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## **Deferred Development Zone (ZAD) versus “Zone to be protected”.**

### **Analysis of a struggle for autonomy in/of rural space.**

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#### **Abstracts:**

This article aspires to examine how, through the implementation of alternative collective practices, resistance to the Grand Ouest airport project (AGO) in Notre-Dame-des-Landes north of Nantes resulted in a collective search for autonomy in and of rural space. Part of the “useless imposed mega-projects” category of activism used to designate infrastructure and networks (energy, transport or consumption) that are more often than not rural or in the periphery of urban areas, this struggle also expresses itself as an “experiment laboratory” (Ripoll, 2005a) labelled with the acronym ZAD, hijacked to mean “zone à défendre ” [zone to be protected]. In a greatly restricted setting, practices can be observed aiming to redefine the uses of rural space based on specific arguments opposing the dominant arguments for privatisation and the merchandization of land. In this context, the “right to the village” will be understood as the protection of an autonomous rural space, which would not be subject to the competitive, predatory philosophies of urbanization. Rather than revealing the diversity of the political positions of the airport’s opponents, this struggle will be examined from the perspective of one of the opposing positions, combining the development of alternative practices and criticism of urbanization in a re-localization philosophy: that of the degrowth activists.

**Key words:** Décroissance, ZAD, « pratiques alternatives d’autonomie », appropriation, usages de l’espace.

Degrowth, ZAD, alternative autonomy practices, appropriation, uses of space.

#### **Introduction**

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"Below, above, space is being organized for us without us, on an incomprehensible scale"  
(Some opponents, 2011)

In 2013, Camille published the *Livre noir des grands projets inutiles*<sup>1</sup> [tr. Black book of useless mega projects] in "Passager clandestine". In it, many projects are referenced that are generally described as development projects. In some of the activists' registers, since 2001, they are called "*useless imposed mega projects*"<sup>2</sup> (UIMP). This new, recently constructed activist category, designates a range of facilities (athletic, commercial, etc.) and infrastructure, particularly energy-related (nuclear facilities, high-tension lines, dams, nuclear waste burial sites, incinerators) and rapid transport (high-speed lines, highways, airports and urban belt freeways).

Objection to this type of project is not new but today seems to be called for as a "norm" (Subra, 2008: 12). If the geographic analysis of these conflicts has developed (Charlier, 1999; Lecourt, 2003; Lolive, 1997; Melé, 2004, 2008; Ollivro, 1997; Pistre, 2010; Varlet, 1997), this could appear to be explained by the fact that the space is "[tr.] both the medium and the issue of the conflict" (Lecourt, 2002: 18). More specifically, these conflicts involve contrasting philosophies of use and appropriation of space, but also various relationships to the space, or representations. These aspects can be analyzed starting with the concrete struggles against UIMPs embodied in the hijacking of the development acronym ZAD, the meaning of which goes from being Deferred Development Zone [French: zone d'aménagement différé, or ZAD] to "Protected Zone"<sup>3</sup> [French: zone à défendre, i.e. also ZAD]; starting specifically with the Notre-Dame-des-Landes ZAD (Box 1).

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the opponents of the airport project near Notre-Dame-des-Landes call themselves Camille, "[tr.] an assumed name making it possible to preserve the anonymity of those against the project and to protect them from potential legal action. Use of the name Camille also prevents "charismatic spokespersons" from appearing (Camille, 2013: 111). The procedure consisting in "breaking down" this text, although shared with the ZAD activists who use it under other forms, does not depend on them but is the author's own.

<sup>2</sup> The terms in Italics and quotation marks are indigenous terms highlighted in the activists' documents or heard in the field. They are indicated as such only the first time in which they appear.

<sup>3</sup> In the article that follows, ZAD will mean "Zone to be Protected".

**Box 1: The Notre-Dame-des-Landes airport project, a long-standing conflict.**

The plan for an airport for western France (region surrounding Nantes and Brittany) appeared in the 1960s, in a favourable economic context but especially in an aggressive political context focussed on the development and “re-balancing” of France’s territory around eight metropolitan areas.

