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Ariège's Development Conundrum

by

Alan Thomas Devenish

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Science  
in  
Geography

Thesis Committee:  
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## Abstract

Since the latter half of the nineteenth century, industrialization and modernization have strongly shaped the development of the French department Ariège. Over the last roughly 150 years, Ariège has seen its population decline from a quarter million to 150,00. Its traditional agrarian economy has been remade for competition on global markets, and the department has relied on tourism to bring in revenue where other traditional industries have failed to do so.

In this thesis I identify the European Union and French policies that continue to guide Ariège's development through subsidies and regulation. I explain the origins and effects of modernization on rural areas such as Ariège, and the ways in which market pressures and new technologies have reshaped the landscape, and advance an argument for why Ariège's story is relevant across rural Europe and communities globally that exist at the margins.



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## 1 INTRODUCTION: ARIÈGE

In the late summer and autumn of 2011, I spent roughly four months in the French department of Ariège (Figure 1) conducting the research that formed the basis for this thesis. French departments are somewhat like states, in the sense that it isn't right to think that Los Angeles and San Diego agree on everything, simply because they're both in California. So, if you've been to Mirepoix (I haven't had the pleasure), and find my conclusions about "Ariège" off base, I apologize in advance.

One of my goals with this project was to present a portrait of a region. The life and livelihoods between town and country in the portion of France where I lived sit across a great divide. In order to have something meaningful to say about both sides, I lived on a farm a few miles outside of Foix for the first half of my stay, and in the town proper for the second half.

In the course of my research, I visited several neighboring towns. My thesis is concentrated on the relatively urbanized belt that follows the river north-south through Ariège—with the exception of St. Girons and St. Lizier, which are located in the western portion of the department. Pamiers is the largest town in the department, and sits in flatlands to the north. Foix, the prefecture, is centrally located, and to the south is Ax-les-Thermes, around the bend from the Pyrenees.

The region that I present is therefore neither politically nor geographically strictly defined. Its boundaries are instead those that I felt encompassed the story I wanted to tell about a region's changes over 150 years. That story ends in the present, but so much of what is happening now is rooted in the past.

Many parts of this story will strike the reader as familiar, but in its particulars it is unique to Ariège. The rise and fall of spa tourism in Ax-les-Thermes will resonate with those who have sped past an abandoned Interstate tourist trap, and many people will see something of their hometown in the spread of sprawl in Pamiers. St. Giron and St. Lizier, with their outsourced paper mill, could be anywhere between North Carolina and the Pacific Northwest.

Foix, with art-house cinema within sight of a castle, is where the ready comparisons break down, and indeed, none of the North American equivalencies I drew above would stand up to sustained scrutiny. And it is precisely this difference that made me want to write a profile of the region. What I found is a cluster of towns where trends in tourism swing traffic from one town to another, and whose other industries falter badly. This has brought significant change over the last century. Traditional farming methods are fading, and idle lands are selling for cheap.

As some parts of the region are pulled toward new, high-tech industries, the more remote towns face evaporation under the heat of urbanization, their residents pushed closer to industrial centers and larger transportation arteries. As I said before, some of this should sound familiar. Policy makers at the French and E.U. levels are working to solve similar problems across their domains.

The various towns I discuss have played different roles in the region's adaptation to outside changes. Different towns have taken the lead in different eras, and how best to understand those roles is as variable as the circumstances that placed them in the spotlight. Economic history, anthropology, and geography all have something to say about this region, and they are applied throughout this thesis as necessary.

What I will show is how the fickle tastes of tourism have moved from Ax-les-Thermes and its once great spa resorts, to Foix and the countryside. Equally important is understanding why, in the intervening century, other industries have declined. St. Girons and St. Lizier are pastoral towns on the verge of taking on the more negative aspects of hinterland, while Pamiers seems to pursue a separate—urbanizing—course from the rest of the department.

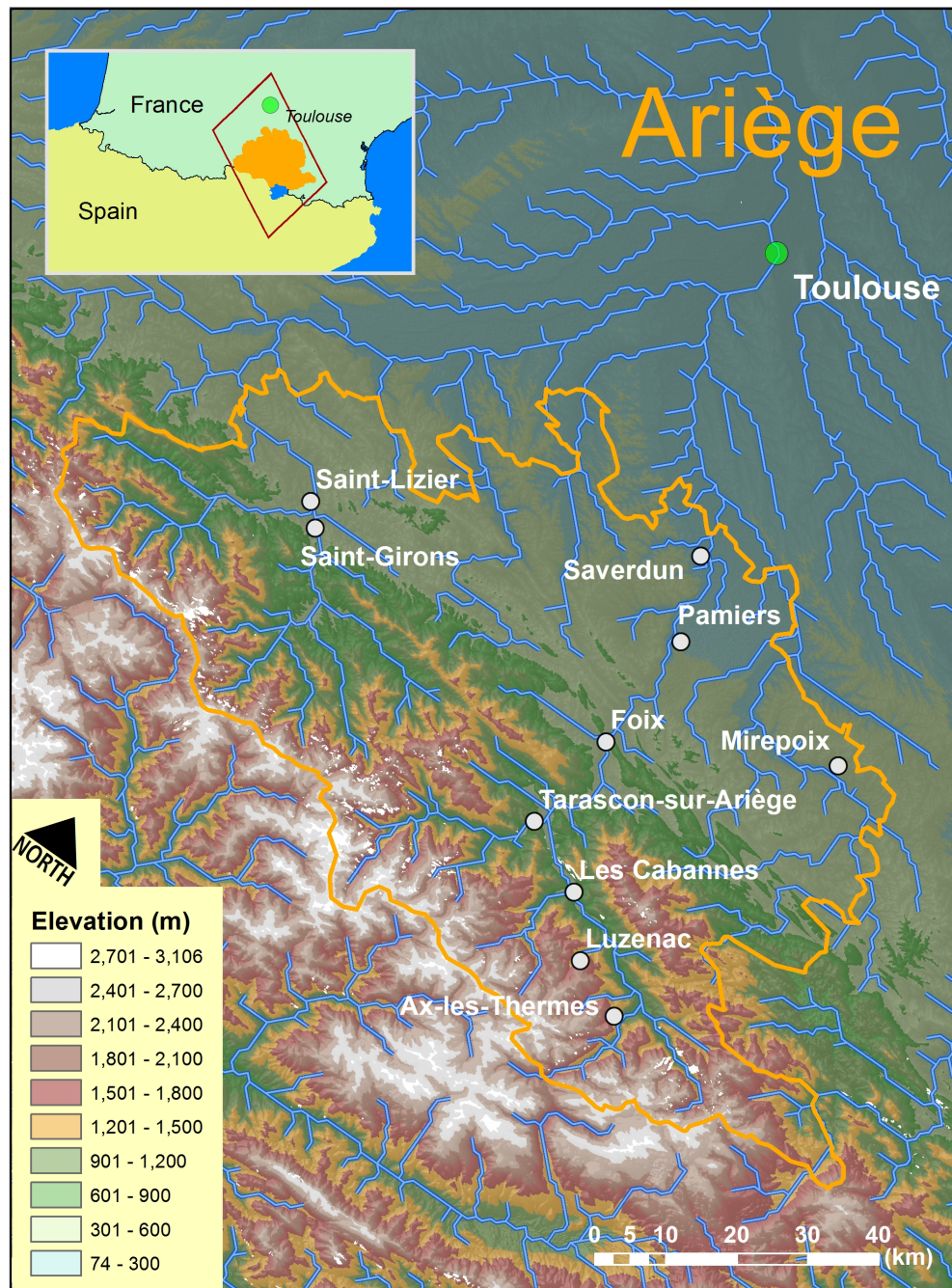
These are not purely abstract matters, but instead the foundation for decision making, both by individuals pursuing careers and starting families, and for institutions that serve those individuals. The familiarity of the dilemmas these small towns face should tell us there is something of value in understanding the literal and figurative landscape that envelops the region I write about.

The underdeveloped Ariège department offers opportunities to observe in increments the landscape changes, infrastructure growth, and demographic shifts that have come with twentieth-century modernization. Tracing the region's transition from spa resort to agro-tourist center connects historiographies focused on specific eras and industries to both social critiques and economic analyses that take up today's problems. Placing the two approaches on a common timeline expands the context of current policy critiques, while studies of the past are given new relevance.

The conundrum facing Ariège is that whether it chooses to pursue development of new industries, aligning itself with Toulouse's current bid for a high-tech economy, or whether it chooses to preserve its landscape, outside influences will have a strong role in setting the agenda, and there is no guarantee that local residents will benefit. As is explained below, the growing high-tech industries in Toulouse have limited compatibility

with the labor force in rural parts of the region. Because the problems of Ariège are in many ways the problems of rural France, as well as mountainous Europe and the “European south,” it is important to understand how the region’s livelihoods and way of life have adapted to modernization.

Before examining how this state of affairs came to be, I would first like to briefly describe the towns I visited.



*Figure 1: Ariège terrain and overview*



*Ax-les-Thermes*

The town of Ax-les-Thermes (Figures 2 and 3) is the farthest southern town of significant size within the department. On an autumn Monday (a traditionally slow day in France), the trains to and from Ax-les-Thermes are nearly empty. The long stretch of road from the station to the town is bordered by grand, deserted hotels, and cafes where locals sit on patios, taking in the sun. A hotel recommended by the previous year's guidebook—the Hotel Moderne—has recently closed and inside it is freshly dusty. The tourist office is hidden, a greasy windowed, nondescript building fully staffed with friendly employees hard-pressed to find something for visitors to do in October.

There is not yet snow, and hotel prices have sunk into the low season trough between summer campers and fishers and the crowds that come for skiing. Year-round attractions are few. A large fire from a century ago unfortunately pushed the bulk of the town's construction into the modern era, and so heritage tourism is limited to a thin walking tour (a highlight is a barely visible third-floor medieval window frame overlooking a parking lot) and the remnants of the thermal bath tourism industry.

There are occasional flashes of the town as it was in the days before the fire. A collapsed corner building in an alley has a sign explaining that the butcher's shop used to occupy the space, taking advantage of the shade of other buildings to cool its interior and lengthen the shelf life of its meat. The town's housing core was rebuilt using much of the original plats, circulating pedestrians up steep stone staircases and under arches. Most of the businesses are in the ends of small lanes that meet in a plaza holding a thermal footbath that steams and smells of sulfur. Ski shops blaring techno music are pressed against bakeries and news stands.

Across the main drag from the rebuilt old town is a large entertainment complex, or casino, that is the center of nightlife. There are films and other events. A one-woman show appearing two weeks hence is heavily advertised. Being the largest town for some distance in every direction, Ax-les-Thermes is a valuable stopping point on the Grande Randonnée, offering access to several branches of this nationwide network of trails.

Like many Ariège towns, three rivers meet here, and a walking path with parks runs along stretches of them. It is an appealing place to enjoy some quiet, and has its share of retirees, but temporary visitors not taking the waters or hitting the slopes will quickly get itchy feet. Around two o'clock, after the bakery rush, the small square separating the old town from the row of thermal bath hotels and spas empties, shutters close, and it grows quiet.



*Figure 2: Ax-les-Thermes ski facilities*



*Figure 3: Outskirts of Ax-les-Thermes*

*St. Girons and St. Lizier*

The towns of St. Girons and St. Lizier are at the far western reach of the department. In May 2012, Ariègenews.com<sup>1</sup> reported that hundreds of protestors were in the streets of St. Girons, responding to signals from the corporation that owns the remnants of the town's paper industry that it was considering abandoning local operations. St. Girons is a subprefecture of fewer than 8,000 people located in the west of Ariège. It is in a designated Natural Park area, as is most of western Ariège. On a clear fall day, the town allows striking vistas of the snowy Pyrenees, which appear abruptly after miles of rolling green hills. Outside of town the land is divided into large estates where orange leafed autumn trees merge gracefully into pastureland. Along the river, iron mechanisms built for drainage but no longer in use have been incorporated into park paths (Figure 4). In a delicious argument for regional diversity, the town's leading bakery serves a unique quiche with scallops that have melted into creamy pools of oven-based innovation. A chest-height chocolate bear beckons from a sweets shop, a reminder of a time when real bears were found in the surrounding forests<sup>2</sup>.

