Arenas and resources of the right to the village: the underpinnings of emancipation in Western countryside in the 21ˢᵗ century

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Abstract

Lefebvre's call for a right to the city was made in a particular historical moment, known as the early worldwide expansion of industrial capitalism and the urbanization of societies. The questions raised by the concept were, and are still, addressed primarily in the field of urban studies, even though the author stated that they are not tied to a particular spatial materiality. We explore the specific rural morphological and social characteristics of contemporary Western countryside that allow individuals to initiate their self-empowerment and emancipation initiatives. This leads us to consider some specific "countryside" conditions for these kinds of movements. The possibility of using these characteristics as levers for emancipation is currently threatened by the contemporary capitalist rural economy and should be protected by a new kind of right, the right to the emancipation resources that are built in villages.

Keywords: Right to the city, community-based development project, local development, emancipation, resources, rural citizenship.

Introduction

Within rural studies, explicit references to the notion of "right to the city" are scarce, as is the transposition of related questions (Barraclough, 2013; Banos & Candau 2006). Has the expression, with its inherent semantic attachment to the city, deterred researchers from experimenting with it in this way? Some have argued that the concept is unsuited to the rural context. For a long time, the tenets of rural and urban studies within geography were built in opposition to each other, and thus ended up developing relatively autonomous theoretical tools and approaches. However, the growing urbanization of populations and the reshaping of relations between cities and the countryside have reduced these cleavages, as researchers' theoretical objects or references gradually converge (Mathieu 1990 & 1998). As with other Western countries, French rural areas have undergone profound changes, starting with the strengthening grip of capitalist mechanisms as observed in the cities. In parallel, various struggle, protest and mobilization phenomena are also manifesting in these areas, reflecting the transformations affecting them.

We here investigate the morphological and social characteristics of rural areas that can promote the emancipation and empowerment of their inhabitants. Boltanski (2011: 155) argues that emancipation implies a better distribution of possibilities of action and "*open[ing] up to people the possibility of having some purchase on the collectives of which they are component parts*", starting with institutions. It can be obtained by giving critique and its institutions some purchase on reality. In keeping with this definition, we understand emancipation as the process whereby an individual or a group extracts themselves/itself from relations of domination to be able to co-construct the spaces of everyday life, in all their dimensions. It thus articulates the threefold perspective of liberation, capacity building and potential to act. Empowerment refers to a particular trajectory of emancipation, with a more firmly asserted political and critical content. It is a process whereby social groups constitute "*non-capitalist, egalitarian and solidaristic forms of political, social, and economic organization through a combination of resistance and creation*" (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006: 730). Ensuring the reproduction of resources promoting emancipation and empowerment and access to them constitutes a "right of

citizenship"[1] applied "to the village", in an understanding similar to Lefebvre's notion of "right to the city", the individual's right to contribute to the construction of their living space, to shape it and derive meaning from it. The first part of this article investigates the content of the Lefebvrian right to the city to gain theoretical and methodological insight into the drivers of emancipation. Looking at the "local development" movement (as community-based development project), the second part studies the initiatives and mobilizations of rural populations, through resistance but also creativity. In an attempt to summarize these theoretical and empirical findings, the last part outlines the emancipation processes at play in some of the countryside of France and Western Europe over the last fifty years, and sheds light on the arenas and resources that drive them, as well as the trends that undermine them. It shows that rural areas, like cities, can be conducive to emancipation when local actors mobilize to that end.

1. The "right to the city" as a claim to emancipation

The first part of this article does not seek to determine what Lefebvre's position on the possibility of a "right to the village" would have been through a reinterpretation of his work. Rather, we wish to show how certain concepts and ideas he developed can be used to structure reflection complementing (rather than furthering) the Lefebvrian approach to spaces of emancipation.

The motives of struggle

Lefebvre (1968) links the right to the city to the transformations undergone by cities due to their prominent role in the expansion of the capitalist economy. In Greco-Roman Antiquity, they are said to have had characteristics that rendered them conducive to citizens participating in the production of their spaces, thereby facilitating the emancipation of the people (with its known limits linked to the

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[1] Understood as participation in political life, associated with the recognition of territorial belonging. According to the Trésor de la langue française informatisé, the droit de cité means 1- "enjoying all the rights of a citizen, of a member of a city, with the ensuing privileges", and 2- "In the republics of Antiquity, the small size of the territory meant that each citizen had significant personal political importance. (…)".

conception of political rights in Antiquity). However, while aspects of this urban citizenship were perpetuated or reconfigured in Medieval and Renaissance Europe, the rise of industrial capitalism and the submission of urban forms and populations to its imperatives have hampered this emancipation. Having become loci of deprivation of basic rights, pre-empted by economic interests, cities have also become ideal places for political struggle and social revolution (Harvey 2011).

