From the peasant *bocage*[11] to the new "green territories": Political and cultural construction combining the environment, the landscape and the heritage

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Within the framework of research on green networks[2], we have studied the evolution of the forms and functions of the *bocage* systems in two peri-urban areas, close to two major French cities, Angers and Rennes. Our work has focused more specifically on pollarded trees – known as "*ragosses*" in the Rennais region and "*têtards*" in the Anjou region – which are one of the components of this system made up of plots of land within a network of ditches, embankments and hedgerows, themselves subdivided into several layers (tree - pollarded trees -, shrub and herbaceous). The Angevin site is a vast area of wetland meadows of the type found in the Loire valley, fashioned by the confluence of the 3 rivers that cross the area (Sarthe, Mayenne and Loir). Flooded several months per year, this area called in French Basses Vallées Angevines (Lower Angevine Valleys, BVA) is characterised by an exceptional biodiversity and singular landscapes. In the urban peripheries of Angers and Rennes, a landscape and environmental policy has led to the integration of ancient pollarded trees in the urban fabric. Protected at the beginning of the 1980's in accordance with an approach focused primarily on landscaping and urban planning, these trees are today closely associated with discussions on ecological continuity.

The *bocage* and the pollarded trees that characterise the latter are the product of an agricultural economy that is today obsolete. They have been fashioned throughout the ages by peasant societies who were mainly rearing cattle. A utilitarian tree if ever there were one, the trees fulfilled needs and had specific agricultural and rural uses: fodder, fire wood, timber used in boundaries, fencing and gates, animal shelters, etc. These functions, linked to the agricultural and rural economy, explain the way in which they were thus shaped and trimmed. The techniques and practices of pruning and maintenance have produced graphic, skeletal, distinctive forms that are still clearly identifiable today, especially during the winter months. Forms that tell a story that is economic, technical and social.

We shall show here how these inherited elements of the landscape ("*ragosses*" and "*têtards*") have been returned to the centre stage whereas the reasons for their creation have disappeared. In the process we shall explain how they have changed in substance and in the representations they generate under the combined effect of

1 Farmland criss-crossed by hedges and trees.

2 A research coordinated by J. Baudry within the framework of a research programme from the French ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development ("Landscape and Sustainable Development", 2006 - 2009).

public policies and social changes; namely, how they have found new functions and meaning through three filters that are perceived as theoretical and operational - at least for a certain number of players - environment, landscape and heritage.

1) From a diversity of players and modes of maintenance to the diversification of forms

a) Until the 1950's, arboreal figures indicative of a specific social organisation structured by tenant farming

Until the 1950's, pollarded trees, of such singular appearance, were at the heart of social relationships between owners and farmers, namely the tenants on their lands (Luginbühl Y., Toublanc M., 2003). In effect, the shaping, use and replanting of *bocage* trees were defined in the code of "Local Practices": these were legally enforceable collective requirements that were later incorporated into farm leases. These "local practices", known by all, governed the rights and obligations of each tree manager, in this case the owner and the farmer. Thus, the trunk was for the owner and the branches for the farmer who used them both for fuel and animal fodder. The farmer was required to pollard the trees regularly[3] using a suitable technique in accordance with the local practices in force: for example, he was not to cut off all the branches but to leave one, also called a "sap-drawer", which, as its name indicates, was intended to promote the tree's new growth. The farmer also had to ensure tree renewal by locating young, healthy shoots and watching over their development. In addition, he was not allowed to cut down a tree; only the owner had this right.

Apart from being the result of specific, collective regulations organising social and economic relations between those who held land and those who did not, these trees were also the result of a local sociability (Luginbühl Y., Toublanc M., 2003): in effect, the practice of pollarding, collective in part in the regions studied, relied on community and family or neighbourhood support networks where pollarding methods common to all were transmitted.