The only bookstore features an extensive English-language section and the tourism office is engaged in a full-court press, issuing on one visit a five-page customer satisfaction survey. The pastureland visible from everywhere but the core of town is often not profitable enough to sustain the livelihoods of the people that let livestock loose to graze it. Gîtes are the ubiquitously advertised form of lodging in Ariège. A term stretched well beyond its breaking point by marketers eager to spin straw into gold, the word connotes an ideal of rustic habitation, on the edge of agriculture or isolation, infused with a quite malleable strain of authenticity.





*Figure 4: St. Girons drainage*

The gîtes available in St. Girons and its small surrounding communes are rented at boutique rates, often paired with thermal spa therapies or organic farming courses. A high-end grocery store reflects the town's upscale ambitions, the produce combining co-op quality with a chain store's commitment to scrubbed presentation and range of choice. A bag of mushrooms is comparable in cost to a week's worth of produce at a farmers market. The town as a whole is pitched to a different market than the towns along the Ariège River, and the jump of a euro or more in the cost of goods is immediately noticeable.

Ariège the department is a fusion of two counties. In that earlier administrative scheme, St. Girons was a central seat of power, just as Foix was. St. Girons has historically wielded influence on the basis of its importance as an ecclesiastical center of

authority. The town is at a remove from the main current of traffic throughout the department. There is no rail service, making the only public transport option an infrequently run bus line from Pamiers or Foix. The bus makes numerous stops at communes of a couple hundred people, and is not a viable commute option.

St. Girons is inevitably paired with nearby St. Lizier, a town to the north also very closely linked to its religious institutions. Between St. Girons and St. Lizier is a highway full of blind turns and narrow shoulders certain to excite the religious fervor of those traveling on foot. The road between the towns contains a massive supermarket with attached gas station. Across the street from the gas station, cows graze in an unfenced field, the mountains visible behind them. On the southern end of St. Lizier is an agrotourist farmhouse that lures visitors with friendly goats and a topiary walk.

In St. Lizier a large Catholic campus holds old cloisters and cathedrals, and the surrounding area reveals this influence. The town is beautifully maintained and heavily planted with flowery vines and wide trees. There are unpopulated walking trails leading to a cross on a hill, or to even more secluded church-owned buildings. The town's only parking lot feels like a city park. The cathedral complex is in various stages of renovation and modernization, but its architectural integration into the landscape has not diminished (Figure 5). The peaks of the roof and the placement of the towers line up in thoughtful ways with the mountain range behind. The covered walks frame the mountains with arches and pillars.

The quiet, contemplative alleys of St. Lizier are at a remove from St. Girons, where tree-pruning crews noisily remove branches and bulldozers take advantage of the low season to tear up entire plazas to support development. Despite this busyness, St.

Girons's remoteness has nonetheless made it a location accessible mainly by car. The cost of renting a car is, per week, about the same as lodging throughout Ariège, making the town effectively twice as expensive to visit as other towns.



*Figure 5: St. Lizier cathedral*

*Pamiers*

The department's most populous city, Pamiers is located in the northern flatland of Ariège. The river is atypically not incorporated into the city's layout. The city has the dusty feeling of many Spanish towns, and is often ten degrees warmer than the foothill towns to the south. The old town remains a popular shopping district, offering goods that are difficult to locate elsewhere in Ariège, such as fabric, chili sauce, or Halloween costumes.

The main shopping streets, one of which is cut off to traffic for a few hours each day, are decorated with lines strung across the road, dangling triangular pendants bearing the Ariège colors. On one such street, a few blocks apart, were once a well-stocked



*Figure 6: Pamiers commercial district*



Occitan-language bookstore and a housing co-op (Figure 6), until the bookstore moved to a less prime location and the co-op stalled, the building sitting empty. These two small institutions, in their own way working against the grain, are the most recent casualties in a town that is everywhere surrendering its “character” in service of commerce and industry.

Most of the city has been constructed with automobile travel in mind. Walking anywhere outside of the urban core recalls the frustrating, dwarfing experience of pedestrian journeys in suburban America. Adding to the feeling of dustiness is the extensive construction and renovation that is taking place in the city's outer ring (Figure 7). In the autumn of 2011, entire city blocks were deserted, the pavement torn up. Nevertheless, vacation rentals in the form of both town apartments and country homes are heavily advertised.

Hints of the city's history are present but often uncelebrated. Decorative horse heads carved from wood in a previous century have survived, unremarked, on a balcony in an alley. A curving lane offering access to a cathedral atop a hill is called *Chemin de Chevre*—“Path of the Goat”—although nothing else in Pamiers suggests anything at all pastoral.

There is a large square on the western side of town that hosts a Saturday produce market in the morning, then gives way to groups of teenagers who pass the time on its planter boxes, and new parents aimlessly pushing strollers. The fields of the outlying towns around Pamiers are practicing agriculture on a larger scale than is found elsewhere along the Ariège River. Center pivot irrigation has made it possible to productively till the dry but flat land in the department's north.

For small crop farmers, produce markets such as the one hosted in Pamiers are essential sales outlets. The major towns in Ariège tend to stagger their market days to allow farmers to reach more than one large market each week (Foix hosts on Friday). Despite the influence of large supermarket retailers, such as the Casino company, demand for market produce appears strong, with most sellers loading only empty crates at the end of the day.

After a few minutes' walk west, past the market square, the cityscape becomes industrial. Factories, warehouses, and ironworks hug the river, reflecting local industry's origins in the Canal du Midi. Raw ore was brought down the hills of the Ariège valley and refined in Pamiers before moving farther north. The region never enjoyed a reputation for favorable refining conditions, or efficient mining practices. The outside imposition of modern refining infrastructure and expertise improved productivity in the twentieth century, but that productivity did not translate to long-term economic viability.



*Figure 7: Construction in Pamiers*

*Foix*

The town of Foix is relatively central within the department. The overnight train from Paris to Foix arrives early enough so that even in the long days of summer the traveler will alight with only dim impressions. Along the Ariège River are beautifully constructed row houses, nearly abandoned but only a coat of paint away from giving picturesque Bayonne a run for the money. The paint is not forthcoming and during the day even the For Sale signs look run down. The railroad tracks continue south along the river, and are abutted by vegetable gardens and small fruit trees that are tended by residents conditioned to ignore the frequent roar of the train.

Across the river to the west is the old town (Figure 8), winding streets bordered by medieval cross-timber buildings that open onto small squares or parks.



*Figure 8: Eastern edge of Foix's historic core*

The not-quite grid frequently dead-ends upon itself, forcing backtracking, and in the dark the street layout funnels walkers away from an abrupt hill, home to the motley grouping of castle towers dominating a mound of rock at Foix's center (Figure 9).



*Figure 9: Castle in center of Foix*

A tree-lined arcade runs east to west, hemming in the old town and softening the transition to bank branches, government offices, and military garrisons. The roads south from this pedestrian parkway, which doubles as market space and fairground, funnel south into a highway. Parallel tributaries lead past a high school, a municipal billiard hall and ping-pong club, a community center with a nationally sponsored film program, and a sports arena.

Dotting the hills are vacant stone buildings. Abandoned terraces are cut into hills throughout the valleys, sprouting the same foliage as on the hill slopes, where alternating

swathes of trees have been harvested. Some electric cables are slung in avenues mowed through the forest, and some are moored defiantly in limestone ridges.

The road west follows a river past a small overlook park, a defunct Clear Channel billboard, and an abandoned building of industry on the riverbank slowly being pulled away by the current. The road climbs between crumbling apartment buildings on one side and a new, all timber house with a 1400m<sup>2</sup> lot for sale on the other. At the top of the hill the street branches off into farm roads and highways on a plateau in the valley. Pears, apples, figs, and hazelnuts hang over fences and fresh horse droppings appear without apology on the sidewalk until the sidewalk ends amidst cornfields and Gascony cows.

Two-story homes on large lots boast freshly painted shutters. Some have yards containing crisply weeded landscaping; others are work lots, with sawhorses and hand-cranked cement mixers. Still others have hidden horses that tromp up from small stream valleys, and a slaughterhouse and public pool signal the final end of town. Nearby, a clump of large pumpkins grows beside the dangling flowers decorating a barn converted to a garage, and feed corn stalks stand in a field behind a strip of crop-stubble ash, which on some days is still smoldering, under the attention of a sedan-driving farmer.

Along this western road, the castle has not been visible for some time, but near the Commune de Cos, a private dirt road connects the D617 and D117 highways, which both head west. As the dirt road rises, the castle is suddenly clear and visible in the morning, but in the afternoon it can almost be mistaken for another of the natural rock outcroppings that pepper the green valley. The proprietors of la Ferme du Cassou (Figure 10), a farm that raises chicken, ducks, rabbits, pigs, bees, cows, and a variety of produce,



maintain the private road. The farm's income is supplemented not only by a guesthouse, but also through by-reservation prepared meals and the sale of jam.



*Figure 10: Farm to west of Foix*

ATVs are parked alongside cars throughout the downtown, and it is rare not to spot a hay truck or butcher's van in the stream of daily traffic. The town and country connection is a complete circuit, expressed in both urban planning and local preoccupations. Teenagers and young adults share scooters, pouring noisily out of the hills. Determined pensioners pull handcarts full of produce on the lightly trafficked streets, but it is not really a pedestrian-centered city, except for intrepid hikers who are not local. Newsstand operators know local farms by name and location, and paved roads melt easily into lanes that end in walking trails leading out of the department.

One of the most popular of the local hikes begins near the train station, then leads straight up the hill past condemned buildings and abandoned bits of iron and stone wall. It is marked with short white and red stripes, placed at unobtrusive intervals that occasionally provoke nervousness in their infrequency. The sharp uplift typical of the area's hills eventually ceases, opening into smooth meadows spotted with goat and cow droppings. In one direction, a cross that in the floor of the valley appeared to mark the peak of a hill is now seen to be on a ridge well below the crest. In another direction, the scattering of houses and outbuildings continues until it imperceptibly merges with the loose strands of another town, and this pattern continues to the horizon, where the jagged Pyrenees proper are seen in hazy silhouette.

The abandoned la Ferme du Foix is the most notable site on this stretch of this trail. Marked with intersecting rather than parallel white and red stripes (France's Randonnée symbol for “wrong way”), it is as inviting of curiosity as it is repellant of entry. Inside the forbidden area, a swollen-bellied white stone oven sits in a small room at the side of the dilapidated farmhouse. Abandoned equipment is discarded in the entry room, with patchy flooring and a wooden spiral staircase. The next room over contains a bale of fresh hay and the building's collapsed roof. The house's walls are tightly packed stones with patches of more modern bricks placed in repair. The arches are not really arches, but wooden crossbeams.

The trail soon crests the hill, in a few hours walking becoming the Sentier Cathar, a footpath that will carry trekkers to the Atlantic. Another notable footpath is the Chemin de Saint-Jacques, a popular pilgrimage route that ends in Galicia. Trekkers who follow either route will pass through many hilly communities such as those found in Ariège, but

the particularities of each can easily be lost to the inscriptive power of these culturally imbued walking routes.



### *Regional Challenges*

Were it not for the data kept by various governmental administrations, one could easily mistake Ariège in the summer for a land of perfect idyll, the languorous living conjured by the phrase “the south of France” at last fulfilled. Though the private frustrations of the under-employed family breadwinner, or the failure-to-launch thirty year-old are hard for a temporary foreign visitor to detect. Ariège is among the poorest departments in France, a reality so at odds with the highly visible consumption that fills its most trafficked public spaces that it demands investigation.

The economic analysis in this thesis proceeds with the assumptions that the economy in Ariège is reactive to national trends and priorities, and that the department’s regional role is that of hinterland to Toulouse.

According to a 2003 article by Aragon et al. examining unemployment in the Midi-Pyrénées region (of which Ariège is part):

The unemployment rate in any given area is determined more by national than by local effects (OCDE 1997), and most of the theoretical and empirical work on the subject reflects this (e.g., Artus and Muet 1995). Thus the unemployment rate in the Midi-Pyrénées region has evolved in line with the national unemployment rate, rising gradually from 3.2% in 1974 to 11.3% by January 1995. The rise in unemployment occurred despite robust growth in the Toulouse area, which was driven in large part by the rise of the aerospace sector. (Aragon et al. 2003, 156)

The Aragon et al. article underscores the significance of understanding how national policies translate to the local level, in an era when national- and E.U.-level policies increasingly set the agenda. Aragon et al. write, “Hinterlands with a high proportion of young people have higher unemployment, so [we can conclude that] young people are not showing flexibility in moving in search of work. Serious long-term social effects could result” (170). This phenomenon is troubling, because the authors do not

detect deterrents to migration in the regional housing market; this would suggest that a skills mismatch rather than a spatial mismatch is the root of the problem. Aragon et al. write, “longer periods of unemployment are associated with a degradation of saleable skills” and that “where there is more seasonal variation in employment, the unemployment rate is (on average) higher, as more people combine seasonal work with a spell of unemployment” (ibid.)

The authors argue that government efforts to reduce unemployment produce insignificant results in the face of the effects of employment equilibrium, with certain types of hinterland demonstrating static rates of unemployment. Specifically, “Hinterlands with a high concentration of industry also have more unemployment. The explanation for this may be interpreted as a disequilibrium effect, attributable to the secular decline in industrial employment that leaves people without jobs” (ibid.) The resulting disequilibrium between available jobs and job seekers is normally resolved either by an influx of firms or the migration of those looking for employment. A skills mismatch would preclude either resolution.

For a region such as Midi-Pyrénées, with Toulouse on the rise, examining average income and other region-wide indicators can obscure the economic reality experienced by the hinterlands. Furthermore, measures taken to improve regional economic vitality may not result in benefits to people living in the hinterlands. Making improvements to infrastructure that reduce the effects of isolation might make Ariège more attractive to firms, but the skills mismatch makes it likely that extra-regional workers would be recruited to fill new jobs.

Contrary to the way the region is marketed in tourist brochures, there is not much that is “traditional” about Ariège’s economy. According to figures maintained by INSEE, France’s national statistical bureau, in 2012 agriculture accounted for 4.8 percent of total employment (the Midi-Pyrénées average in 2012 was 4.0 percent). Construction and other industries amounted to less than a quarter of total employment, with the remaining 70 percent or so taking the form of retail and other tertiary sector jobs.

Both the department and the region have experienced a decline in agricultural employment over the last decade; in 1999 Ariège and Midi-Pyrénées had 6.3 percent and 6.1 percent agricultural employment, respectively. Within the Midi-Pyrénées agricultural industry, Ariège is a leader in organic harvests. In 2012, as measured in active surface area, 12.5 percent of Ariège’s active agriculture was organic. The Midi-Pyrénées regional average was 5.5 percent. The emphasis on organic agricultural in tourist marketing perhaps overstates its presence in actual local agriculture.

Annual rates of visitors have fluctuated, but between 2005 and 2011, the number of tourists in Ariège staying in hotels fell from roughly 175,000 to 151,000. Those camping or staying in other rustic accommodations fell from about 105,000 to 95,000 over the same time period. This explains the concerted effort of the region and department to craft compelling marketing campaigns, and demonstrates the potential pitfalls of banking on the tourist industry to provide consistent revenue. As the following chapters will illustrate, this is a region where in the past tourism has come and gone and left not enough behind.

## *Ariège*

I refer repeatedly to “Ariège” as a fixed thing, as the geographic unit of my analysis. It is the French department containing the cross-seam of villages where I conducted research, but that only goes so far in explaining its coherency as a place. Its present extent is of Napoleonic vintage, the fusion of two political units from an older system of drawing borders.

In earlier times its inhabitants were opposed both to the Roman pope and the Parisian king. Its political leaders fought crusades in what is now modern Syria, and threw their support behind the founders of Andorra, while their religious leaders, the Cathars, provoked an extended Catholic crusade throughout the region. Eventually, the Cathars scattered and the region folded into France.

Most of the castles built by the Cathars are not in Ariège, but Ariège markets itself as “Cathar Country\*.” The department is not in Languedoc, but in Ariège one can find Occitan bookstores—and lose their bearings when it comes to vowels in the smaller towns.

Almost all of the sizable towns in the department follow the banks of the Ariège River on its north-south course in the eastern side of the department and are connected by rail as well as roads. In the west there is a cluster of towns set at a distance that in prior centuries would have been a solid day’s journey to reach.

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\* For a network analysis of the institutional actors and interest groups that coordinate to market Cathar Country see: Solé, P. J., Guia, J. J. O., Coenders, G., & Universitat de Girona. 2012. *Entrepreneurship, ties and relational networks: The case of a public-private cross-border tourism product*. Girona: Universitat de Girona.

In between, highways trace winding routes along large parcels that become smaller and run together as one enters a *commune*. Some of these are reminiscent of blink-and-you-miss-it American highway towns (a small market, a post office), and others seem like little more than glorified homeowner associations.

While Ariège is home to numerous castles and caves of great archaeological significance, the patterning of village and country is also rooted in its heritage. Unlike monuments, which could simply be avoided by developers, specially valued landscapes tend to lack discrete boundaries or objective criteria. The medieval vintage of much of this patterning is shared with large parts of rural France.

Most development is located on the rolling lowlands. Sharply rising hills and mountains buttress the east and south of the department. The hills to the east create a small rain shadow over a patch of red-rocked terrain in the next department over, from which the Marquis took their name<sup>3</sup>. The hills in the south are Pyrenean foothills. Throughout the department are long ridges and dramatic hummocks that form constraining valley viewsheds.

Patches of post-harvest forest growth interrupt pastures, fruit overhangs fences, and it is possible certain times of day to walk along rural roads for a long time without encountering cars. Few of the people one will encounter in the country, however, make their living from the land. Roughly one in twenty is engaged in agriculture, and the department's total agricultural revenue represents an even smaller proportion of total production.

It was not always so, and in their experience of struggling to keep up with modernizing changes to the economy, the residents of Ariège have much in common with

neighboring departments, and other (rural) departments that have not fared well over the last fifty to one-hundred fifty years. Partially in response to modernization's effects, back-to-the-land enthusiasts from throughout Europe and beyond have made Ariège their permanent or seasonal residence.

The department's politics tack hard to the European left. Industrial productivity and employment are in decline and there is recognition that large-scale commerce is unlikely to benefit most locals, who lack the skills and training to take advantage of, say, an expanding aerospace industry near Pamiers.

Aerospace and other high-tech research and development industries form the thrust of the Midi-Pyrenees regional promotional materials produced to encourage investment. In this geographic formulation, Toulouse is the center of the region, and places like Ariège are simply the backyard, or weekend destinations. The fact that this "backyard" retains settlement patterns dating back to the fourteenth century or earlier in much of its morphology makes it difficult for residents to wholly welcome the development of new industries.

Resistance to the policy agenda proposed by the urban core has numerous antecedents in Ariège\*. Despite the democratization of French society that has taken place over the last century, planning still occurs at a scale that neglects those who live at the margins. There has been significant work done by geographers in articulating how and

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\*Eric Arnold's study of resistance to Napoleonic conscription describes village leaders in Ariège hiding birth records to allow residents to evade the draft, sometimes for over a decade. Arnold tabulates "incidents of disturbance" related to conscription for roughly 50 departments between 1904-1906. Ariège leads all departments with 16. Neighboring Haute-Garonne is second with eight incidents. The next highest tally is four.

why places come to be defined. This ranges from economic theorizing to painstaking discussion of what “place” actually is.

In the next chapter I review some of the major E.U. and French policies that are attempting to maintain local populations and provide economic opportunities to rural areas. I refer to areas such as Ariège as “marginal” because the tendency has been for such policies to be beneficial everywhere but at the local scale. There are signs, however, of concerted efforts to reverse this tendency.

## 2 MANAGING THE MARGINS

### *European Subsidies*

The trends undermining the continued viability of communities in Ariège are tied to influences outside the region. Although Ariège's response to these factors is in some ways locally unique, the pressures it faces as an underdeveloped hill region are shared with similar areas throughout Europe; E.U. planners have developed several frameworks to direct subsidies toward alleviation of these common difficulties, with the Common Agricultural Program (CAP) being the most important and oldest of the frameworks. The CAP policy that most directly applies to Ariège is the Least Favored Area (LFA) subsidy provision. Ariège qualifies for LFA subsidies designated both on the basis of low agricultural productivity, and for its disadvantageous terrain (Mountain LFA)<sup>1</sup>.

It would be difficult to argue that hard-pressed Ariège does not receive significant net benefits from the scale of funding offered under LFA, but it is worth noting the ways in which this rather blunt administrative instrument can dent local life. The LFA program has a narrow aim. It is intended to spur economic development through improving an area's ability to produce competitively for existing markets. In practice, this means encouraging field consolidation so as to allow for more modern irrigation techniques and increasing regional specialization in a smaller number of crops<sup>2</sup>.

This is in many ways a continuation of French policies of a few decades ago that diminished crop diversity and eliminated many so-called marginal producers. In an agricultural area such as Ariège, this type of change has palpable effects not only on the marketability of local skills and knowledge, but also on the social fabric. LFA subsidies also promote updated auxiliary agriculture infrastructure and industries. These auxiliary



encouragements are designed to increase the scale of production, but have the effect of dissolving existing local arrangements as locals are outcompeted by larger regional conglomerates<sup>3</sup>.

The CAP's administrators published a 2012 policy overview that declares a shift in priorities away from simple increases in production toward a holistic raft of objectives supporting sustainable agricultural practices<sup>4</sup>. The overview reads, "In its early years, the CAP encouraged farmers to use modern machinery and new techniques, including chemical fertilisers and plant protection products. These were necessary because the priority at that time was to grow more food for the population" (10). The effects of these reforms and the historical context of their implementation are discussed in later chapters.

In the roughly fifty years since CAP's development, a very different set of circumstances faces E.U. agricultural administrators from those that existed in the 1960s. Per the overview brochure:

In the face of the food surpluses which resulted, the emphasis has changed. Now the CAP helps farmers to:

- Farm in a manner that reduces emissions of greenhouse gases,
  - Use eco-friendly farming techniques,
  - Meet public health, environmental and animal welfare standards,
  - Produce and market the food specialities of their region,
  - Make more productive use of forests and woodland,
  - Develop new uses for farm products in sectors like cosmetics, medicine and handicrafts.
- (ibid.)

Of course, creating surpluses, for trade on international markets, was always the point, and on these terms, CAP has been an unqualified success. CAP produces periodic reports on the impact of its funding on production yields by sector. In 2011, for example,

CAP released reports titled *Evaluation of CAP measures applied to the dairy sector* and *Evaluation of CAP measures applied to the sugar sector*<sup>5</sup>. These reports aggregate data at the E.U. level, and the conclusions and recommendations of the reports are oriented more toward future WTO negotiation than toward agricultural producers.

CAP administers grants and subsidies through E.U. member states, following the guidelines of their particular national strategies. CAP authorities conduct programmatic assessment examining how well the programs are administered, e.g., funding absorption within targeted areas, and completeness of member state reporting. The programmatic assessment aggregates data across the E.U., using indicators such as total number of hectares or producers affected by CAP programs. These include breakouts by country and by investment zone, but these geographic scales do not capture effects for smaller towns and regions.

The new stated emphasis of CAP reflects environmental and social concerns common to rural communities. As is discussed in the section below covering French agricultural reforms, there have been significant difficulties in translating objectives from the CAP scale to the farm scale, both in terms of disseminating information from the latest research, and providing incentives for farmers to act on that information. Acknowledging this, the brochure states that CAP hopes “to promote innovation in agriculture by bridging the existing gap between research and farming practice and facilitating communication and cooperation among stakeholders (farmers, advisors, agro-business, scientists, administrations, etc.)” (ibid.)

A 2013 CAP policy memo addresses modernization; the specific language of the memo is important for understanding how CAP administrators are building capacity to promote qualitative change in production, rather than simple growth:

There are many incentives to encourage modernisation and help farmers improve their farms, process and sell their produce and produce higher-quality foods using more sustainable, environmentally friendly farming methods. From 2014, the CAP will offer new measures to facilitate collective investment, help small farms to develop and encourage transfers of agronomic know-how between farmers through a European Innovation Partnership in the farming sector.<sup>6</sup>

A photograph of a farmer in the field consulting a tablet computer accompanies the overview brochure text, suggesting what direction the bolstering of “agronomic know-how” might take. This vision of Information Age agriculture is by no means far-fetched, and is in many ways becoming a reality<sup>7</sup>. In a similar effort to improve understanding and communication between researchers and farmers, CAP has developed a program that offers farm work experiences to administrators<sup>8</sup>.