The main aim of these struggles is not access to the cities in their current materiality, but rather the right to an "*urban life with all its services and advantages*" (Lefebvre 1991: 36). Lefebvre therefore does not associate the "urban fact" itself with a particular physical and material morphology. Instead, he prefers a social approach (Barraclough 2013) which he links to practices and ways of thinking (Lefebvre 1968: 74). He thus gives great importance to lived experience and everyday life not only in self-actualization but also in the expression of citizenship. For him, beyond the question of services, the urban ideal reflects a mental and social configuration: that of simultaneity, of gathering, able to emancipate individuals in society. In his attempt to conceive of an urban ideal free of its contemporary flaws, Lefebvre thus stressed the idea that the space produced for and by urban life must first and foremost be the "work" stemming from the search for emancipation. This work can materialize through multiple vectors of accomplishment, like art or heritage, but can also simply be expressed in the everyday framework of the practices and aspirations of human groups, particularly of the "working class".

The city appears to be evolving and its plasticity ensures the possibility of a right to the city, calling for consideration of the "*practical-sensitive realities that would allow for it to be materialized in space, with an adequate morphological and material basis*" (Lefebvre 1968: 94). This concrete base allows for an infinity of possible configurations, insofar as inhabitant-users become emancipated by designing the practical-sensible forms of their everyday lives themselves. In absolute terms, the right to the city could perfectly extend to any society marked by urbanity, irrespective of place and socio-spatial configurations. Both Lefebvre and Harvey maintain that the greatest threats weighing on the existence of urban life are the commodification and industrialization of the world. "*The world of commodity has its*

own immanent logic, that of money and unlimited generalized exchange value. Such a form, that of exchange and equivalence, is totally indifferent to the urban form" (Lefebvre 1968: 79). Observing that "*exchange value and the generalization of commodity, through industrialization, tend to destroy the city and urban reality by subordinating them*", Lefebvre (1968: 4) points out that these are currently becoming "*the havens of use value, seeds of a virtual predominance and of a revalorization of use*".

One of the objectives of urban struggles must be to acquire and ensure the right to create and shape the city. "*The right to the city therefore does not amount to a right of individual access to the resources embodied by the city: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city so as to make it better match our deepest desire. Additionally, it is more of a collective right than an individual one since, to change the city, collective power must necessarily be exerted on urbanization processes*" (Harvey 2011: 8). Reading *Le Droit à la ville* ultimately leads us to target more specifically four dimensions of social life necessary to fuel these struggles and support emancipation: **inhabitation** "*involving participation in social life*" (Semmoud 2013), **encounter** (Lefebvre's *socialization*, in other words the fact of living together in society), **work** as the end-goal of participation in and actualization of public life, and finally **appropriation** which expresses the possibility given to all to participate in this public life, independently of property and associated powers.

Why has the right to the city "ignored" the countryside?

Although Lefebvre sought to free his analyses of material spatial categories to link it to lived experiences and social constructs, his reflection still revolves around specifically urban environments. Yet the *praxis* associated with the right to the city can very well be expressed in spaces which we continue to call rural, especially as they are in turn overtaken by urbanity. Barraclough (2013: 2) thus considers that "[...] *the right to the city might be created anywhere and everywhere, including the places we imagine to be 'rural'*". Whilst in principle, the notion of right to the city has universalist aspirations, the categories "city" and "urbanity" were built through a historical retrospective on urban attributes and in opposition to the countryside.

Rural space is consequently excluded from the right to the city for reasons closely linked to the city-countryside opposition. Thus Lefebvre[2] saw the "traditional" rural, unlike the ancient city, as incompatible with the possibility of emancipation, insofar as peasant societies were under the yoke of social control through acquaintanceship, closed in on themselves, clientelist and conservative. Such countryside was also marked by an agrarian, cyclical space-time, juxtaposing specific local particularities (Lefebvre 1970). Yet the major hypothesis developed in *La revolution urbaine* (1970) concerns the disappearance of this "traditional" rural, with the expansion of the urban on all scales, and its generalization in the North as well as the South. Far from regretting it, Lefebvre argued that this disappearance opened the prospect of social change that could extend the right to the city to all spaces worldwide: "*Whether the urban fabric closes in on the countryside and what survives of peasant life is irrelevant, so long as 'the urban', the place of encounter, the prioritization of use value, embedded in the space of a time promoted to the rank of supreme good among all goods, finds its morphological base, its practical-sensitive materialization*" (Lefebvre 1970: 108).