Part of a single agricultural rationale and shaped by universally acknowledged practices that served as standards, pollarded trees on a given territory always presented the same outline. Today, the situation is more complex.

b) Today management of pollarded trees that is less and less agriculturally driven, and increasingly varied forms[4]

3 The interval varied from region to region; in the regions studied the *ragosses* and the *têtards* were pollarded every 7 to 8 years.

4 Luginbühl, Y. & Toublanc, M., 2003 ; Frileux, P. & Javelle, A., 2007.

At the end of the 1970's, rural society changed. Desertion of the countryside gradually gave way to a process of demographic growth accompanied by social reshaping of rural areas (B. Kayser, 1990) and unprecedented urbanisation of the entire territory. The farming population regressed in favour of other social categories emerging from the towns: the urban working population (manual workers, clerical staff, executives), retired people, owners of second homes…. Encroached upon by urban sprawl, the linear wooded elements and pollarded trees we have studied were less and less part of an agricultural environment. Even when pollarded by farmers, the shared collective rules to which these trees referred have fallen into disuse in the wake of agricultural modernisation.

A one-to-one social exchange between a landlord and a farmer was thus succeeded by a great diversity of social exchanges that have impacted the residual *bocage* network. Social configurations have diversified to the point that the management of pollarded trees is henceforth in the hands of numerous agricultural and non-agricultural players with diverse, indeed differing, individual and collective rationales, motivation and practices. Social organisation modes are numerous. We shall mention a few examples here: the lone farmer, owner or tenant who trims his trees with the help of a non-farming neighbour (a worker living in the countryside, an owner of a second home,…) interested in using the wood or indeed the farmer who subcontracts to an agricultural works contractor; there are also local authorities or government bodies who entrust tree and hedgerow management to their technical departments or to associations (reintegration user, naturalist,...), who award contracts to private concerns (farmers or otherwise), together with technical specifications and financial remuneration from the State; similarly, it is not unusual for non-farming residents, living in residential areas, to have in their garden or bordering their plot of land a few pollarded trees, which they will prune in their own way.

Maintenance practices thus fall under diverse management methods ranging from no maintenance to radical exploitation, with a continuum of situations between the two corresponding to the varied techniques and practices. This results in a diversification of the form of the trees with the appearance of new arboreal outlines. The "sap-drawer", a direct descendant of peasant culture, has been adopted by certain town green spaces departments: however, it is no longer so much a question of optimising the tree's new growth as a question of preserving the town's green spaces. Other hybrid forms are the result of a crossover of techniques and expertise between professional cultures, peasant and "landscape[5]". Yet others reveal a loss of expertise (leaving stubs when trimming, for example). In private gardens, unusual forms are the result of personal reasons such as protecting a home from public view (fig. 1) or freeing up space for the garden (trimming of lower branches only).

5 "landscape" in the sense of the landscape gardener.

Figure 1. Ancient pollarded tree whose branches have been trimmed to half its height (Bouchemaine)

This diversification of motifs is apparent in the landscape; in order to observe this, one must simply follow the walking trails created by the public authorities. For example, the pollarded ashes lining the long-distance walking trail crossing the BVA are of very mixed appearance, depending on the sections. On certain stretches, the pollarded trees are no longer trimmed and have large diameter branches; on others, they are trimmed but less frequently. In both cases, the tree physiognomy has changed. It is no longer that of the "cat head" or "large head" tree, characteristic of the *têtard*; in addition, their alignment is no longer regular and the trees no longer have a uniform appearance and countenance. On this trail, designed and maintained for recreational purposes by the inter-urban council of the Loire Anjou region, the shaping of the trees is left to the initiative of the residents owners, be they farmers or no. Apart from the fact that the shaping of the trees no longer respects the collective regulations shared by the same category of players, the farmers, it also eludes the public authorities who is unable to implement a global management strategy for the entire trail. In this same area, moreover, the public authorities are confronted with the disappearance of these trees. At the beginning of the century, both in the BVA (2003) and in the Loire valley (2004), wood merchants bought numerous uncut pollarded ashes from their owners, and cut them down for the wood, a sort of burr wood much sought after in cabinetwork (luxury car industry). The hollow trunks were abandoned in situ. This use of ash trees is another, short-term, form of "management"; corresponding to an immediate economic payback, it is totally at odds with the practice of pollarding, which allows the wood to be used without harm to the trunk.