The site of the project, chosen in 1971, is between the towns of Notre-Dame-des-Landes and Vigneux-de-Bretagne. In 1972, opposition begins and coordinates around the ADECA (Association de Défense des Exploitants Concernés par l’Aéroport [tr.: Association for the protection of operators concerned about the airport]). The deferred development zone is decreed by an ordinance in 1974. It initially covered 1,225 hectares. It is carried out through banning the establishment of new farming operations based on a right of pre-emption granted to the Loire-Atlantique general council, which managed to acquire 870 hectares of land between 1974 and 1988 (Coordination of opponents, 2013).

When the project emerged, this rural space was largely agricultural – which is still the case– and the towns had not yet begun to sprawl. But above all, this land is marked by peasant unionism, is Christian and “left wing”, at one time dominated by Jeunesse agricole chrétienne (JAC) [tr.: Christian farm youth]. Thus, in early 1968, a local figure of the peasant resistance, Michel Tarin, participated with Bernard Lambert, a national figure, in the creation of Paysans en lutte [tr.: Peasants struggling], which then became Paysans-travailleurs [peasant-workers] and then Confédération paysanne [tr. Peasant confederation], the national union opposing large scale farming operators of the FNSEA and a member of the Via Campesina world network (Oudin, 2012).

Resumption of the project in 2000 materialized with the choice of the contractor of the Aéroport du Grand Ouest (AGO)<sup>4</sup>. In 2006, a public survey was 67% opposed but culminated in a favourable opinion on the part of the commissioners in charge (Kempf, 201: 26). In 2008, the declaration of public utility was published. The deferred

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<sup>4</sup> This name given to the future airport is also the name chosen by Vinci, the operator who won the contract in 2010 for 55 years as part of a public-private partnership, for his subsidiary in charge of construction and operation of the airport. In the text that follows, references to the AGO will pertain to the name of the project and not that of this subsidiary.

development zone then covered 1,650 hectares. The procedures for Vinci's acquisition of private land and properties were followed by expropriations – to date they have not been completed – as well as demolitions. Once again, the “peasants” as most of them identified themselves, were the core of the opposition, occupying and cultivating their land while the many court cases were dealt with, but also protecting the dwellings slated for destruction with their tractors.

Extensive mobilization emerged in parallel to the resumption of the project. Among the main organizations opposed, we can cite the Association citoyenne des populations concernées par le projet d'aéroport (ACIPA) [tr. citizen association of populations affected by the airport project], created in 2000; coordination of the opponents, grouping together various types of support (ecology associations, political parties, unions, local communities and individuals) since 2004; the Collectif d'élus doutant de la pertinence du projet (CéDpa) [tr.: Group of elected officials doubting the relevance of the project] founded in 2009; and, the Collectif des organisations professionnelles agricoles indignées par le projet d'aéroport (COPAIN) [tr.: Collective of professional farm organizations angered by the airport project] created in 2011.

In 2009, the Camp Action Climat, a self-managed ecology group, resulted in a new dynamic: the establishment of those who would later be dubbed the “*zadists*”. Whether they were inhabitants for a few weeks or a number of years, whether they came to resist the evictions and destruction of houses, whether they were more ecologist or anarchist, more feminist than ecologist, the *zadists* carried out various forms of resistance through the physical occupation of this orchard space in ways that were more often than not illegal (squatting and building their own structures using salvaged materials).

While it is essential to take the local dimension of the struggles against UIMPs into account – the more so when they organize around a ZAD – focussing on this alone

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runs the risk of reducing them to Nimbys<sup>5</sup>. The arguments proposed by their opponents can, to the contrary, be analyzed as a "groundswell" (Lolive, 1997), a massive protest. The UIMP category tends to make connections between isolated projects while directing the protests towards an overall criticism of the current economic system and society – ours – that causes it to exist. For example, the arguments seeking to define farm land – so-called "*Mother Earth*" or "*food producing land*" – as a "*common good*", and moreover, vital, attempt to get out of this model. This "extension of the common good" process (Lafaye, Thevenot, 1993: 503) highlights the "general interest" issue that is too often perceived as contradictory to all "local" struggles – the more so perhaps in the context of land development which itself was established, historically, as being in the general interest at the national scale. For Arthur Jobert, comparing local disputes to "neighbourhood disputes" [or] to a ground swell of local and individual egos" comes under a "disqualification" process (1998: 91).