Lefebvre however remained pessimistic as to the possibilities of change in the countryside, particularly since he rightly noted that rural space was already affected by modernization, which did not seem to offer more opportunities as it turned that space into one purveying resources for the dominant classes: farm production resources with the disappearance of peasant societies under the impact of agricultural modernization, as well as consumption resources for urban leisure and the establishment of suburbs (Harvey 2011: 41). Lefebvre did not perceive the arrival of new populations linked with the urbanization of the countryside as sign of the possibility to claim the right to urban life, given this integration of the countryside into the globalization process (Lefebvre 1968: 107). He saw the residential strategies of suburbanites or neo-rurals as counterproductive processes that merely reproduce relations of domination, through the spread of capitalism. Although they did partially

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[2] H. Lefebvre even started with rural sociology work, partly discussed or gathered in his book *Du rural à l'urbain* (1970), in which he addressed the expansion of modernity and overcoming the old city/countryside conflict.

attest to a rejection of the practical-sensitive forms of the capitalist city and its nuisances, Lefebvre considered that they also signalled these populations giving up on protest and embracing the transformation of the urban environment[3].

The change – still in its infancy as he wrote *Le Droit à la ville* – conveyed by the social renewal associated with leisure and re-urbanization practices, only introduced another form of domination, by the city on the countryside. This completely altered rural spaces by bringing in the commodification of space and of social relations. Urban practices in the countryside would thus not accommodate this urbanity discussed by Lefebvre. On a political level, he associated new customs in rural spaces with the dominant classes, which he situated alongside the oppressors. On a social and economic level, the long period of exodus which hit most of these spaces suggested that they no longer harboured the industrial bourgeoisie nor the working class world. Lefebvre therefore did not consider them as a site of struggle between proletarian-workers and the dominant classes.

2. "Local development", the arena of emancipation in rural spaces

The French countryside has evolved considerably since 1970, and no longer matches the image Lefebvre had of it. The erosion of farm employment has continued, to the benefit of the manufacturing and especially the service sectors (Mischi 2013). Precarious employment and unemployment are now as present as in the cities, if not more so. Rural communities, destructured by the disappearance of smallholder farming, have rebuilt themselves by welcoming new inhabitants, partly from the middle and working classes (Gilbert 2010). Their lifestyle is characterized by daily commutes and longer trips for some of them, and by their precarious counterpart, captivity, for others (IGAS 2009; Rougé 2007; Gambino 2010), such that they fall into the category of the dominated. Moreover, the expectations surrounding the amenities, the environment and the diversified uses of rural space do not

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[3] "*Through surprising detours – nostalgia, tourism, the return to the heart of the traditional city, the call of existing or newly developed centralities – this right (to the city) is slowly evolving. The claim to nature, the desire to enjoy it diverts from the right to the city. This last claim is expressed indirectly, as a tendency to flee the deteriorated and non-renewed city, alienated urban life, before truly existing. The need for and the right to nature conflict with the right to the city, without actually being able to evade it*" (Lefebvre 1968: 107).

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antagonistically oppose urban populations and rural communities through processes of domination, but are informed by profound, socially and spatially diffuse changes in values and customs (Mormont 2009). By ridding themselves of traditional social relations and the control these implied on individuals, and also by integrating the dynamics of capitalism more directly, the rural spaces of the second half of the 20th century moved away from the vision Lefebvre had of them. The profound changes in their social structures, their customs and their economy, with the redefinition of power relations this implies, allow for the ideas formulated in *Le Droit à la Ville* to be transposed to these rural areas.

These processes of rural social and functional re-composition have sometimes led to the emergence of emancipatory movements conveying inhabitants' claim to the right to choose their lifestyles and activities by extracting themselves from the mechanisms of (institutional, economic or social) domination in which they are embedded. These movements can be grouped under the generic term "local development", a term which here refers to their political protest dimension, their functioning through citizen projects and their bottom-up construction (community-based development project)[4]. In this way, the first "local development" initiatives that emerged in France in the late 1960s can be considered to have expressed the same desire for emancipation as the social struggles that informed the theorization of the right to the city. Far from being confined to French rural spaces, similar approaches appeared in other Western countries, in struggling countryside areas marked by the same kind of journeys, for example in Quebec (Joyal 2012) or in English-speaking countries (Mc Carthy 2006, Hess 2009) with "*community-based economic development*". Identical experiments have spread throughout Europe (Italian Alps,

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[4] This expression is often criticized for having blurry content and outlines. It is often used with a rather institutional connotation, referring to local development strategies and to the support systems, particularly economic and political, devised in the 1970s in several countries to accompany them. The economic reference relates to the diversification of enrichment of economic and social activities across a territory through the mobilization and coordination of its resources and energies (Greffe, 2002). While there is a real proximity of meaning and use between these different definitions, we here refer to the spirit of community-based development project, conveyed by the emergence of citizen-actors of development (Teisserenc 1994).

Tyrol, Catalan Pyrenees, etc.) in response to situations of marginalization, with the pioneer initiatives gradually being relayed by regional policies.

The drivers of "local development", which Jollivet (1985) qualified as a social movement to highlight the extent of the transformations induced in the countryside, thus lie in the desire to react to the devitalization of rural territories excluded from the economic momentum of the post-war years and from "rural modernization"[5]. The population exodus, particularly of the youth, the withdrawal of the industrial fabric from rural towns and the growing precariousness of the most fragile individuals impacted on the countryside areas sidelined from this model to various degrees. Subsequently, in the 1970s and 1980s the crisis of the Fordist model of development reinforced an understanding of rural space that conflicted with that of "liberal productivism" (Mathieu 1990). The initiative of the Mené in Brittany, which formed a "country" in 1965 (Gontcharoff 2009) and inaugurated the movement in France, primarily claimed the right to continue to exist as a lived territory, and thus not to be exterminated by domination processes gradually devitalizing it (exodus, closures and relocations, isolation). From this perspective, "local development" projects thus provide arenas, in the sense of sites "*of real confrontation between social actors interacting around common stakes*", within which the actors confront their positions and renegotiate power relations (Olivier de Sardan 1995: 179). They therefore constitute emancipating processes, coupled with a claim to autonomy. Three characteristics of the general spirit of "local development" reflect all these facets of the populations' aspiration to emancipation.

"Local development" as taking charge of local issues

As a collective and endogenous initiative, the "local development" approach is both reactive (resistance – refusing relegation) and proactive (creation – building the project of the territory), geared towards the production of strategies of adaptation to change. The call for wide-ranging social and popular mobilization (Houée 1996) and building a collective and bottom-up capacity for initiative (Gontcharoff 2009) directly

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[5] The local development movement also concerned many urban spaces "in crisis" through the urban social development initiatives that shared its philosophy.

draws on the discourses of "inhabiting" and "encounter" underpinning the right to the city. The ambition to intersect occupations and categories of inhabitants, and the objective of structuring a long-term form of local coordination, both point in the same direction. From them stem the desire for the collective to drive initiative and innovation, whilst defending the heritage and not only the social, economic and cultural but also the natural capital of the territory that it embodies. The "re-appropriation" of places and of levers of action on the future ensues. Finally, "local development", both as an action collective and an arena for debate, gives shape to the construction of "the work" through the prospect of the "territorial project" central to its method.

In this spirit, the original principle was to give free reign to local collective construction, free expression and concerted decision making. The projects exceed a strictly economic goal since priorities, both in the objectives and the actions, are negotiated according to the aspirations of local actors. The ideal (symbolic, cultural or political) dimension is also present in development projects often concerned with identity and culture, associating different ways of being and living, different dimensions that form an inherent part of everyday life. While it partially draws on autochthonous resources (Retière 2003), the claim to a right to development, and in turn to conceive of new models developed on a local scale through projects underpinned by civic participation, has also been closely associated with the renewal of rural populations. This dynamic has benefitted in particular from the arrival of populations which to a large extent claim to marginalize themselves from society in order to build concrete alternatives, defined in an autonomous and original way. Following the work of Hervieu-Léger and Hervieu (1979) on neo-rurals, some authors have shown that in the areas that have welcomed significant contingents of these protester settlements (like Ardèche, the Cévennes, the Baronnies and the Diois in the Pre-Alps or the Corbières in the Aude and the Couserans in Ariège), these new populations have been relays for peasant societies and have helped the autochthonous populations to mobilize. In these cases, they have even served as cornerstones to destabilize the traditional structures of rural patriarchal power and social hierarchy. Likewise, they have been at the forefront of the elaboration of

development projects, directly taking part in negotiations with high-ranking administrative officials and contributing to the visibility of rural spaces and of their inhabitants' expectations (Cognard 2011).

"Local development" as a social movement thus partly relies on forces of protest that contribute to fuelling and renewing its capacities. More generally, newcomers have contributed not only "*to gradually rearticulating the relations between local and central power*" (Jollivet 1985: 13) but also to redistributing power at local level, the nature of which is changing. For Jollivet, these power struggles signal "*the new inhabitants' entry into the local society*" and their involvement. They have led to the creation of new political arenas by making explicit, enacting and negotiating the local project, previously implicit and embedded in clientelist relations. Responsibility and involvement in different local arenas thus offer an opportunity to create or reinforce inhabitants' capacities to act on the construction of their everyday spaces.

"Local development" as liberation from relations of domination

Rural "local development" initiatives moreover reflect struggles against the reproduction of relations of domination, which in urban settings had constituted one of the markers of the claim to the "right to the city". These struggles target class relations, capitalist imperatives' stranglehold on countryside areas' functional purposes and on rural productive models. The claims made and the reactions to the consequences of rural modernization rapidly became the focus of many studies, including that by Eizner and Hervieu (1979) on the working class world of the rural industries. More recently, Mischi (2013) attested to the revival of the levers of class struggle, based on his work on the local scale as an arena of rural working class political engagement faced with the "*demobilizing effects of their cultural and economic domination by employers*".

As Roullaud recently pointed out (2013), it is also through peasant struggles and trade union demands that the most emblematic initiatives have been expressed, sometimes articulating "classical" mobilization such as strikes in agricultural working class environments (Décosse 2013). Mobilization on the Larzac plateau, with the struggle against the military base extension project and direct land occupation

(Roulaud 2013), currently echoed in the ZADists' action against the construction of an international airport near Nantes, is well known (see Pailloux's article in this issue). There are also protests more directly targeting certain corridor infrastructures (TGV train line in the Basque Country, large mountain rail tunnels). They reject an exogenous appropriation of space for projects considered as vectors of major nuisance in the territories that are crossed through but derive few benefits from the infrastructure (Genovese 2012). Finally, looking at all the struggles attesting to contemporary social movements, Ripoll highlights that after waning in the mid-20th century, "*peasant struggles* [including the Via Campesina movement] *are* [...] *a pillar of the struggle against capitalist or 'neoliberal' globalization*". Note also that the forms of struggle, as Woods (2011) has stressed, draw on the modalities of expression and radicalism of urban movements, leading to a much clearer opposition between stakeholders than previously. As they gain visibility, they are also being more forcefully repressed, whereas until the 1990s they enjoyed a certain degree of tolerance by the public authorities. The renewal of the forms of struggle has thus gone hand in hand with an emancipation of the organizations traditionally representing corporatist interests in rural areas. These changes are often coupled with a rise in the radicalness of the protest movements and strong anti-capitalist stances.

Many rural areas are also becoming loci of collective appropriation of production tools, with some domains witnessing a significant rise in collective entrepreneurship in areas of activity related not only to farming and services but also to the manufacturing sector. These initiatives can serve as drivers in the reconstruction of local systems of small rural industry, as in the case of spinning in Archèche (Barras 2006) and of local wood processing businesses on the Millevaches plateau and in Ariège.

This dynamics is currently also supported by small rural collectives seeking to re-appropriate their local resource exploitation infrastructure with a view to steering the transition towards greater energy autonomy (Dodigny 2012) while building localized production systems (Tritz 2012). These struggles, which are reflected in other forms of collective action, go way beyond Nimby-type claims and issues of conflicts of use

(Woods 2003). They are catalysts and are intertwined with attempts to reorganize economic networks. The definition of the terms of the conflict and of its framework and the legitimization of positions act as processes which redefine positions, values and identities. These processes thus transform society and territory, around claims to and expressions on spaces, their uses and, ultimately, the different actors' relative positions. Conflicts have a transformative power, they transit between several scales of action and claims and, ultimately, they can reconfigure the local as much as they make the local a space of social transformation (Mormont 2006).

"Local development" as an empowerment process

Another lever of mobilization of "local development" relating to citizens' appropriation of space concerns the "galaxy" of initiatives of empowerment of productive and emancipating systems through alternative lifestyles. These are often closely linked to struggles of opposition, as in the case of the collective strategy surrounding the farmland and then civil society groupings of the "Terres du Larzac". This initiative highlights the local desire for endogenous management and development by gathering all the means of production (including those handed over by the State in 1981) with a view to establishing new farmers and avoiding farm concentration. For over thirty years this approach, underpinned by the spirit of solidarity funding, has ensured the pursuit of a regional project based on the diversification of activities and local solidarity (Terral 2011).

In parallel with initiatives to re-appropriate and revitalize local production systems, individuals' involvement in the production of their everyday space is highlighted by work on lifestyles, alternative habitat and what Halfacree (2007) calls the *radical rural*. On the scale of households, Pruvost's research (2013) on the environmental alternative particularly sheds light on the links between residential localization in rural areas and the individual and collective elaboration of empowerment strategies through over-investment in domestic self-production activities (food production for the home's everyday consumption, home construction/improvement, energy production). In this respect, the work of Mésini (2004, 2011) on mobile and

temporary dwellings is particularly echoed in this special issue "Right to the Village", since it explicitly raises the question of the right to these types of housing.

The resonance of these movements and of the arenas they have contributed to developing suggests that Lefebvre may have had an incomplete understanding of the transformations underway in the countryside. He perhaps under-estimated the existence of struggles against relations of domination, and claims to a better everyday life, which have actually been present for a long time (Roullaud 2013). Both Lefebvre and Harvey saw struggles for the right to the city as fundamentally anti-capitalist struggles. Do existing struggles in rural areas resembling a form of citizen emancipation and vocalization reflect the same sentiment? While their anti-capitalist dimension is asserted to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the context, most of these struggles and claims conflict with the organizing principles of neoliberal capitalism, be it on an economic, political or social level. This is for example the case of claims concerning the maintenance of services in rural areas, which refute the market and economies of scale imperatives adopted by many public services, denouncing the territorial inequalities they produce. High places of counter-globalization or even anti-capitalist protest have thus emerged (festivals, unofficial gatherings, counter-summits). The cases of the Larzac and of Notre-Dame des Landes exemplify this trajectory.