Peri-urban encroachment is engendering changes in form to these trees; they are being modified by the effect of changing techniques but above all by the effect of a diversification of practices, modes of management and competences. This change is magnified by the process of political and cultural reinterpretation.

2) Trees reinterpreted and transformed by public policies

From the 1950's onwards, in the name of modernisation and technical progress, the trees of the *bocage,* inherited from the peasant economy and the system to which they belong, were synonymous with archaism and for this reason devalued (Toublanc M., Luginbühl Y., 2007 a); many were to disappear (consolidation of lands, friendly exchanges between owners). Today, they are endowed with many qualities. Perceived as part of the heritage in the sense of common property offering different services to the community, they find themselves assigned new functions: environmental, cultural, economic and landscaping. We shall focus our comments here on the reinterpretation of the *bocage* trees in terms of the environment and the landscape.

Social recognition of the trees of the *bocage* is due to associations and political representatives conducting actions aimed at protecting and managing these "green networks" on different scales, ranging from the territory of an agglomeration to that of an urban or agricultural plot of land. In the sites studied, these public actions vary according to modalities, objectives and contents as a function of the scales and characteristics of the territory: "sustainable" urban development, the agri-environmental management of a wetland, the landscape development of a housing estate. The "traditional" peasant hedgerow is evoked locally, namely by local authorities, within the framework of urban planning projects or development policies, the aims of which are far removed from the reconstruction of a *bocage* landscape, in the geographical sense of the term, and completely separate from the activity of agricultural production.

a) Landscape motifs: from tree to network

In the peri-urban areas studied, it is not unusual for ancient arboreal figures of the *bocage* to have lasted until present day. As early as 1956 in the agglomeration of Rennes, the architect and urban planner G. Bardet drew on the *bocage* network in his design of the garden-city of Rheu. The preservation of the oaks was at that time part of a process for constructing the town in continuity with the past. Even today, rows of oaks trace the route of the pedestrian pathways and are present in the boundaries of private or public gardens. From the 1980's onwards, the approach was wholly adopted at agglomeration level within the framework of the environmental and landscape policy of Rennes. The ancient pollarded oaks were preserved in order to improve the "quality of the living environment" in accordance with an approach that was initially mainly town and landscape related (fig. 2). Embankments were levelled, brambles and local bushes (*Ulex europaeus,* for example) uprooted. The ancient sunken lanes were banked up and the ground cleaned, rid of weeds and

sometimes even tarmacked. The *bocage* system (embankment, ditch, various plant layers) and the network of hedgerows thus demolished; isolated trees, devoid of any environmental function, were all that remained of the agricultural *bocag*e.

Figure 2. A component of the urban network, the pollarded tree may fall under the auspices of the local authorities: for example, "converted" ancient pollarded trees in an urban park (Le Rheu, Rennes Métropole)

From the 1990's onwards, the Rennais elected representatives adopted an ecological approach. A safe habitat for flora and fauna, water sanitation, walking and the landscape were the arguments put forward by the metropolis's urban-planning agency for protecting the ancient hedgerows. Leaving the dead leaves on the ground, keeping borders uncut, etc. became the new watchwords of the day. Raised awareness among elected representatives and technicians now enables conservation of the hedgerow to be considered as an ecological whole. With the framework law on spatial planning and sustainable development (1999) and the law on urban solidarity and renewal (2000), the notion of biological continuity is now inscribed in urban planning documents. In the new districts, urban planners and landscape gardeners now incorporate the ancient hedgerows with their associated indigenous flora. Housing developments are back to back with the ancient *bocage* network, which reinforces ecological continuity within the town. The concepts of "urban *bocage*" or "a *bocage* bedroom" (J. Osty's work in Beauregard, for example), truly ecological and landscaped adaptations of the agricultural *bocage*, fashion the new green territories in peri-urban areas.