Thus, taking into account the question of scales of the struggle, like its issues, appears fundamental in the case of the Grand Ouest airport project – indeed, the scale is already in its name. This makes it possible to identify a number of dynamics of this conflict: on the one hand, the struggle for appropriation of this ZAD space and a land-use conflict; on the other, a struggle based on space classification and organization – in other words, its "development" – tied to a struggle of representations of rural space and its relationships with urban space. In fact, among the arguments in favour of moving the Nantes airport to the countryside is the attractiveness of the Nantes metropolitan area<sup>6</sup>. From that point, the question is posed of the hierarchical relationships between urban space and rural space, bringing into play various representations of rural space that are mobilised in speeches by project promoters and their opponents alike. The purpose of this article is to show

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<sup>5</sup> Nimbys (Not In My Back Yard) can be defined as neighbourhood mobilizations for the protection of self-interests in the face of a development project that the residents would not have mobilized against were it not in their living space.

<sup>6</sup> In Chapter 4 of his thesis, Michel Carrard examines the role of airport infrastructure in territorial competitiveness for the purpose of strengthening the competitiveness and attractiveness of an area, the Nantes metropolitan area in this case (2009).

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how these different struggle dynamics are constructed with an aim of “autonomy” and can thus be understood as collective attempts at building autonomy in and of rural space, through practices and speeches. Autonomy is defined here as collective capacity, “[tr.] [namely] to make their own laws, and be able to explicitly challenge them” (Castoriadis, 1996: 195). Henri Lefebvre’s philosophy – the “right to the city” – is understood as the (self)-management of the city by its inhabitants, i.e. their effective participation in all decisions concerning them; by analogy, without wishing to diminish Lefebvre’s thought, the “right to the village” will be understood as a community’s ability to appropriate a living space in rural space such as to be able to autonomously determine its uses as it sees fit.

This analysis arose from an extended investigation of a Parisian community in favour of degrowth and two political organizations demanding degrowth: the Mouvement des Objecteurs de Croissance (MOC) [tr.: growth objectors movement] and the Parti Pour La Décroissance (PPLD) [tr. party for degrowth]. This led me to study their participation as support to the project’s opponents. Thus, the AGO conflict did not result in a specific investigation but a number of series of direct observations that were carried out on site since 2011 during the events bringing the project protesters together. In this context, it was a matter on the one hand of discussing with the local opponents in order to understand the tangible dynamics of resistance taking place on the ZAD, and on the other, of following the developments of the demands – i.e. the political stances – of the opponents to the airport through collection of various activist documents and observing debates. As a result, I am not proposing here a detailed analysis of the ZAD residents’ daily practices, but identifying some trends at specific points in time: after the eviction phase in the fall of 2012, and the police presence over a few months thereafter. Moreover, the speeches analyzed (Box 2) are not representative of the range of the opponents’ various sensibilities and political positions. Finally, it seems important to me to warn the reader that this text was completed during the summer 2014, prior to the killing of a demonstrator by law enforcement authorities on the Testet ZAD in the south of France in the context of opposition to the Sivens dam (see the paper by Pelletier in this issue). It cannot

report on developments experienced on the ZADs since that time, whether they concern the future of projects or so-called “police violence”.

As part of a thesis on forms of activism for degrowth, this article concentrates on these aspects, mobilizing some of their political and theoretical arguments. They can be considered along the same lines as the “ecological justification” deployed against UIMPs: denouncing modernity, productivism and industrial development, but also “[tr.] the technological society and its development” (Lafaye, Thevenot, 1993: 512). Based on this “grammar”, degrowth philosophy strives to portray itself as the bearer of a new “social imagination” (Castoriadis, 1996) in which proximity, slowness and autonomy would be valued to the detriment of the implied globalization, speed and heteronomy of the “technology system” (Ellul, 2004)<sup>7</sup>.

**Box: List of activist literature used**

- Literature produced by AGO and UIMP opponents:

BELLEVUE (Ferme de), « Rester ferme ! », dans *Silence*, n° 413, Résister aux grands projets inutiles, 10-11, June 2013.

CAMILLE, *Livre noir des grands projets inutiles*, Le Pré-Saint-Gervais : