidarity. Distinguished spatial or social objects also participate in producing the territory. Thus, the Mont Gerbier de Jonc, the Mont Mézenc, the waterfalls, the emblematic buildings, are all symbolic materializations signifying the values shared by the social group: their spread constitutes for society so many catalysts of the socio-spatial specificity of the territory of the Monts d'Ardèche.

Through these two examples of the average mountain in the Ardèche region, it is clear that the spatial imaginary associated with spaces constitutes a powerful operator of territorialization. It contributes to the consciousness and appropriation of space by societies.

## **Socio-spatial representations and territorial dynamic: a reciprocal construction**

### **Inversion of urban / rural value: a theoretical framework that illuminates the case of Ardèche**

The purpose of this second part is to understand the dynamic link that exists between the evolution of the spatial imaginary and the dynamics and recompositions of the territories' objects of representations. The aim is to highlight the performative propensity of representations that partly determine territorial dynamics and, retroactively, to underline the impact of spatial recompositions on the production of representations. The diachronic comparative analysis of Jean Ferrat's song (1964) and the Monts d'Ardèche website (2016) are both of interest here.

The evolution of representations and the socio-spatial dynamics experienced by the Monts d'Ardèche are to a large extent similar to those that have characterized rural areas more generally (Hervieu and Viard, 1996). There is a reciprocal and concomitant play of construction between territorial recompositions and evolution of the geographical imaginary. The factors behind the recomposition of rural areas are important to emphasize, as they have, in part, contributed to overturning the image of rurality. Advances in mobility and the desire for ownership have led to a movement of urban loosening and periurbanization, supported by the possibility of accessing more space at a lower cost. In parallel with the modernization and marginalization of agriculture, the diversification of the uses of rural areas, in particular the development of residential and

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recreational functions has resulted in a recomposition of local societies (Cognard, 2010). Moreover, the deterritorialization of the "urban style life" was manifested by a form of convergence of urban and rural lifestyles. Thus, the growth of domestic comfort and the spread of mass consumption have contributed to the recomposition of rural spaces, to the emergence and spread of new imaginaries associated with the "urban" and "rural" spatial categories. Conversely, these new representations conveyed by rural areas, which reflect a reversal of values, have influenced their dynamics. The recomposition of the imaginary pertaining to each category thus appears simultaneously as a resultant and an operator of the territorial dynamics that these spaces are experiencing.

The reversal of values attributed to urban and rural spaces was gradually introduced in the 1970s in two ways. On the one hand, by "sliding" representations attributed to one spatial category towards the other. Thus, aesthetics and patrimonialization of nature have sanctioned the transfer of aesthetic representations (which is "beautiful"). The "pleasant" sociability, long associated with the urban life style as evidenced by the word "urbanity", has also migrated towards village sociability. Similarly, the spatial assignment of the imaginary linked to freedom has at least experienced a significant decartmentalization (Debarbieux and Rudaz, 2010; Fournier, 2014). On the other hand, the inversion of values is also reflected in the revalorization of "permanent" representations, that is to say, always peddled by the same spatial category. Thus, for example, "tradition" or "calm", still attached to rurality but now valued, testify to a new idealization of the past. Conversely, the "progress" and the "speed", attached to the urban, seem to experience a form of devalorization reflecting a certain crisis of modernity. Trends in the socio-spatial representations of rural areas have contributed to the upgrading of their amenities, particularly in terms of quality and living environment. They thus contribute to define the degree of attractiveness of spaces, in a differentiated way.

In this perspective, the comparative analysis of the song and the website illustrates the evolution of representations and the reversal of values relating to the imaginary of urban spaces and rural spaces. The evolution of representations attached to the Ardèche mountains seems to correspond in a paradigmatic way to the evolution of the imaginary conveyed by rural spaces. The socio-spatial representations associated with the Monts d'Ardèche testify to the inversion of values and the symbolic shift of the socio-spatial recompositions animating the territory. Three major evolutions can be observed.

## **From a harsh environment to a living space rich in amenities**

The Monts d'Ardèche were once perceived as a binding living environment, in order to take up the concepts of classical geography, a rough and difficult "way of life" for the traditional peasant society.

*Avec leurs mains par dessus leurs têtes*

[...]

*Deux chèvres et puis quelques moutons*

*Une année bonne et l'autre non*

*Et sans vacances et sans sorties*

From now on, their representations highlight the amenities of the living environment, first of all on a landscape level: the development of an imaginary associated with a preserved environment ("beautiful", "genuine", "abundant" and "generous") and the international recognition of the specificity of its relief (Geopark label). This inversion is also a consequence of the spreading, in the countryside, of the trend of mass consumption and domestic comfort. It has led to restoring a certain attractiveness to this space that was previously "repulsive", causing rural exodus as in Jean Ferrat's song. In a game of reciprocal construction and cyclic causality, this renewed attractiveness is reflected in the arrival of an allochthonous population which contributes to the development of representations, which in turn influences the attractiveness of the territory and thus contributes to territorial recompositions.

This "reversal" in the evolution of representations is especially evident in the ways of living attached to the space (the harshness of the old mountain life / recreational space today). It can be illustrated by the contrast between the text of Jean Ferrat's song ("*Et sans vacances et sans sorties*") and the Mont d'Ardèche slogan "*Vivre ici est une chance*". In *La Montagne*, it was the city that had the recreational offer:

*Depuis longtemps ils en rêvaient*

*De la ville et de ses secrets*

*Du formica et du ciné*

*Les filles veulent aller au bal*

*Il n'y a rien de plus normal*

*Que de vouloir vivre sa vie.*

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Post-modern representations now apprehend mountainous space as a "pleasant living environment" and a "playground". This evolution was co-built with the development of tourism and leisure activities in the region. They mark a break with the traditional imaginary of a constraining mountainous area. It is interesting to note in this connection that at the beginning of the 20th century the Alpine high mountain was associated, in particular for a fringe of the English aristocracy, with a "playground" through the sport of mountaineering. The recreational potential of the mountain area thus seems to have simultaneously been democratized and generalized to all mountains.

### **From the "archaic" peasant society to the community of belonging**

While Jean Ferrat sang about the traditional Ardèche peasant society with affection, his song nevertheless suggested an "archaic" and "conservative" dimension of the "vieux" evoked in *La Montagne*. The words of the song suggest a causal link between this static character and the departure of young people.

*Qu'important les jours les années  
Ils avaient tous l'âme bien née  
Noueuse comme un pied de vigne  
[...]  
Mais il faisait des centenaires  
A ne plus que savoir en faire*

These representations, which were negative at the time, contributed to the repulsive nature of the space and resulted in a massive emigration of young people to the cities, symbols of progress and modernity. In this respect, it is interesting to observe the distortion between the representations that Jean Ferrat lend to young people and his own almost anachronistic representations of a space which he fills with positive values, out of step with his contemporaries.

The imaginary attached to the contemporary local society, promoted by the website of the Park, presents a form of continuity with the past. But there has been a complete reevaluation of the values attached to them. The community model based on inter-knowledge and the sharing of values of local society is now strongly valued: "*Ici des liens se tissent*" claims the website. As a filigree, the opposition is constructed with the negative

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representations conveyed by an urban sociability that is now considered contractual and superficial, even dangerous. The relation to time illustrates this inversion of values: the immobility of traditional society, once devalued in favor of modernity and mobility, is to a certain extent revalorized by the reassuring side of this "permanence" in a context where progress is worrying. It enables local cultural identities that embody shelters in a globalized and homogenized context to be preserved. With anticipation, Jean Ferrat illustrated this inversion.

*Pourtant que la montagne est belle  
Comment peut-on s'imaginer  
En voyant un vol d'hirondelles  
Que l'automne vient d'arriver*

The lines express this indifference to the passing time. The rest of the text ("*Il faut savoir ce que l'on aime / Rentrer dans son HLM / Manger du poulet aux hormones* ") testifies to a certain mistrust of progress that finds a certain echo in today's society. It may be interesting to draw a parallel between the timeless character of the Monts d'Ardeche, which defines an "elsewhere" and the concept of heterotopia by Michel Foucault (1984), the concrete and social spatialization of utopia, which implies a form of breaking in real time. The evolution of the representations and territorial dynamics become clearer this time mutually: in a structural context of globalization, they tend to revalue the local identity and the territorial specificity of the Monts d'Ardèche, giving them a new attractiveness.

### **From the "outdated" to the patrimonialized**

A last notable reversal highlights the deep evolutions of the spatial imaginary associated with the Ardèche Mountains. To a large extent, it derives from the elements mentioned above. This concerns the revalorization of traditions and know-how which is consubstantially associated with the infatuation of heritage (Gravaris-Barbas and Guichard-Anguis, 2003). The extension of the notion of heritage (from the extraordinary to the vernacular, from material to intangible) has led to a patrimonialization of rural territories, "nourished" by the feeling of disappearance, a threat to the specificities. In the globalized context, these specificities are henceforth like identity refuges. In this respect, patrimonialization is an instrument for promoting specificities, a tool for protection and a vector for the production of identity (Gravaris-Barbas, 2003 and 2005; Landel, 2007). The example of the Monts d'Ardèche illustrates these dynamics. Once

their image was negative, outdated: "*Le vin ne sera plus tiré / C'était une horrible piquette*". It now has a heritage dimension.