Complicating the actualization of CAP goals is the fact that CAP is no longer administered within an E.U. level policy vacuum. The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) finances development projects to support regional “convergence” and the creation of “sustainable jobs.” “Sustainable jobs” in this context refers to jobs that are not tied to mineral boom cycles or service jobs dependent on the leisure spending of other regions. Rather than pure modernization, ERDF projects are intended to diversify rural economies and provide financing for locally owned and operated businesses. Present

rural industries are supported, as are structural improvements to infrastructure and information technology. The ERDF is also concerned with increasing administrative capacity in areas such as risk management and planning<sup>9</sup>.

Despite the diversity of projects supported by the ERDF, the desired outcome is similar for every region—that is, increased ability to compete and integrate with existing markets. “Convergence,” in the ERDF use, means the movement of low-productivity regions toward higher productivity. There are valid concerns that such a project is inherently homogenizing. Martin Boesch reports on the findings of the ERDF-funded DIAMONT research project, arguing that “economic behavior and decisions are gradually being streamlined towards a uniform, competitive attitude with only short-term perspectives; as a result, settlement structures and agriculture are losing their regional uniqueness” (Boesch 2007, 6).

DIAMONT drew on the expertise of mountain area researchers from several European countries. These experts were asked to assess the development schemes of countries and rate the importance of several influencing factors for development, including national priorities. These experts concluded that France rated issues such as “Strengthening the regional economy,” “Minority rights,” “Ecological sustainability,” and “Good education of local population” as less important national priorities than did most of the other countries in the study (7). Additionally, these experts did not detect a trend in France toward improving coordination in planning or development, nor did they see a strong capacity for bottom-up or federalized implementation of development initiatives.

*Recent French Approaches to Agriculture and Land Management*

France has since 1999 explicitly attempted to implement sustainable agriculture at the regional level through policies such as the Territorial Farming Contract (TFC). TFCs are intended to diversify local farming economies, and bring them in line with recent national frameworks designed to improve ecological sustainability and increase the viability of agricultural livelihoods. As will be made clear in the pre- and post-war historiography presented below, TFCs and similar instruments are ostensibly a departure from decades of efforts to centralize production and drive out lower-tier producers. Confirming, however, what Boesch's work indicates about French development priorities, Gafsi et al. argue that the TFC program's "emphasis has been on technical modernization at the farm level, ignoring the broader ecological, social, and institutional contexts of sustainability" (Gafsi et al. 2005, 473).

Gafsi et al. write that "TFC implementation has not succeeded in introducing real changes in current farming systems" (472). In fact, the TFC scheme has had an impact on farming systems, but the effect has been in line with LFA influence. This is troubling because TFCs were intended to address what researchers had identified as the most serious gaps in existing programs, including LFA. The TFC program was ambitious. It attempted to change farm systems and values in such diverse areas as erosion control and animal well-being, while simultaneously promoting territorial production system "coherence" within territories.

Regrettably, the incorporation of territorial interests, or "coherence" resulted in agro-business dominating decision-making. TFC's outreach to individual farmers—who were awarded financial aid on a specific, per-project basis—and its deep involvement in

identifying territorial priorities, demonstrated a willingness to use innovative non-market mechanisms that circumvented many top-down management pitfalls. Despite this intentional approach, “farmers have been most interested in the economic aspects of sustainability. The other aspects (i.e., environmental and social) were under-addressed by farmers’ projects, and therefore did not play a significant role in the farming change process” (ibid.).

Farming associations and lobbies account for much of this intransigence. The awkward syndicalism of the 1930s evolved into a sleeker post-war, market-oriented, modernizing set of groups, in the form of the *Confederation Générale de l'Agriculture* (CGA). Today those groups enjoy an influential position in agricultural development paths. Gafsi et al. argue that “the territorial dimension clearly has a limiting effect on the TFCs and lessens their efficiency ... Stakeholders involved in setting up the TFC model in Midi-Pyrenees Region have already pointed out this limitation, and see it as a result of stakeholder interaction with professional farming organizations” (ibid.).

The most immediate drawback of this situation is a TFC implementation scheme “whose territorial priorities are reduced to fundamental economic objectives” (ibid.). Léger et al., in a 2006 paper, see a silver lining to the failed TFC scheme’s implementation in the form of increased community input in agricultural decision making, as well as signs that farmers are willing to step away from the productivist model. They attribute TFC’s failure to rushed implementation and insufficient support for farmers attempting to create multifunctional farms after decades of policies promoting just the opposite.

Without profound institutional reforms, the gridlock between long-term French and European planners and regional farming groups will continue in a setting where “the environmental and social functions of farming are seen as the outcomes of the production function, which remains all-important” (472—473). Fleury et al. identify an inherent problem in the planning side of TFC-type policies. In a 2008 article examining failed sustainability contract farming initiatives in the Alps, they find that policies consistently do not reflect the latest research. Their “main assertion is that implementation of the ‘local governance’ principle (multi-stakeholder and participative approaches) in small-scale projects requires an alternative view of the phases of project management,” one which improves over the too “linear” flow between concept and policy (Fleury 2008, 231).

These problems have led France to a recent reform in how regions coordinate development. The basic purpose of the *schéma de cohérence territoriale* (SCOT) and the *plan local d’urbanisme* (PLU) is to provide administrative layers between communes and departments, and between departments and regions. SCOT and PLU are the most comprehensive national policy instruments related to sustainability at the local scale. Local power structures are not likely to change as a result of the scheme, but it has the chance of introducing greater transparency, and by extension, legitimacy, to large-scale projects. It has the potential to make farmers and developers alike beholden to regional interests beyond their professional associations.

The two instruments are not without their drawbacks: Phillip Booth argues that there is insufficient simplicity and representation; Marc Bonneville argues that the new framework does not resolve an ideological dilemma regarding whether development

processes should be publicly or privately directed—that is to say, socially or market-oriented.

Boesch's DIAMONT analysis shows that local, traditional culture is increasingly irrelevant to regional development. He argues that planners “must not spend too much effort on indicators based on traditional cultural differences, but more on indicators measuring sustainable progress in a globalizing world” (10). In his view there is value in “regional identity, provided it means not mere folklore or leftovers from the past, but a conscious profile and strategy for future challenges” (ibid.). Boesch is not attempting to argue that culture is unimportant, but rather that it is locally formed and dynamic, and not something that EU regional development policies are suited to address.

### *Preserving Heritage in the Metropolitan Countryside*

The European Landscape Convention (ELC) is a promising document for tying development to research, but how to assign value to landscape remains an open question. Marc Antrop, Mauro Agnoletti, and Paul Claval<sup>10</sup> are three of the leading writers attempting to influence land allocation processes. They have had some success among geographers in drawing attention to traditional land management practices, and the value those practices have in a sustainability-oriented development atmosphere.

The Netherlands-based Alterra research institute is one of many organizations attempting to map and classify landscape character for policy purposes<sup>11</sup>. Like the concept of landscape before it, classified landscape in policy terms is the subject of several discourses. Quantitative data and more subjective measures are difficult to place into a common scheme, but just such a project is being attempted.



Europa Nostra, the grassroots cultural heritage foundation, has existed nearly as long as CAP, and is committed to protecting “against threats to vulnerable heritage buildings, sites and landscapes<sup>12</sup>.” The concerns many citizens share with Europa Nostra are now reflected in E.U. policies such as the European Landscape Convention (ELC).

Like CAP, the ELC is aimed at providing a common solution to common problems. Unlike CAP objectives, however, there is not a cut-and-dried metric for evaluating success. There are several competing frameworks for defining the type of landscape the ELC is attempting to protect. Efforts to peg landscape categories (heritage, agriculture, etc.) to objective evaluation criteria have not resulted in consensus around a given scheme. Even in its rather subjective form, however, the ELC’s mere existence as a coherent, Union-wide document is a significant step in responding to concerns such as those voiced by Europa Nostra.

Member states have wide latitude in implementing CAP programs, and face different challenges in succeeding in international markets. France’s strategy for managing growth in the agricultural sector is rooted in its history of purely domestic agricultural reforms, and its institutional and agribusiness legacy structure, even as France has been responsive to CAP priorities.

The Midi-Pyrenees region displays demographic patterns that defy the conventional wisdom on the relationship between youth migration, employment, and the housing market. Most notably, depopulation appears to have slowed. Ariège’s population slid from over a quarter million in the 1850s to below 140,000 by the 1950s, and has climbed, since then, to over 150,000<sup>13</sup>. The “back to the land” movement, with its accompanying influx of relatively well-to-do outsiders, does not immediately signify

great change in agricultural realities, but does suggest that the social landscape has become more malleable and less fixed in regional heritage.

The urban-born SCOT is the development framework guiding large-scale infrastructure projects in Ariège, such as a proposed airport. It is telling that SCOT was implemented to prevent ghettoization, or the unfair distribution of socioeconomically disadvantaged populations in urban areas. That this metropolitan-oriented scheme has applicability in Ariège demonstrates the degree to which urban and rural communities are merging and are being addressed in common policy frameworks, as well as the dearth of appropriate instruments for peri-urban and rural development. As elsewhere in Europe, urban France's economy has outpaced its administration in claiming the countryside.

### *Future Impacts?*

Those familiar with France's institutional history will not be surprised by the DIAMONT findings, which reveal an urban bent to priorities, and evaluation of data aggregated above the local scale. The new stated emphasis of CAP, with its evolved definition of modernization, is encouraging for those who agree with Boesch that reforms are needed to improve the relationships between French agricultural producers and French and E.U. administrators.

Doubt should persist, however, that this latest round of reorganization and modernization, absent other changes, would change the essential relationship between producers and agricultural administrators, or change where the power to shape the landscape resides. Deeper than institutional biases detected by the DIAMONT study is the entrenched wariness farmers feel toward would-be reformers.

The following chapter examines the historical circumstances that led up to CAP intervention, and places France's post-war agricultural strategy in the context of changes to international markets and natural resource and manufacturing industries.

### 3 AGRICULTURAL ANGST

The character of France's urban-rural divide through the Third and Fourth Republics was shaped by French industrialization in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Critically, "while England was becoming an urban country whose elites retained rural values, France remained a rural country with highly urbanized elites" (Hohenberg 1972, 232). Industrialization swept in new rural employment in extractive industries, creating labor scarcity in the agricultural sector. This scarcity contributed to the dissolution of large estates, the end of the peasant, and the rise of the tenant farmer. Newly minted landlords had tendencies toward abuse and predation, while old-hand aristocrats managed in absence; in both cases entrepreneurism was stifled and micromanagement the norm. These circumstances precluded innovation, because "between the extremes of feudal paternalism and capitalist tenancy, suspicion locked both parties into reliance on the status quo as the only mutually acceptable position" (ibid.)

Against this unpromising 1860-1870s backdrop a two-decade depression in cereal crops arrived in France, as a consequence of the rapid expansion of railroads. According to Schwartz et al., railroad "expansion picked up and sustained itself from the 1850s to the early 1880s" and "by the end of the century ... the French tortoise appeared to be closing on the British hare" (Schwartz et al. 2011, 59).

This new transportation system raised issues surrounding uneven development at both the national and local levels. Nationally, between the 1880s and the 1920s "the government, prompted by pressure from regional and local interests where rail service was scant or nonexistent, likely recognized that the main network then in service had

aggravated disparities among regions of France, favoring the north and northeast especially over the Midi (south)” (64).

The wealthy north no doubt enjoyed political advantages, but this was not the sole reason disparity in rail expansions existed. Schwartz et al. write, “While some regions were ‘left behind’ because they lost out in the fierce competition for rail transport, other regions in the disadvantaged south were victims of challenging topography and an associated history of poor communications and sparse capital investment\*” (67).

Schwartz et al. argue that the railway expansion created new construction and transport employment, and that “when the agrarian depression struck in the later 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, the economic benefits of rail service likely diminished rural out-migration in communities where rail transport was close at hand” (56). This was in essence a restructuring of landscape, with human settlements remaining in place or growing near rail lines, and elsewhere shrinking or vanishing altogether.