b) Environmental values

From 1993 to present day, the BVA, a vast wetland of 5 000 ha situated close to the city, has been the scene of an agri-environmental management policy. The French league for the protection of birds (LPO) has acted as a spur in the launch and implementation of this public initiative aimed at maintaining low intensity animal farming in order to protect the rich biological diversity (especially the avifauna of the wet grasslands) and its associated landscapes. This policy has resulted in negotiation of contracts with farmers on 60% of the eligible territory[6]; for a long time it was to focus on the maintenance and preservation of the mowing meadows and did not, strictly speaking, incorporate the management of the pollarded trees associated with the latter. It was only with the launch of the sustainable farming contracts in 2004 that this question became a clearly identified objective. In 2007, this purpose was to be reaffirmed with the launch of the Natura 2000[7] management contracts. Among other things, these were to concern "the regeneration and maintenance of pollarded trees", considered as a natural habitat, and recognised for their ecological value; they were to initiate contract negotiation with non-farming owners (inhabitants, associations, municipalities)[8].

Pollarded trees, whether *ragosses* or *têtards*, were endowed, principally by naturalist and nature conservation associations, with a high natural value (habitats and ecological corridors). Transformed into symbols of biodiversity, they occupy an important place in the movement for the construction of sustainable agglomerations and neighbourhoods.

The question of trees in cities is preoccupying managers confronted with the challenges of sustainable development. This is shown in Rennes by the organisation of open days for the city's technicians in order to debate questions such as the identification of "green networks of high ecological value", the incorporation of "ancient hedge trees into urban development planning", or "sustainable maintenance" of trees in cities. Managers are particularly concerned about managing the ancient pollarded trees. Those that have been preserved and incorporated into the city have very often been weakened (ground subsidence during building work, damaged root collar, etc.). Such trees then become a prime target for the great capricorn beetle, a species protected in France. Although they have not been pollarded for over ten to fifteen years for the most part (areas urbanised in the

6 Which shows a real local appropriation of the contractual system.

7 In 1999, this territory is classed as a Special Protection Area (European directive on birds 1979) for the rich biological diversity of its avifauna, then Zone Natura 2000, in 2002.

8 Within the framework of the Natura 2000 contracts signed with the State, the financial aid given each year to *têtard* owners for their maintenance is 9.15 € per tree and 0.24 € per linear metre for two lateral trims in 5 years.

1990's), the question of maintenance of these trees is now being tabled. Should the tradition of pollarding as in former days be maintained? In this case, if the last trim was a long time ago, pollarding large diameter branches can prove fatal to the tree. Conversely, should they be converted into high forest trees? The reply of the elected representatives and the managers of green spaces is restricted by the cost of maintenance (150 euros per tree pollarded) and the contradictory demands of the residents: some complain of the shade and the leaves in the gutters, while others criticise overly radical trimming, contrary to their values regarding the landscape and recreational activities.

A comparative analysis of the two Rennais and Angevin areas has shown that the stakeholders for the installation of the "new green territories" act on these elements principally in the name of their ecological and/or landscape functions; which legitimates their actions. But what is the "efficiency", in terms of ecology and landscape, of the actions carried out? Ecological requirements often conflict with management of green spaces, still very much horticultural in essence (impermeable soil, regularly mown lawns, bare soil, pesticides, fungicides, etc.). As for the question of renewing these ancient trees of the fields, now so cherished by city dwellers, it is rarely contemplated. In the BVA, the policy in place is contractual, and thus uncertain as it is on a voluntary basis. Although the local appropriation of the system is very real (60% of eligible grasslands are governed by a contract), as the territory is not completely "under contract", there is no spatial continuity and therefore no ecological coherence. Monitoring of these actions remains, moreover, a long way down on the identified objectives, in particular concerning the manner in which the trees are to be shaped and maintained.