3. In search of the underpinnings of emancipation in rural areas

Just as Lefebvre asserted that urban centrality acted as a powerful catalyst of mobilization, the different elements raised above lead us to the following hypothesis: attributes specific to Western rural spaces exist today that are being shaped into emancipation resources, allowing for the right to the city to be adapted to a rural materiality. These resources, unstable and evolving as understood by Raffestin (1980), are economic and political stakes around which power relations are articulated, to appropriate them and participate in their very construction. The wealth and position of the actors, and their social capital (Bourdieu 1980), determine each one's capacity to intervene in the construction and distribution of these resources, and in the way they are valued (Ripoll and Tissot 2010). These

emancipation resources articulate social attributes (populations and their characteristics) and morphological attributes (landscapes, population) of the space. Their presence is however but a prerequisite, a medium for the deployment of emancipating processes which, to become effective, must still be claimed and implemented. We have attempted to formalize them in the table below, based on the literature and examples encountered. Drawing on Lefebvre's work, we have envisaged them for each of the customs or practices that constitute the right to the city, that is: inhabiting, appropriation, the work and encounter (Table 1). While these resources provide fertile ground for emancipation, their existence does not however attest to a generalized emancipation of rural populations: they remain unevenly distributed in space, just as they cannot be mobilized to this end by local actors.

Table 1 – Emancipation arenas and resources in rural space

Emancipation practice or use	Resources articulated to exercise these practices and customs	Attributes of rural space encouraging the development of these resources	Destructive or penalizing processes
Inhabitation	Diversity of uses of space Common or public spaces Spaces assumed to be "vacant" and available Availability and accessibility of services and infrastructure Free use (non-	Large proportion of open spaces (unbuilt but also boasting the attributed of traditional urban public space) Low population density ➔ less pressure on the use of services and the land resource	Commodification and specialization of uses Privatization and access restrictions or non-availability Integration of land and rural real estate into the cycles of capital reproduction (speculative investment) Shortage of space

	segregative economic aspect) Access to and availability of housing (low cost, vacant plot and houses, etc.)		allotted to housing through environmental protection zoning ➔ non-access (high prices, saturated housing stock, etc.)
Appropriation	"Decentralized" policy and political decision making, also replying on acquaintanceship	Small-sized local communities ➔ greater social proximity, lighter logistical burden of participation, greater "accountability" between individuals Weaker or more complex geographical proximities ➔ search for organizational proximities	Multiple relations of power and authority Political authoritarianism Clientelism
Work	Appropriation and management of heritage by inhabitant-users Norms constraining the use of space and its development (urban planning,	Distance/isolation ➔ development/reproduction of the competences of autonomous ways of life Higher cost of public	Construction of a normative framework to regulate uses based on the principles of sustainable development, economic

	environment) Recognition of individual or collective work	intervention per inhabitant ➔ other forms of social control (than coercion by the public authorities); development of individual initiatives Knowledge of the actions facilitated by acquaintanceship	streamlining or heritage protection ➔ heavy constraints on the use of space
Encounter	Social diversity Acquaintanceship "Public" spaces and convivial moments (celebrations, etc.)	Greater cultural, social and economic proximity ➔ collective behaviours encouraged Small-sized local communities = withdrawal into a more difficult social group ➔ need for "opportunistic" contact between groups Need for training to autonomy (distance and isolation) ➔ reproduction/constru	Social segregation, elitism Anonymity Individualism

		ction of social networks	

One of the major characteristics of emancipation processes is the fact of re-conquering the right to **inhabit** a space, which requires the creation of rights allowing each individual to express themselves and take part in shared decisions. This aspect, closely correlated to the question of access to housing and land, often raised by marginalized social groups, is one of the main challenges in the exercise of the right to the city in dense urban fabrics. Processes of economic and political exclusion of the populations that can no longer afford accommodation there unfold in these contexts. In contrast, the attributes of rural space are characterized by a larger proportion of open spaces, more approachable and often more accessible, at least outwardly (Le Caro 2002), and by a lower population density. This can translate into possibilities to create and access the resources of inhabitation, as attested to by informal dynamics in housing and the use of open spaces, but may also alleviate pressure on certain services, when these are present (Banos and Candau 2006). Thus, the non-built nature of the space affords the emergence of new spatial arrangements for social groups whose alternative involvement in a territory relies on reversible and/or ephemeral housing structures (reproduction of nomadic accommodation, caravans, light self-constructions, etc.), and often also on their mobility. The physical appropriation, even temporarily, of the place through inhabiting then becomes a form of protest against the rights of exclusivity of private property. Moreover, the proximity of resources for self-production, self-consumption or "*DIY*" (Weber 1989 cited in Pruvost 2013: 40) is keenly sought after by the alternative collectives founded on "*the idea that nature is a resource to 'work' and not to dominate*" (Pruvost 2013: 40). Leisure practices are also a constituent aspect of inhabitation fostered by the openness and low density of spaces, which often translates into free use and uncontrolled access. This is the case for instance with outdoor sporting activities (walking, swimming, hunting, etc.) or the different possibilities of use of "common" urbanized space such village squares, examples of agreed versatility of use.