Those “left behind” by rail expansion had to contend with the 1870s “arrival in European markets of vast quantities of cheaper wheat from the United States;” as a result “French farmers struggled through a first crisis of globalization” (70). Although rail development had been uneven, the impact of massive wheat imports through improved transport was felt uniformly. Schwartz et al. write, “What railways—and steamships—gave with one hand they often took away years later with the other, forcing even favored communities to adapt to changing market conditions” (ibid.) The roughly twenty-year

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\* Schwartz et al. compiled historical GIS data related to rail expansion in France and performed cluster analysis to illustrate rail influence nationwide; their results are extensively illustrated in Schwartz R., Gregory I., and Thevenin T. 2011. "Spatial history: Railways, uneven development, and population change in France and Great Britain, 1850-1914". *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. 42 (1): 53-88.

agricultural depression abated in 1896, and rail expansion continued, when possible, until the late 1920s.

In the aggregate, the countryside had bounced back, but within the industry a significant change had been effected. Schwartz et al. write, “By 1929, 66 percent of agricultural land was devoted to pasture and animal husbandry and 34 percent to wheat and other crops—the reverse of the proportions in 1862” (Schwartz et al. 2011, 73). This reversal had wide-ranging consequences.

The changes in transport networks, international markets, and how farmland was being used created the need for new farming methods, and for adjustments to the social contract. Pierre Tanguy-Prigent, in his role as a Socialist political operative, had attempted to unify France’s farm workers in the 1930s. Although they formed a potentially powerful bloc, organizational questions and political differences prevented them from realizing their efficacy as a lobby or force at the polls. When Tanguy took the office of Secretary of Agriculture following the Second World War, he faced splintered lending societies and cooperatives numbering nationally in the thousands, but “more important still were the so-called ‘specialized associations’ which grouped the wheat growers, the sugar-beet producers, the wine-growers, and so on” (Wright 1953, 404). The political prominence of the specialized associations, combined with the realities of postwar market pressures, meant that reforms geared toward improving the efficiency of mono-cropping producers would take precedence.

Tanguy and his leadership in the new agricultural federations “proposed the rapid mechanization of agriculture; the cooperative use of machinery; the consolidation of small scattered strips of land into larger units; the expansion of cooperative buying and

marketing; and the planning of crops on a rational, nation-wide basis,” in other words, reforms that would support economies of scale (405). Wright argues that as Tanguy’s federations were given opportunities to elect their leadership, it became difficult to temper local influence, as representatives considered the needs of their constituents above Tanguy’s agenda. In a trend that reveals a great deal about the relative importance of national affairs to rural areas at this time, Vichy-tied leaders that Tanguy had removed found themselves back in office after *Confederation Générale de l'Agriculture* (CGA) members voted. Tellingly,

until 1948 at least, all factions in the CGA had rallied to the "expansionist" doctrine of the CGA's founders, who preached that French agriculture should vastly improve its productivity and expand its production in order to become a great exporting branch of the national economy. From 1948 on, however, the farmers' optimism dimmed as their production began to catch up with demand, and as the favorable price scissors began to turn against them. (412)

Wright, writing in 1953, was correct in his caution in drawing conclusions about what this turn in opinion meant for the usefulness of the CGA as a means of representing farmers at the national level. The geography and demographics of France’s farms, however, were against a comprehensive association providing meaningful representation. Wright notes the division between the priorities of larger northern producers and smaller southern ones. Similarly, priorities varied greatly based on the crop a given producer grew. The slim possibilities for effective negotiation between Paris and producers via the CGA, or any political organ, essentially vanished when after the war the European Commission became another, even more foreign pole to contend with.

Of equal concern to increasing “national income” was “to ensure the survival of the petite bourgeoisie, the ‘property-owning democracy,’ as a means of preventing the

division of society” along producer and laborer economic lines (Jones 1982, 543). In 1936, the same year that vacation was officially provisioned to workers, the government took steps to limit the spread of the department store within France. The benefit of this action for the small shop owner was not because the shop owner enjoyed significant political clout, but because the government had done little to promote effective business practices through policy or in education, where institutions “taught commerce as an appendage of engineering” (545). The result was a glut of merchants for some goods, and shortages for others, in a social environment that was rewarding workers from other sectors of the economy.

Jones argues that this trend toward promoting larger numbers of shop owners was reversed by the Vichy government, which sought to limit supply networks and “rationalize” the distribution of goods during a time of short supply. These efforts ran counter to the interests of both shopkeepers and the prefects the central government relied upon to enforce new standards; this placed a greater share of the economy on the black market. “To refuse to participate in the black market,” Jones writes, “was to resign oneself to doing without vital supplies, spare parts for vehicles, butter and household necessities” (562). This disintegration of the cash economy temporarily changed the relative economic footing of occupied urbanites and relatively free rural dwellers, as “everybody with relatives in the countryside relied upon ‘care packages’ to supplement his diet” (ibid.).

Although “within three months of the restoration of liberty, fifty thousand new shops had been opened,” these shops not only lacked the expertise and effective regulation that had been missing prior to the war, but their outdated methods and capacity



were a growing concern for a nation that had begun competing with American and other European producers (559).

While France struggled to reestablish networks for the supply of even basic goods, their American creditors expanded their interests in France. The Americans had been exceptionally efficient in establishing a foothold in European markets even as combat operations continued; Coca-Cola “employees were assigned as ‘technical observers’ to the military in order to take charge of new bottling plants set up close to the front lines” (Kuisel 1991, 99).

Political unease with the implications of accepting Marshall Plan investments, as well as cultural concerns about the increased postwar global influence of the US, meant that to the French, “Coca-Cola was only one feature of a multifaceted American ‘invasion’ that included Hollywood films, the *Reader’s Digest*, and tractors” (102). In Kuisel’s interpretation of the angry public declarations from wine associations, the medical establishment, and various political groups—which have resulted even as late as the 1980s in below-average Coca-Cola consumption within France, “Coca-Cola aggressively announced the arrival of consumer society at a time when the French were not yet ready” (116).

Market integration within Europe was central to the administration of the Marshall Plan, and the bureaucratic maneuvering required to achieve this in the postwar environment encouraged new modes of international cooperation. Given that by the end of the Marshall Plan economic productivity in Europe exceeded 1938 levels, it would seem that “Reconstruction” is an inadequate term to describe all that took place through the benefit of Marshall funds.

France had few paths forward in the postwar era; it is clear why acceding a certain amount of influence to the European Commission and the United States was seen as an acceptable step if it would set France on the road to recovery. Shepard Clough looks at the dismal economic reality that faced postwar France:

Her inventories were hopelessly depleted; her transportation system was demolished; many of her foreign investments had been liquidated to pay for much-needed imports; and her productive equipment, already lamentably antiquated before the war, was now absolutely inadequate to meet national needs or foreign competition. Indeed, the French War Damage Commission estimated that the total cost of the war and occupation was equal to 45 per cent of France's entire national wealth. (Clough 1956, 541)

Clough argues that former League of Nations Deputy Secretary General Jean Monnet was an essential figure for immediate postwar planning. Monnet had built extensive contacts with British and American officials, possessed world market and infrastructure development experience, and had close ties to Charles de Gaulle. This dynamic period saw extensive reconfiguring of industry and public investment. By contrast, Hirsh's mid-1950s plans were less dramatic, and were intended to shift the burden of lending and investment more heavily to the private sector. Clough notes that in 1956, "French national income is only a little over what it was in 1929, while British and German national incomes are up by some 50 per cent over the previous date" (552).

By 1957, the European Economic Community (EEC) was formed; one of the earliest direct institutional ancestors of the modern European Union, the EEC lowered trade barriers and paved the way for continent-wide planning. The Common Agricultural Policy was one of the first major policies to emerge from meetings between members of the EEC, and today its subsidies and investments comprise roughly half of the E.U.'s annual budget. Conservative in its design, the CAP is a politically entrenched array of

programs, and as an evolving set of policies is a useful proxy for understanding modern E.U. approaches to specific locales.

Methods of increasing production took several forms. Machinery was updated, irrigation capacity was increased, and new techniques and seed stocks were disseminated<sup>1</sup>. Adoption of these modernized modes of production separated growers into winners and losers. As agricultural productivity of state-promoted crops increased at the regional scale, the consolidation of the industry pushed many people out of it. By the 1970s, when post-war reforms had been in effect for a generation, agriculture in Ariège and other outlying areas in southern France had been updated, but the benefits were not reaped equally in local economies, and in some mountainous regions, there was great disparity commune to commune. While France had succeeded in becoming a viable exporter, it had not provided the administrative capacity to translate this success to its remote regions.

The farming community's response to these and later reforms was not at all uniform. According to Wright, the reforms were targeted to younger farmers, and these farmers were in fact more able to adopt them, operate profitable farms, and increase their holdings. The CGA anticipated that the result of its reforms would be the "disappearance of many marginal peasants," but the question of programs to retain local people would have been too comprehensive for these agricultural technicians to address (Wright 415). The young farmers of 1950, of course, became the aging farmers of 1975. By that time, there was little offered in the way of profit-increasing reform, and instead national and continental leadership had turned to subsidies in order to prevent further losses to the agricultural labor pool.

Pastoralism, as noted above, remained a viable industry even through the French agricultural slump of the late nineteenth century in part because of its low labor investment and flexible use of land. Planted crops fared much worse. Terrace agriculture, a useful adaptation for hilly areas, has mostly vanished. What is planted in the larger, consolidated fields created by market-pressured reforms has also changed. Crop variety has suffered from the need to scale up production, with nineteenth-century pressures toward monoculture cropping only intensifying with postwar reforms.

*Agricultural modernization in context: a look back on reforms*

A generation after these profound changes in world markets, Eric Villepontoux's 1981 anthropology dissertation examines the case of Valloire, a southern Alpine French village. His analysis of the agricultural situation there could apply to nearly any contemporary case of hill town agriculture.

Alpine agriculture is in search of new regional markets, but is not finding them easily. Land consolidation has been possible only in the flattest areas. In these regions sizeable increases in productivity have been achieved. Cash crops such as lavender, apples and peaches, wheat and corn (used mostly for animal food), and lamb for slaughter are now mass produced. But a combination of factors prohibits higher yields. The first problem is the age of farmers, a vast majority of whom are 50 years of age or older. Furthermore, middle and high-altitude Alpine agriculture, which is fragmented into many parcels, today competes with production zones in the plains preventing regional markets from expanding evenly. Cattle raising is one of the most stable Alpine agricultural markets but it survives only because a sufficient number of farmers have intensified their operations. (Villepontoux 1981, 83—84)

Villepontoux uses a world systems model to explain the economic changes that took place in Valloire throughout the 1970s. Domestic fiscal policy and local industry trends could no longer account for the changes taking place in Valloire—

or in villages around the world. He argues that tourism was having an urbanizing influence on Valloire, and examines potential outcomes of the industry's presence. He predicts that agriculture is unlikely to return (which proved to be the case), and also expressed worry that Valloire was poised for population explosion. His fears were not realized, as the village today has fewer than 1500 residents.

France's program of advancing the social safety net had survived and even flourished despite wartime setbacks. Entitlement provisions and partial nationalization of industry had helped prevent the creation of ghost towns. By the 1970s, however, it was clear that land use priorities at the French and European planning levels aligned poorly with traditional knowledge and practices in rural France. Domestic modernization proponents—and the policy and market changes they had initiated decades previously—had found a powerful ally in the European Community, which demanded greater per capita production, with an emphasis on goods for export.

Mountain communities in particular suffered. Rugged terrain impeded the spread of modern irrigation and increased transport costs. Climates that had allowed for profitable production of varied produce crops were unfriendly to the cereals and grains demanded by the world market. The social arrangements surrounding traditional agriculture and pastoralism—such as pasture sharing, supply relationships, and non-monetized exchange—proved harder to dissolve than planners had anticipated.

Farmers had long presented a potent lobby to the national government. Consolidation of growers in flatland areas had reduced the proportion of the national population engaged in agriculture. This loss of political clout at the polls aggravated the poor market conditions mountain growers faced. Making matters worse was that the scale

of production of consolidated growers encouraged closer ties to the industrial north. This, combined with the internationalization of markets, had effectively made agriculture an urban-controlled enterprise.