The functions attributed to the components of the landscape result from a social and cultural construct that raises the question of the meaning and values associated with these elements (the *têtard* tree, the *talus*, the *ragosse*…) whether they be ecological, economic, agronomic, etc. We could have performed cross-analysis of these different values but we decided to concentrate here on the landscape value.

3) New values and meanings engendering conflicting representations

The aesthetic and cultural value of pollarded trees is at the centre of much controversy. The *têtard* tree as landscape motif appears to be more widely recognised (in spite of much debate).

a) Forms that shock the public's senses

Pollarded trees are criticised for their radical pruning, perceived as mutilation: "mutilated trees", "sorts of stumps", "dead, sad, morbid trees", "trees screaming their pain", "it's ugly and it looks unnatural" ... These negative opinions correspond to an anthropomorphic vision of the tree; it is perceived as a thinking being, capable of feeling pain, in the manner of humans. An anthropomorphic vision or symbol that

was to develop in the 18th and 19th centuries[9] with the romantic movement (Toublanc M., Luginbühl Y., 2007 b) and was reinforced in the 20th century by the ecological movement which stressed the negative effects of man on his environment (Luginbühl and Toublanc 2003: 60-62). This critical stance tends to be that of players who are geographically or socially removed from farmers whose way of pollarding they find incomprehensible: "it's a real chainsaw massacre". Criticism proves to be more virulent regarding the *ragosse*, devoid of meaning for most city dwellers. For residents on housing estates (urbans for the most part) tree pollarding is often perceived as an act against nature and the landscape: "I don't understand how they can pollard on a housing estate. If oaks are left, it's for their ecological and landscape value", "They would do better to cut down the trees and replant new ones. That will never look like a tree, it will always look like a trunk", "a *ragosse* is suited to a pastoral scene, on a riverbank, bordering a field, there it's fine!"

Thus many conflicts have emerged concerning the pollarding of oaks between defenders of letting trees grow freely (limited trimming) and partisans of the preservation of pollarding for the cultural, landscape and ecological value of the *ragosse*. In the Saint-Gilles agglomeration of Rennes, the inhabitants have stepped in between tree and machine. A resident lay down under the tractor's fork to prevent pollarding: "Trees relax us, shelter us, give shade, filter the light and decorate the landscape. So let them live in peace!", she defended herself in *L'Écho des ragosses* (2003), the bulletin of a local environmentalist association that has tried in vain to mediate between managers and users. A petition for permanently stopping work has been circulated on the housing estate. The aesthetics of the tree and its health are the two arguments put forward by detractors of the *ragosse*. Experts refute this last point: "If the proper pollarding frequency is respected and branches removed correctly (leaving no stumps), trees subjected to this practice are just as long-lived as freely grown forms" explains the ecologist M. Rumelhart. In the face of residents who are resolutely opposed to the *ragosse*, some municipalities have opted for a compromise that seems to work well: pollarding of just one or two oaks at a time, in order not to "lay waste to the landscape".

b) An aesthetic and heritage perspective

Although predominant, this negative viewpoint is not universally held. Some actors view these arboreal outlines from an artistic perspective and value them for their qualities of form. According to the conservation officer of the Pays de Rennes eco-museum, creator of an exhibition on "Trees, hedgerows and man. History and ethnology of the *bocage* of the Pays de Rennes," (2006), museographic events have served as a "stepping stone towards a new debate on the *bocage*, from the standpoint of its inclusion as part of the heritage" (personal communication, Bardel 2007). Artists are rediscovering the pollarded tree and including it in their artistic creation.

9 In the 18th and 19th centuries, a romantic vision of the tree was to develop: writers and aesthetes sought to justify the untrimmed tree, free to lift its branches skyward. This extremely powerful aesthetic movement was to shape the view of the French elite. It is still active today and informs (in the sense of giving a form, a structure, a meaning) the view on pollarded trees of a great number of players.