Another fundamental modality of emancipation is access for all to political life, in the most direct way possible (**appropriation**). We know that a right ensuring this political participation was developed within citizen groups sharing a small and therefore sparsely populated geographical perimeter, which gave each citizen a strong personal political weight (the ancient "right of citizenship"). This major challenge to the functioning of the city is less acute in rural areas, owing to two of its constituent features: the low densities and the often very modest size of towns. In France, decentralization has thus allowed for this attribute of the countryside to be turned into an emancipation resource for certain social groups, since the greater proximity to public policy decision-making centres can effectively translate into citizens being able individually to weigh more heavily in political life. In this respect, town councils are becoming the best places to observe the re-composition of class relations in the French countryside (Gilbert 2010). Analysing rural workers' participation in local political life, J. Mischi (2013: 17) has more specifically highlighted the fact that "*the possibility to mobilize family and friend networks[6] provides resources to the working classes, allowing them to counter the demobilizing effects of their cultural and economic domination*". He also points out that this situation is reinforced by the distancing of the decision makers and managers of the large companies established in the countryside. The interdependence of social networks often associated with the low population density of rural areas, considered as a hindrance to the emancipation of individuals within "traditional" peasant societies, is becoming a valuable resource for social mobilization in the countryside of industrialized and decentralized countries.

The search for a right to the city has moreover highlighted the predominance of use value over exchange value, and thus the right to make space a collective **work** informed by its inhabitants' aspirations and possibilities of action. Urban planning, steered and legitimized by the State for a more efficient urban system, is perceived as one of the mediums of domination by the dominant classes. The cost of State action is however increasingly being assessed in relation to the number of

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[6] These are networks inherited from local belonging and therefore from the fact of being native to the village.

inhabitants concerned. For economic and practical reasons, the tight regulation of planning procedures and the verification of norm compliance primarily concern urban areas. In rural areas, distance or isolation coupled with often more pragmatic institutional action, have often resulted in less firm control over these aspects. Far from the loci of power, respect for rules involves localized social interactions more than the mobilization of public authority representatives' coercive power (Mouhanna 2011). These attributes become resources insofar as inhabitants have the possibility to build their projects with more leeway around rules and procedures (which does not however mean that they are absent). The question of housing and of the lifestyles that can be associated with it bear witness to the *de facto* flexibility that rural areas enjoy. Community projects and self-determined collectives have thus found more favourable settlement conditions in the countryside than in the city (isolation, space, tranquillity), and are contributing to creating "alternative" or "radical" rural localities (Halfacree 2007). Pruvost (2013: 39) has argued out that "*the fact of being able to enjoy a place affording a minimum self-production activity and choice of materials provides impetus to these trajectories in search of autonomy*". Likewise, Halfacree (2007: 132) has described "radical" localities he observed in rural England as the concrete form given by the members of these communities to the alternative life principles of "*low impact development (LID)*". At individual level, other forms of appropriation of space are emerging, as in the case of alternative habitat practices such as the construction of yurts, huts, *mazets* or moving habitats particularly involving travellers.

Finally, the facilitation of **encounters**, not only between individuals but also between social groups has long been central to the distinction between urbanity, synonymous with diversity, and rurality, perceived as still characterized by the remnants of the social structures of a bygone peasantry. Yet the dynamics of socio-spatial segregation in urban spaces (Brun and Rhein 1994; Harvey 1973) and the gradual disappearance of places of public conviviality as a result of their privatization or of urban densification, with open spaces being closed in some cases, and the normalization of their uses in others, tend to strongly reshape the possibilities of encounters in the cities. In certain countryside areas, however, repopulation,

organizational proximities and the persistence of public spaces open to non-market uses have fostered forms of social diversity and allowed them to function on an everyday basis (Gilbert 2010; Mischi 2013). Environmental alternative initiatives based on self-production rely, for example, on small-scale neighbourhood relations encouraging acquaintanceship and the appeal to individuals in the different areas of local life. These networks allow for the competences present locally to be mobilized to solve the various political and practical issues facing the groups. This participation encourages knowledge exchange, reveals individual abilities to the collective and, sometimes, encourages learning. This is the idea of the "*work collective which creates common sense of belonging*" (Pruvost 2013: 48). At the same time, the moments of rural sociability are persisting and experiencing a revival under the impetus of new country dwellers: heralding culture and heritage, they like to maintain or recreate its traditional markers such as village celebrations and demonstrations of know-how, while opening new perspectives with all kinds of cultural events.