Structural advantages for larger agricultural producers dating to the Monnet Plan took their toll, and small-plot, family farms suffered undeniable blows to their viability. For other primary sector industries, the writing had been on the wall even earlier. For many rural French and European communities, resource-extraction and industrial economies vanished. France attempted to replace resource exploitation with automobile manufacturing and later, electronics production. The slowdown of domestic mining operations was therefore quite deliberate. The problem was the replacement industries did not perform as well as hoped. Sharon Zukin's assessment of French 1970s industrial decline attributes the failure to foreign pressures, domestic mismanagement, and the oil crisis. Zukin writes that, "from the early 1960s, the government tentatively planned to phase out coal mining and to replace the lost production either with imported coal or with supposedly more economic sources such as imported oil, and electric and nuclear power" (Zukin 1985, 47). Similar to the Common Agricultural Policy, the European Coal and Steel Community (founded in 1954) was intended to coordinate production between European countries so as to better compete in world markets by avoiding redundancies. France was a poor global competitor, and so new industry was needed.

As it turned out, global pressures would exert influence on rural France in very specific ways. The 1973 oil crisis accelerated market globalization as producers sought to lower costs through avoiding expensive European labor and environmental regulations. Some French mining operators simply chose not to mine, determining that the

combination of outdated technology, progressive compensation packages, and a burgeoning environmental movement had made their mines unprofitable. A new wave of industry nationalization was in the works, but for the worker level of the economy, this trend lagged to the point of futility.

The main mineral producers were state-owned in the 1960s, and auto manufacturers were private corporations. As the government attempted to lower its rate of coal and steel production it ran into labor protests—a situation exacerbated by new production techniques that replaced workers with machinery. When it attempted to persuade private manufacturers to open factories in areas with dwindling resource exploitation, it ran into industry opposition as well as opposition from regions that were targeted for new factories. As Zukin writes “it was not until 1974 that the [auto industry relocation] project was completed, at a time when the oil crisis was helping to push the auto industry into an extended period of depression” (Zukin 51). The overall effect was a French Rust Belt in the northern industrial regions, and a shuttering of smaller operations in the south.

Workers could not expect international industry to alleviate these problems. Citing the case of Xerox and others, Zukin writes that, “multinational corporations with headquarters based outside of France have profited from France's subsidies without contributing to the rejuvenation of the depressed areas” (52). The government largely failed to persuade producers and manufacturers to locate their facilities where they were most needed from a labor perspective. New industrial jobs gravitated toward existing industrial centers, rather than recruit a potentially unskilled workforce from rural communities specializing in extractive industries. The lack of a nationwide employment

bridge between the phase-out of the state-owned mineral producers and expanding private manufacturers was disastrous. Whether one concludes that the government pursued a misguided strategy or simply fumbled its execution, the result was the same.

The industrial history of postwar France is entwined with its intellectual history. It was not just the American facility with new market realities that unnerved France, but the technology that enabled that success; in Bess's reading, "anxiety about modernization often tended to take the shape as anxiety about becoming Americanized" (Bess 1995, 835). Stronger than fear of foreign influence was the fear that the unique French landscape might permanently change:

Among the various catalysts of this French angst about modernization, perhaps none was more significant than the massive transformation of the countryside that occurred during the 1950s. A transformation hinging on the mechanization of agriculture, it was pushed forcefully along by the Fourth Republic's ardent technocrats and by Marshall Plan aid; and it gave many French citizens, both urban and rural, the sense that a centuries-old balance was being disrupted, perhaps irreparably.  
(ibid.)

Bess cites a late Braudel work as an example of how French geographers interested in long-term social change analyzed this period of modernization as a fundamental, capital driven restructuring of French society's relationship to the land<sup>2</sup>. The influential anthropologist Bruno Latour grew up as this mechanization proceeded, and has wrestled throughout his career with the ways in which technology shapes a society's relationship to nature<sup>3</sup>. This preoccupation is only natural for a French intellectual of Latour's generation. Bess writes that "at the same time as de Gaulle aggressively pursued policies of industrial and agricultural modernization, he continued



to lament the passing of traditional France—‘a nation of 120 cheeses,’ as he affectionately called it” (836).

Bess asserts that this anxiety surrounding homogenization and loss of landscape was accompanied by a new concern for the natural world, which is the ultimate basis for traditional landscapes. This concern was expressed popularly in venues such as the student movement against nuclear power, and by public figures such as Jacques Cousteau. Bess illustrates a France conflicted about the roles of technology and the national government in society and in resolving environmental issues. Technology and a far-reaching government increased the scope of action for possible solutions, but were also seen to have had a hand in creating the problems.

This chapter began with a look at latter nineteenth-century France as its rural areas attempted to cope with changes in the social contract, the growing presence of the railroad, and disastrous exposure to competition from American producers. In latter twentieth-century France the countryside had experienced two Republics worth of changes to the social contract, was receiving a rapid expansion of the highway system, and was facing stiffer market competition than ever before, from global agricultural producers. The environmental movement was a new constituency, with priorities that further complicated agrarian issues.

Recent E.U. and French policies directed toward rural areas, as discussed in Chapter 2, have an increased emphasis on management rather than growth. This is due, in part, to the efforts of the environmental constituency, cultural preservationists, and to public demand for policies that mitigate the negative effects of agricultural and industrial expansions and modernization. Bess synthesizes the recommended policies of 1990s

environmentalists; their position acknowledges the need to provide income for rural areas while advocating for a departure from strategies focused purely on agricultural competitiveness:

The French environmentalists have also addressed the crisis of their nation's agriculture with a whole cluster of new proposals. French farmers, they argue, should be encouraged to stay on the land, but not through a vain effort to compete with the large-scale monoculture of the American Middle West. Instead, they should turn to producing their more traditional, local, and labor-intensive specialty crops, if need be in high-tech green-houses, for it is these kinds of lucrative products that are increasingly being sought after by savvy consumers in the big cities. In certain hilly or wooded regions, farmers could sell their tractors and go back to the use of animals in tilling their fields, without losing one iota of real productivity; yet this willingness to "go back to the grandfathers" should not preclude the continued development and use of sophisticated chemicals and advanced machines, as long as these new technologies were designed to be friendly to the environment. Moreover, they contend, since rustic bed-and-breakfasts are the fastest-growing sector of the French tourist industry, the French paysans should take note. Farmers need to learn how to do more than just farm; they should capitalize on the spectacular countryside that surrounds them, adapting their old barns and lofts to the booming demand among city dwellers for all things fresh and traditional and verdant. In this way, the disastrous legacy of the rural exodus could finally be reversed, through an innovative response to new tastes and new demands in the European economies. (853—854)

The articulation of this strategy brings this chapter of economic history full circle to the beginning of a series of events that began roughly 150 years ago with the widespread introduction of rail. The depopulated countryside, the market pressure toward monoculture, and the use of technology in farming all have separate histories, but they can be treated as a single complex of problems. Economic planners cannot hope to address one of these three issues without considering the others.

Post-industrial economic strategies brought significant changes to French landscapes, and these changes prompted a new environmental consciousness in French civil society, to complement its longstanding pastoral strain of intellectual history. The

European Landscape Convention can be seen as the manifestation of a common European anxiety about the consequences of uneven development, and the influence of industries and institutions that have grown ever larger over the last 150 years, even as the villages and communities they affect have shrunk in population.

The environmentalist enjoinder to farmers “to capitalize on the spectacular countryside that surrounds them” in order to benefit from the “booming demand among city dwellers for all things fresh and traditional and verdant,” if heeded, carries the potential for replacing ecologically intensive industries with the lighter tread of tourism (ibid.) In the following chapter, I explore how the “new tastes and new demands” described by Bess actually have precedent in trends that have surfaced in various forms since the nineteenth century, and the social consequences for villages that have in the past catered to those demands. (ibid.)

#### 4 FROM ADVENTURE TO LEISURE

James Erskine Murray, who visited Ariège in 1887, wrote that Ax-les-Thermes was “not one of the fashionable watering-places of the Pyrenees” (192). At that time, he was visiting an unknown region, but not an undiscovered region. He was in an intentional backwater, a valley whose riches were subject to the French colonial process of centralized extraction as thoroughly as were those of formal protectorates in Africa and Asia.

A Scot who later became a British Member of Parliament, Murray's travel record is typical of those of his era: he offers a vainglorious boast that his is the first survey of the region; depicts himself as advising local carriage drivers to safety in dangerous circumstances (while chivalrously preserving the peace of mind of the ladies present); pointlessly brings hired guns within dangerous proximity of war zones.

His account is diverting for its outdated politics, undisguised jingoism, shameless adventuring, and occasional snobbishness, but is essential to deeper understanding of the region simply because it pushes the time frame of what are considered current regional issues back into the nineteenth century. This opens the door to historiographic explanations for the region's sluggish economy, and calls into question the notion that tourism is a recent intruder into this “pristine” part of France. It also reminds us that even in the nineteenth century, “urban” culture was internationalized.

The firsthand accounts of Murray and others—including the American Edwin Asa Dix<sup>1</sup> and the British Frederick H. Johnson<sup>2</sup>—are also valuable bits of social history. The travelers describe the towns they visit in general terms, as well as with reference to specific local characters. These pre-guidebook accounts were intended to have some use

for readers interested in retracing the author's path, but they were written primarily to entertain and to open a window into an exotic corner of the world few would visit. While the writers tackle various subjects, they are writing for a wealthy, well-educated audience, as is clear from the sprinkling of Latin and French throughout, their references to obscure medieval history, and their ready access to local government officials in the areas where they travel.

The authors of these volumes, produced primarily for armchair Grand Tour travelers, present the locations in question in the context of either discovery or rediscovery, tinged always with romanticism. For those emerging from the Mercantilist era ready to invest in new markets, however, there existed a more hardheaded class of information. An 1843 investment prospectus, published on Fleet Street nearly half a century before Murray's escapades, makes a case for directing British capital toward a proposed the Canal of the Pyrenees<sup>3</sup>. In arguing for the Canal's likelihood of a healthy return on investment, Bush writes:

Thousands of visitors from the other departments of France, and from all parts of Europe, every year flock to the Pyrenees, to enjoy the air of the mountains and their romantic scenery, or to take the mineral waters so abundantly found there: many of these travelers will prefer the easy and leisure passage, by water, to the more fatiguing and rapid journey through roads of continued steep ascent or descent, and will at the same time effect a great economy in their expenses by the same means. (Bush 1843, 5)

Many of the circumstances that made the Pyrenees a tourist draw exist today; additionally, tourists then and now are far from neutral observers, but instead wield economic clout and hence have a significant impact on the region's landscape. In the modern era, these can mean campsites or second homes, but in the nineteenth century it

often included what are considered the fundamentals of modern industrial civilization—such as reliable communications.

Bush touts tourism traffic as a valuable business area for the canal, but is quick to point to its other profitable use, writing, “It is indeed almost impossible to estimate the increase of trade which must arise from an improvement in the means of transit, by such a Canal, and which is now carried on almost entirely by the more expensive mode of land carriage” (ibid.) Bush notes that the hilly and mountainous departments will continue to supply raw materials and agricultural products to the lowlands, in exchange for finished goods, but with greater efficiency.

The contents of the prospectus reveal knowledge of local politics and economics, with Bush writing familiarly of local petitions gathered in support of the canal project, which towns and departments are likely to benefit, and which goods would be traded. The prospectus anticipates revenue from the transport of goods such as coal, timber, salt, and fir and even, “in case of war with Spain,” the material necessary to supply an army of 100,000 men (19). There are accounts of Pyrenean landed gentry visiting London in support of the project, site descriptions, and cost estimates from Paris officials.

The fact that Bush could write so intimately about a complex development project in a region of France that over forty years later could be rendered by someone from the same country as an exotic location suggests that the authors are speaking with different intents, to different audiences. Bush wanted to give his readers (potential investors) a sense of familiarity with the Pyrenean region, to leave them feeling that they have grasped the sphere of action and that the situation there is as comprehensible to them as

their native city. Conversely, Murray's audience was signing up for an adventure, and wanted to hear about a land that defied understanding and previous experience.