An artist from the Rennais Basin marvelled at these *ragosses*, which he compared to "a magnificent sculpture lesson". In itself, this fact is nothing new; indeed these trees have often been depicted by painters (Bardel et al. 2008 ; Dumont et al., 2007). What has changed is that previously they were remarked by artists for their form and picturesque nature, whereas today they are remarked for their cultural value. Contemporary artists are seeking to restore pollarded trees to favour and to preserve their memory. They are elevating them to a collective heritage to be conserved and handed down to future generations. Their artistic discipline is often situated at the interface of art, landscape and activism, in associations or in other forms. In a commune situated on the periphery of Angers, the mayor has commissioned a sculpture from a local artist. The objective was to embellish a public space that had been landscaped, and that aimed to link the town centre to the newly built housing estates. Following in the wake of the Jardin des Trognes, a garden of ancient pollarded trees, created by D. Mansion in Chaumont/Loire, the sculpture consisted of a presentation of ancient pollarded trees whose endorsement by the elected representatives and the planners is proof of common interest in these ancient pollarded trees.

c) Collective symbols

The *ragosses*, like the *têtards* are today symbolic figures and expressions of identity for social groups, some formal and others less so. In Anjou, in the BVA, the " pollarded trees of the *chemin du roi*" association, in Rennes, the Saint-Gilles Nature and Environment association carry out teaching activities (raising awareness, information, nature education, etc.) for all audiences, on *têtards* for the former and *ragosses* for the latter. Both these associations have chosen the pollarded tree as a central theme of action and as a symbol.

In the Angevin area, the *têtard* is part of a movement by associations and political and institutional bodies for building awareness of and promoting local heritage (plant heritage but also and primarily cultural heritage and that of the landscape). Its vegetal outline, which is dotted throughout the valleys of the Loire and its tributaries, is considered by many as a characteristic feature of these alluvial territories; after the corn crake, it has become a symbol of the BVA territory, a feature of the landscape and of local identity. What is more, the inter-urban council of Angers-Loire-Métropole has chosen a drawing of a têtard tree as its logo for the creation of the *Sentier de Grande Randonnée de Pays*, a regional walking trail, in the Basses Vallées Angevines. This is proof that when the *têtard* is present in an area it acquires a strong symbolic value of local identity, which is also felt by the elected representatives. It may be said that it has become a key element in the landscaping of the rural environment, even if its form (especially immediately after pollarding) is criticised by certain people. Present in many books for children (school manuals or literature for children: Toublanc M., Carcaud N., 2008) and in many works of art (paintings, drawing, engravings…: Adam M., 2007), the pollarded tree seems to be an archetypal tree shape. This artistic representation may have opened the way for its inclusion as part of the heritage, as opposed to the *ragosse,* the social and political appropriation of which, both symbolic and concrete,

is less marked. Mobilisation on behalf of the *ragosse* as part of our heritage is confined to a small gathering of intellectuals (scientists, artists, and eco-museum curators). The conservation process is more about the tree in itself than about the form or aesthetic value of a pollarded tree.

Conclusion

The pollarded tree was part of a peasant rationale, it was a form that resulted from the practice of hedge trimming, in itself a part of the agricultural economy. Today this system has disappeared and the pollarded tree falls under landscape, environmental and territorial considerations: it is valued as a habitat for biodiversity, as an element of the landscape and as a part of the cultural heritage. It becomes an end in itself in a given social sphere, dominated by associations and political representatives, and by urban planners. However, we may raise the question of the impact of attributing such a value upon it. A social impact first of all: Who can relate to this element? For whom does it have meaning? Next comes the ecological impact: What is its function, namely in terms of biodiversity? And lastly, a territorial impact: What role does pollarding play in the organisation of urban peripheries?

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