The geographical areas of the initiatives taken towards autonomy and emancipation vary in size. Their limits depend on the relevant perimeter to allow for individuals' organization and expression in collective frameworks. But insofar as individuals claim active civic participation, or even a form of management autonomy, the size of the collectives is necessarily constrained by the context and available means to reach this objective. For rural spaces, at the time when Lefebvre was writing, the organizational scale corresponding to the *city* was that of the valley or the village. Today, social recomposition, the fragmentation of living environments, and their consequences on the perimeters of acquaintanceship and customs are leading to a wide variety of possible geographical areas: they could correspond to a village or town, including the countryside functionally and socially associated with it, or match the scale of the multiple forms of territorial belonging, provided they are representative of a collective and have room for autonomy to manage themselves.

Conclusion

With specific characteristics conducive to emancipation, rural areas are turning into a medium for many initiatives similar to what the right to the city seeks to defend. While in the last two sections we emphasized the construction of resources promoting this emancipation in the countryside, it is important to point out that they are neither present nor mobilized in all places. It would therefore be wrong to think that all rural populations are "emancipated". Moreover, we cannot conclude without mentioning the emergence of new destructive processes (Table 1). Here we will mention two in particular. First, the emergence of a speculative rural housing market: the creation of a shortage of building land (through zoning and normative protection) in the name of sustainable development and of the protection of certain areas with a high environmental or landscape value. Second, the de-qualification of rural (and suburban) lifestyles in comparison with the "sustainability model" promoted by the "dense city", in part due to the high levels of consumption of artificialized spaces and to the extreme dependence on cars. This de-qualification could challenge the legitimacy of the right to inhabit certain areas with a very low density, in the name of cost streamlining and the reallocation of public service resources (Hilal et alii 2013). These destructive processes, among others, raise the question of the existence of law regulating them and of the possibility to build and protect emancipation resources "in the village".

To overcome the semantic block linked to the use of the term "right to the city" in village configurations, it should again be pointed out that Lefebvre gave the latter a primarily social – and not spatial – meaning, actually designating a right to *urbanity* and the *urban* far more than the right to access to the material form that is the city. The term refers to the possibility to behave and be treated as a citizen, in other words to have a political expression, the capacity to intervene in choices concerning daily life and the configuration of the spaces in which it unfolds, as well as the possibility to define the principles and norms informing decisions. The individual right must also be a collective right if it is to allow for exerting power over urbanization processes (see the first part of this article).

In keeping with the Lefebvrian understanding of the right to the city, to conceive of the right to the village it could be useful to make a detour via the "right of citizenship", which relates to individuals' integration to the arenas, places and institutions of political life in Greco-Roman Antiquity. As such, the right of citizenship relates to the capacity for decision making and action of the citizens living in a same geographical entity, irrespective of class, social belonging or place of birth. These inhabitants have a right to control their living space and environment, to build and produce society (i.e. life together) through participation in decision making and the appropriation of their living environment. Moreover, the right of citizenship is subordinated to the dimension of the spatial entity in which it is exercised, which determines the voice and role given to each individual. While the right of citizenship thus formulated would no longer be semantically or functionally associated with the city, it could, in theory, be expressed in other spatial perimeters, provided they were of a small size.

From this perspective, M. Woods (2009) actually proposes the metaphor of the emergence of a "rural citizenship" as one of the major phenomena of the recomposition of Western European rural areas over the last 40 years. His interpretation, similar to ours, posits that the edification of this citizenship stems from protest movements defending the right to a specific *way of inhabiting*, and reasserting the appropriation of space through it. In contexts characterized by the arrival of neo-rurals, the emergence of this "rural citizenship" is also supported by the desire to take charge of managing local issues (grassroot initiatives), illustrated by the growing competences of the populations residing in these spaces (empowerment) and the multiplication of arenas of participative democracy.

Thus, just as the right to the city defends access to the resources of urban centralities, the aim of "the right to the village" would be to defend rural resources for the emancipation which we have started to analyze in this article. However a form of right of citizenship based only on its "rural" resources would seem inconceivable today. Given the generalization of lifestyles rooted in individuals' multiple territorial belonging, "rural" resources are now combined with the "urban" resources of the construction of the right to the city. Certain protest groups' withdrawal to the

countryside to more easily find "places of one's own" (Ripoll 2005: 9) necessary to their daily activities offers a perfect illustration. There lies the meaning we give to the expression "right to the village", which in its formulation calls for a de-compartmentalization of the analysis of the right to the city and of the places for which it is demanded, as well as those in which it is exercised.

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