This meant that Bush oriented his readers by describing the proposed canal's location relative to well-known places such as Toulouse and the Canal du Midi. He emphasized its appearance in French government reports and its high-profile status among concerned local citizens. The region described by Murray is nodal. It is a series of disjointed scenes separated by dangerous journeys over unmarked roads through hidden valleys.

The Canal of the Pyrenees was never built. The year before Bush published the prospectus, France arrived at a public-private railroad financing scheme, ushering in an era of intense railroad expansion that would vastly expand trade and eventually enable many more people to see for themselves the parts of the Pyrenees described by Murray<sup>4</sup>. The tie of tourist revenue to economic development is in the present a carefully managed reality, but as the boom in Ax-les-Thermes demonstrates, profitable tourism's origins in Ariège border on the accidental. As this chapter shows, in many eras developing the tourism industry was a means of making the best of a bad situation.

### *The Spa Boom*

In a bit of luck for the spa proprietors in towns such as Ax-les-Thermes and Aix-les-Bains, "it was axiomatic to French hydrologists that waters were therapeutically effective only at their source" (Weisz 2001, 455). This added the price of room and board to the expected outlay from the roughly half a million annual French visitors to spas in the 1930s. Weisz notes that "Aix-les-Bains also provided expensive hotels, restaurants,

casinos, theaters, parks, and other forms of leisure and diversion, including the possibility of rubbing shoulders with or at least getting close to the wealthy and influential and, sometimes, royalty” (457). The industry took the unusual step of advocating for additional medical regulation of spas—regulation in this case meaning not merely medical approval of facilities, but intensive supervision and administration of sessions in the waters. Such regulations would add to the staff needed on hand.

The interwar period saw anxiety about outdated institutions in the areas of industry and colony drive both the creation of a modern social safety net and the groundwork for an interrupted suite of production reforms. Another result of this anxiety was that, “the perceived need to compete economically against Germany, was a major rhetorical resource for the thermalism and tourism industries and explains much of the support they received from French politicians” (460). The medical and leisure aspects of these facilities—given that they were state-funded—sat together uneasily, because the relaxation and enjoyment inherent to a visit to a spa town had the potential to undermine the curative claims made about the waters.

From a purely economic perspective, while the supporting industries surrounding the spas did a good business, “an exclusive emphasis on tourism was thought to be an unstable basis for the continued development of the industry” (ibid.). Additionally, the genuine goal of many spa proprietors was to help people recover from ailments. This led to a combination of research, marketing, and lobbying activities that after World War II would result in spa treatments being included in national insurance plan coverage. Weisz traces the industry’s transition from a luxury service to a bureaucratically doled out treatment, observing that it presently enjoys national annual revenues in the billions.



*Rise of Resorts*

The development that must be reckoned with between the spa boom and the present is mass tourism. The persistent economic woes of Ariège and the surrounding region are frequently cited in academic literature and tourist guides, but summer visitors will at first glance find that these writers have overstated their point. Sidewalk cafes are constantly crowded and every weekend brings some new carnival or market. Over the months, however, as one's breath becomes visible, the people vanish. By the first weekend in October the last of the be-spandexed American cyclists has long since departed, and so too have many of the cars and bar patrons. Business hours become less reliable and many tourist sites advertise that soon they will close their doors until spring.

It is an annual cycle driven by the tourist season. Furlough writes that “whereas only a tiny proportion of French people, perhaps 5 to 10 percent, went on vacation in the mid-1930s, by the 1980s over 60 percent set off for the beaches, countryside, or their second homes during the summer vacation season” (Furlough 1998, 250). The effect of tourism on the feeling of public space throughout Ariège is visible over the span of months, while its effect on the landscape is slower and subtler, but no less real, as the priorities of visitors came into competition with those of residents.

Expanded access to vacation spots provided by increasing automobile use and mandatory vacation time, combined with the globalizing forces described above, by the 1970s meant that large numbers of middle class people, rather than elite travelers, defined the industry. Government efforts throughout the 1950s and 1960s had promoted “social tourism”—typified by the Family Vacation Village (VVF) program (“social” in the publicly subsidized sense). This state-funded program offered wide-ranging services such

as a motor pool and childcare, making vacations affordable for blue-collar workers, while private enterprises such as Club Med enjoyed access to a growing market of vacationers with bigger budgets.

This opening of new strata in vacation experiences prompted a new business model. Furlough writes, “Although Club Med was originally founded in 1950 as a nonprofit association, in 1957 it was legally reconstituted as a commercial organization” (Furlough 1993, 76). Commercial tourism owed its success to savvy decisions in real estate and labor. Foreign investment received excellent return as high unemployment and slumping land values made resort development attractive in southern France and foreign holdings undergoing decolonization. In the 1960s, the Britain-based Rothschild Bank and later, American Express were financial and organizational partners instrumental in Club Med’s expansion (*ibid.*)

In the form of the resort, the circulation of the urban French through France was not the exercise in national pride and worker solidarity envisioned by the socialist government that developed the VVF. “As anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss claimed, people on vacation ‘suddenly transform themselves, or believe they are being transformed, into absolute and unilateral consumers.’ On vacation, one could break various patterns and taboos on consumption” (Levi-Strauss 275).

Such a reorientation toward consumption had an impact on the goods and amenities tourist-receiving communities made available. The economic effect on the national scale was to shift the mechanism behind vacation from entitlement to purchase. “When one paid for a vacation, the ‘product’ being purchased was a pastiche of

heterogeneous elements amalgamated by advertising and marketing, the emergent tourism industry, the mass media, and government tourism policies” (ibid.).

As Furlough acknowledges and as this thesis aims to make clear, from a structural standpoint this was a continuation of longstanding urban-rural and class relations. Apart from the democratization of vacation, Levi-Strauss argues that the major change from the 1930s to the 1970s in tourism was the specific content of that “amalgamation,” which now “included services (accommodations, dining, transportation, recreation), culture (national heritage, monuments, festivals), and a rich mixture of promised pleasures and experiences” (ibid.)

The spatial and temporal dimensions of the vacation “product” were reassuringly delineated by the sequestered, prix-fix environments offered by Club Med. Furlough writes, “Club Med’s ethos as an isolated and recuperative Eden was as carefully packaged as any other consumer commodity ... Like other institutions that construct sites for consumption, Club Med created integrated environments promising predictable pleasures” (Furlough 1993, 73—74). The construction of walled Club Med villages throughout former French colonial holdings enforced old social divides, but in bringing the vacation product to the French village, the tourism industry created new divides.

### *Patrimonial Promotion*

The French government in the 1980s set about promoting tourism on the basis of regional identity and unique monuments and landscapes. Patrimonial promotion had inherent economic and political benefits to the national government, but the program was also to some extent synergetic with popular opinion in rural communities throughout

Europe. Italia Nostra and Europa Nostra were organizations whose activities showed rapid success in marketing traditional features of the countryside that were thought to be threatened by globalizing markets. France as a whole by this time enjoyed considerable tourist traffic; the challenge was to redirect visitors to the non-marquee locations. Hodges outlines the rationale for this initiative:

These developments diversified, towards the end of the 1970s, into a state-led initiative to develop a decentralized tourism industry to satisfy the desire of holiday-makers for diverse experiences, while diverting capital into rural areas adversely affected by agricultural modernisation. The objective was to mobilise the historic diversity of the French state just as it was popularly perceived to be threatened by the spectre of homogenisation. Regional ways of life, many transformed beyond recognition by the upheavals of the post-war period, were symbolically codified in museum exhibits; the idiosyncrasies of local produce and the built environment repackaged for visitors; the burgeoning narratives of local and professional historians drawn upon to provide depth to this differentiation of identities that would render each region distinctive, and attractive. (Hodges 2011, 253)

This form of patrimonial promotion served several purposes simultaneously. It directed foreign money to outlying areas, spread discretionary income from domestic urban areas, promoted regional identity, and demonstrated to potentially disenfranchised rural dwellers that the national government could deliver meaningful services. An economically sensible policy, it came with social drawbacks.

Matt Hodges explores the tensions inherent in centralizing local identity, writing, “In the past 30 years, the locally perceived village past has been set off from the life of the present, concomitant with historical changes, and has begun to be incorporated into a new, heterogeneous sense of local identity with more national and global horizons” (Hodges 2001, 206). Hodges argues that mass media and other nationally central influences have forced localities to adapt representation of their past.

The [late 1970s] plan was to mobilize the historic regional diversity of the French nation state just as it was popularly perceived to be threatened by the spectre of homogenization. Regional ways of life, many transformed beyond recognition by the upheavals of the post-war period, could be preserved, museumified, and effectively commoditized; the idiosyncrasies of local produce refashioned and repackaged; the burgeoning narratives of local and more professional historians drawn upon to provide depth to the differentiation of identities that would render each region unique, distinctive, and it was hoped, attractive to consumers. What is more, money could be made in the process. (Hodges 2001, 187)

For Ariège and the neighboring department of Aude, what this meant was the promotion of “Cathar Country.” Hodges relates that in Aude “during the early 1980s the departmental committee for tourism chose the story of the Cathars, which had acquired a symbolic resonance in the regionalist political climate of the time, to form the centerpiece of a new tourist initiative” (182). This decision spurred the creation of museums and other cultural programming. It also created new opportunities for local food producers. Hodges’s article reveals deep-seated local resentment toward a local figure named Pierre Cadassus who managed to capitalize on these developments. Fascinatingly, local opposition to the business model embraced by Cadassus (such as regional produce boutiques) was not based in any perception of corruption or wrongdoing, but rather a “reluctance to commoditise intimately valued features of one’s social world for the sake of extra cash” (207). In this instance, even a tourism industry built to celebrate local culture proved socially divisive.

Hodges examines how France demarcates past and present in the context of the country’s patrimonial promotion programs:

One encounters a composite of outlooks that incorporate both a sense of the past as a thing to be possessed, and that ‘belongs’ to the organic community of the village; a sense of the past’s identification with a ‘place’ separated by historical rupture and the passing of chronological time from the present; and a notion that its traces (ruins) are still accessible via local memories and associated artefacts,

but are threatened with disappearance. The members thus conceive of the past as ‘completed’, set off as a ‘foreign country’ from a ‘present’ that is qualitatively different, in a modernist vision of ruptured history. (Hodges 2011, 359)

The type of ahistorical reasoning described by Hodges, in which the past becomes a “foreign country<sup>5</sup>,” has inherent intellectual hazards by conflating celebration of past regional achievements with present space for self-determination and enforcing an ethnographic perspective on rural life. It is worth noting that the village in the department of Aude that Hodges studies has, like communities in Ariège, seen its practice of traditional livelihoods drastically decline through recent generations. Some good fortune has come from this change, but it has spread unevenly and therefore divisively. This outcome was all but certain to Villepontoux and Rayna Reiter, anthropologists studying the effects of increasing infiltration of tourism through the 1970s.

### *Limits to Growth*

According to Villepontoux, in the case of Valloire “the local authorities are desperately trying to prevent more locals from getting involved in tourism. Nevertheless, many are offering rental accommodations and even more want to get into the business” (Villepontoux 1981, 221). The anxiety on the part of local authorities was well founded for two important reasons related to village affairs.

First, “Few locals understand that the village has limited tourist capacities. There is deep concern among those who know that the housing boom has been expanding over the last 5 years more rapidly than the ski facilities” (ibid.). Such a situation means that not only would the tourism economy result in dependency on urban customers, but that it was on course to bust.

The second reason is social, rather than economic. As an anthropologist, Villepontoux was interested in the Valloire development case because it revealed tangible effects of world systems on the village scale. It was not simply that Valloire replaced agriculture with tourism; the new ski industry created a small, connected, privileged cohort that threatened community life.

Rayna Reiter's 1973 dissertation offers a detailed study of the political and social divisions created by the tourism industry in two French villages. She argues that Socialist policies neglected the household scale in villages in favor of nationally oriented reforms, and that as a result tourism dollars were shaping village life without adequate administrative intervention. The haphazard introduction of the tourism industry resulted in a situation where some businesses were monetized (and for that matter, flush) and others were still operating on a barter system. Equally serious is the impact of tourism on labor. Reiter argues that tertiary sector service jobs were considered good for pocket money, but were not considered an appropriate livelihood for an adult supporting a family—out-migration was a natural response.