This field is particularly mobilized by the Monts d'Ardèche website. Products resulting from the typicity of the terroir and peasant know-how, local gastronomy, folklore and traditional festivals, "picturesque villages", natural and landscaped heritage, all these elements that once referred to an obsolete image have now become patrimonial elements and territorial resources (Gumuchian and Pecqueur, 2007). Through them the local identity claims its historical and territorial anchorage. Territorial specificity is now being built on the basis of this material and this intangible, wanted authentic: "*Le Parc des Monts d'Ardèche est composé d'une mosaïque de paysages, sauvages ou façonnés en terrasses et fortement marqué par la culture de la châtaigne, des savoir-faire ancestraux, le volcanisme et un patrimoine architectural remarquable*". The rise of tourist activity, which is the driving force behind territorial development oriented towards face-to-face economy, draws heavily on these elements that carry positive representations of authenticity and strong local identity. They must lead to the singularization and the rise of the attractiveness of the territory in a context of inter-territorial competition. The geographical imaginary, combined with the heritage richness of the Monts d'Ardèche, is thus mobilized by the site as a territorial promotional tool. The existence of a brand "product of the park" illustrates this commoditization of the heritage and highlights the evolution of representations. The imaginary conveyed by the village markets is particularly interesting because it is transversal to the three themes: interfaces producer / consumer and nature / culture, they represent idealized moments of social life in which territorial identity and community conviviality are expressed through the valorization of a terroir and patrimonialized knowledge.

## Conclusion

Constructed subjective or collective, the geographic imaginary participates in the appropriation of space by an individual or a social group. It partly shapes the construction of the territory. Associated with spaces, charged with positive or negative values, representations confer on the different territories their attractiveness or repulsion. The socio-spatial representations are not fixed. The dynamics, subject to evolutions and even inversions, are social constructions that influence the evolution of spaces, and result reciprocally from the socio-spatial, organizational and

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functional recompositions that the territories experience. The case of the Monts d'Ardèche is a rich example.

The diachronic comparison between Jean Ferrat's song and the Monts d'Ardèche website illustrates the contribution of the geographical imaginary to the process of territorialization of space and the reciprocal co-construction between representations and dynamics that animate the territory. In this context, the Monts d'Ardèche territory proved in many aspects to correspond to an archetypal example of rural territory presenting a coherent territorial identity and having strong landscape amenity. The evolutions of the imaginary and the socio-spatial reorganizations of the territory simultaneously translate a new attractiveness that contrasts singularly with the repulsive character that Jean Ferrat described and regretted in 1964. The singer's representations were particularly original in that they demonstrate anticipation: against the current, Jean Ferrat idealized and already fantasized this mountain campaign, its tradition, its authenticity, its beauty. However, the author showed a certain empathy towards the young emigrants who left the "country": "if he explicitly regretted the rural exodus, the last verse expresses a "fatalistic" understanding ("*Il n'y a rien de plus normal / Que de vouloir vivre sa vie*"). He regretted, however, the disenchanting character of the urban lifestyle, and substituted for the freedom conveyed by the city a coercive vision of the urban:

*Leurs vies, ils seront flics ou fonctionnaires  
De quoi attendre sans s'en faire  
Que l'heure de la retraite sonne  
Il faut savoir ce que l'on aime  
Et rentrer dans son HLM  
Manger du poulet aux hormones.*

The site of the Monts d'Ardèche PNR carries a consensual imaginary, built and shared by the local actors. The website's analysis is an opportunity to insist on the performative character of spatial representations, on their political and operational use in territorial marketing objectives and in support of public action. They help to legitimate the very existence of the territory, to strengthen the cohesion of local society and to justify the existence of an institutional structure.

A comparison of the geographical imaginary carried by the two writings of rurality makes it possible to emphasize the systemic evolution of this type of space: in half a century we have gone from the end of

peasant society to the development of a model of a recreational society, which leans on the natural and cultural heritages; from a historical anchorage repulsive to an idealization of the past which, driven by the valorization of the heritage and the fantasized character of traditional sociability, to restore attractiveness to the territory and capitalize on a territorial identity perceived now as strong and rich; from a constraining environment that led to difficult peasant lives, to a life-style coveted by neo-rural people because of landscape amenity and quality of life.

Although the example of the Ardèche mountains illustrates the evolution of representations and the contemporary dynamics generalizable to a number of attractive rural spaces, it is nonetheless remarkable. Social metaphors constructed from spatial representations are based on the Ardèche case on social cohesion, solidarity in adversity, but also on the weight of the community.

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