On the land management side, wealthy urbanites were snatching up lakefront property, and farmers felt compelled to protest a planned hydroelectric dam. In explaining changes in land management priorities, Reiter attempts to integrate population changes, mechanization of agriculture, and changing, intensifying urban-rural relations. What she is observing is a process that was called modernization, and following the work of world systems theorists, globalization. She acknowledges this, writing that the "local economy is a dependent variable in an equation written at the national and international levels" (218).

Villepontoux suggests that in addition to internal divisions, relations with outside areas were affected by tourism's promise of revenue. The tourism industry's growth encouraged "a perpetuation of the practice of defining the position of elected political officials in terms of what is best for local interests, rather than what the government or its regional representatives have in mind" (219). He argues that local officials act as beneficially mediating forces "as modernization proceeds" (*ibid.*). He also argues that with tourism growth comes "continued cultural differentiation between the local population and the incoming tourists" (*ibid.*). The strengthened role of local officials as mediators, combined with cultural differentiation along local lines, creates a political climate resistant to "outsider"-led development efforts.

Ideally, Ariège would build out temporally rather than spatially (both Villepontoux and Reiter argue for this). The summer boom and the winter ski pickup in visitors offer young people opportunities that simply do not exist year round. And for mid-career workers, the available work at any time of year is no opportunity at all. Since at least the late 1970s, those studying village and town tourist dynamics have known of the need to "add a season" to tourist flows. The ski industry accomplished this, but the jobs it created were temporary and low-wage. Telecommuting has not picked up as much slack as might have been hoped, and the rail spine serves commuters to Pamiers or larger cities to the north as well as can be expected. Isolated infrastructure projects alone are not enough to connect the region to new types of employment.

Food production, meanwhile, is perhaps less important to the local economy than the appearance of food production. The agrotourism of Ariège raises the question: What does it mean when outside appreciation for a region's way of life contributes to the end of



that way of life\*? Urban centers in France have centuries' experience in developing ideologies and capital structures to control their hinterlands. It is worth examining the ways in which current tourism and the status quo-preserving policies of agricultural subsidy and cultural preservation funding are another iteration of that process.

Writing of the last few decades of Pyrenean development, Vaccaro and Beltran argue that “the implementation of protected areas and ski resorts affects space more than specific resources. It consequently resulted in territorial appropriation and urbanization of the landscape for consumptive purposes” (Vaccaro and Beltran 2007, 264). The theme of countryside as urban amenity is complex; their move away from “specific resources” to “space” similarly invites complicated debate. For now it is enough to note that their argument frames development as a primarily internal/external dynamic. In their opinion, “the goal may be conservation or speculation, but in both cases territory is set apart for new uses and local development ensues” (ibid.). They identify two significant negative outcomes that typify externally driven, post-industrial development: investment dependence and small second-home villages “mainly characterized by empty houses and an aging population” (265).

What unifies the interests of tourism and second home speculators and conservationists in the Pyrenean context is the desire to preserve the visible landscape. Vaccaro and Beltran write, “To maintain a protected landscape is to keep it stable in a desirable condition. This need to freeze the ecological situation of a landscape, combined with the obligation of parks, as public policies, to divulgate, to communicate with their

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\* Julie Pagis offers an insightful ethnography of GMO protestors arrested in Ariège in 2001. Her analysis reveals that few of those arrested were from Ariège.

constituency, points to the concept of ‘museization’” (267). They see ecotourism as a “development tool that may provide legitimacy to the conservation process,” and go so far as to draw comparisons between such protected landscapes and cultural museums (ibid.). Heritage tourism relies on both types of amenities in rural areas. Vaccaro and Beltran point to a tension in agency between grassroots representations of heritage and the imposed expectations of outsiders.

### *Narrative and Nourriture*

Jean Duruz dissects the genre of current travel writing that apotheosizes farmers and farm culture, finding that in the venue of the farmers market, it is not always clear what is for sale. Duruz writes

Commodification, indeed a form of consumer cannibalism, is invoked by this parade of peasants in nature—the Rousseauian fantasy of the simple (unhidden?) life, at one with the earth and the cycles of the seasons. And under the Tuscan sun, as armchair travelers, tourists, or even as peripatetic residents, we are able to purchase these still lives as indeed “still”—lives drawn in service of Western romances of longing and loss. In these circumstances, ethnicity, as emblematic of difference, becomes more than a spice; it becomes a staple of the cosmopolitan experience and appetite. (Duruz 2004, 431—432)

In the farmers markets, the aggrandizing accounts of local history proffered by tourist offices, and in the many summer and autumn festivals throughout the region one can sometimes observe identity on display and for sale, rather than simply lived<sup>6</sup>. The “commodification” of daily life described by Duruz, to the extent that it takes place in Ariège, is in response to the “new tastes” of environmentally conscious France. Not only the fruits of the landscape, but also the methods of their production and harvest, have become what Furlough might describe as a packaged “consumer commodity.”

Rural tourism as a consumer commodity has undergone many changes over the last 150 years: from nineteenth-century adventuring and spa visits, to stays in rustic cabins, to void-like resorts, to local heritage and traditional agriculture. The economic structures that make production of that commodity a viable economic choice, and determine who provides and consumes it, have undergone relatively little change over the same span of time.

Writing about the experience of visiting farmers markets leads naturally to a kind of rhapsodic nostalgia, whereas frank remembrances should more accurately include the almost hostile milling near the lowest-priced eggs, the sometimes wilted or rotted produce tucked into the piles on long tables, and the expertly deployed local elbows. It is understandable that this kind of exposure to the reality of food as a perishable—and perished—product, and to the dancehall closeness (but not conviviality) of farmers market shopping is refreshing to some who have spent a lifetime shopping in sepulchral Safeway stores.

John Frow argues that in the nineteenth century there emerged “a new discipline of connoisseurship for the eye, centering on the cultivation and display of ‘taste,’” (Frow 1991, 143). Frow outlines the ways in which Heidegger’s concerns with the intrinsic, and a kind of Warholian playfulness with commodity and image coincide with European observational science to create a new sensibility, whose “conception of the aesthetic later broadens to take in landscape and cityscape: not just pictures but the picturesque, now integrated into a more general economy of looking” (144). He notes that John Urry has describes this rather complicated idea as the “tourist gaze” (ibid.). The specific semiotic

processes by which this “gaze” operates are less important than understanding that visual appeal is now effectively a commodity.

In practice, the landscape surrounding Foix represents planning choices that carry consequences. The development of landscape aesthetics is important to grasp in itself, but also for its role in determining outcomes in conversations about what kinds of place a community wants to create. The preservation of a picturesque landscape, such as that found in Ariège, can foster, under the right circumstances, an economy much like that found in timber country, or in mineral rich areas.

## 5 CONCLUSION

As connoisseurs of places, geographers, as a tribe, are naturally repulsed when we sniff something in the wind that might make the place we came so far to know become more like the place from which we came. We are often quick to identify with the underdog, and it is the rare researcher who, work done, having left the forest, city, or cluster of villages where they attempted to extract some useful knowledge, is without hopes for that place or private opinions about what is happening there.

And I cannot be the only geographer whose daydreams about an unfamiliar place preceded my urge to analyze it. It would seem that in the process of having one's curiosity piqued about a place, coming to know it well, and then leaving it behind to mull over one's discoveries, that wisps of exoticism and nostalgia—things which academics wish to avoid—will inevitably creep in.

Travelers, all with different vantage points, are courted by a travel industry that is skilled in promising something other than what is found at home. For places like Ariège, this means that framing the region in a way that resonates with city people and other outsiders is essential to maintaining a lucrative stream of visitors.

A place as beautiful as Ariège, with ruins from various centuries variously taking pride of place or languishing unremarked, can be deadly to linear thought and rigorous analysis. This thesis is not about exoticism and nostalgia, but it is important to take a moment to acknowledge my vantage point as a twenty-first century American writing about an old part of Europe.

As such, I run the risk of being a kind of time traveling carpetbagger or Monday morning quarterback. I attempt to manage that risk throughout this thesis by placing my research in its proper context—that of the curious outsider.

### *Current Approaches*

The Landscape Convention is a framework that allows communities and planners to weigh changes to the built environment using disparate criteria such as heritage value and economic potential. It is a tool that guides how abstract principles and values manifest in the built environment.

What are needed are several more frameworks like the Landscape Convention that can address the challenge of keeping the wealth generated by developing a rural community within that community, and ensuring that local stakeholders have a seat at the table during development debates. Or, more broadly, what is needed are more mechanisms to apply the best regional thinking to the systems that shape regions.

Most aspects of Ariège's experience are the result of global processes, and have parallels wherever small towns are deciding whether and how to grow. This phenomenon has encouraged many researchers (including this one) to focus on the structure of development dilemmas as much as the particulars of a given case.

The best scale of analysis for drawing meaningful conclusions is not uniform across chapters of this thesis. Because even some purely local effects say something important about the modern economic system, and because national and E.U. policies can change what a small farming operation plants, it is important to move between scales throughout the thesis.

*Past and Future*

The towns and villages that appear in this thesis were settled hundreds of years ago. Visitors are drawn to them today because they are seen as a heritage left over from a time when French society had a stronger connection to the land. In medieval times, however, this area was at the frontier of the French feudal system<sup>1</sup>. Rural people resisted and modified the expanding church and state that enveloped them. Cheyette writes, “Looking at the way field tracks of Languedocian villages take their starting points at the gates of village walls, one can almost imagine that these too were originally settled by some seigneurial land developer” tilling lands granted by a bishop (Cheyette 1977, 199).

The villages themselves were something of an innovation when they were first settled. Cheyette argues that “the behavior both of population and the economy after this creation occurred suggest strongly that this new social form should be considered a technological innovation, moving the possibilities of productivity to new levels” (205). Even in clusters of a few hundred people, urbanization was at its beginning linked to economic productivity.

In short order, these small settlements received economic imperatives from distant sources of power:

In an effort to encourage economic expansion during the Middle Ages, kings and feudal lords granted forest land to villages. Villagers, in turn, converted much of these areas into cropland. The remaining forest land remained in their hands. Far from being a free for all, use rights were allocated by village councils. This system of collective ownership promoted a subsistence economy; it succeeded insofar as it provided the locality with a reliable supply of fuel and agricultural product. It is thus an example of a householding economy. According to modern private landowners, who value growth as the greatest good, collective ownership

was quite stagnant. But judged by its own standards, the system showed a pervasive dynamism. (Sarles 2006, 574)

At the risk of drawing an essentialist argument, I suggest that there is something about hilly areas that makes them the ones who put the “uneven” in “uneven development.” Small communities found dubious benefits in the introduction of rail, the expansion of the highway system, and of new forms of agricultural technology. In the present, in places like Ariège, new high-tech industries close by seem to be leaving some local communities behind.

I want to close on a brighter note than one might expect, from the preceding catalog of policy failures and discredited ideologies that form the bulk of this thesis. In CAP’s shift away from growth and toward sustainability, and in France’s efforts to place mediating frameworks such as SCOT and PLU between small communities and big ideas, I argue that it is possible to observe institutional maturation. It is possible to see a policy regime that considers some aspects of modernization to have reached the end of their usefulness, and that has acknowledged the issues raised by the environmental movement and those concerned with cultural heritage.

Further cause for optimism is the fact that cultural preservationists, despite the upheaval of modernization, still see something worth preserving in the landscape of the French countryside (Figure 11). The de-emphasis of agricultural production indicates the possibility of a new realism in economic planning, an awareness of the inherent difference between city and country, as well as their interconnectedness. It is not unreasonable to conclude that some institutions have emerged from all these reforms at least slightly wiser. Ariège’s development conundrum, and those like it, might ultimately



be resolved not through increasingly sophisticated planning, but through revisiting the question of whether more planning is needed.

Finally, the recent recession has brought the garden vegetable plot to the city, along with new attention to and interest in food production. CAP administrators are being sent on farm work experience programs, and researchers like me are interested in better understanding how urban cores shape rural peripheries. Rather than making these landscapes exotic, the current effort is to make them familiar. I argue that in this era of growing population and resource scarcity, there is awareness that village landscapes contain a blueprint for a “technology” that could once again reshape society, and that the village might again be the frontier.



*Figure 11: Foix as seen from a hill to the north*

## Endnotes

### Chapter 1

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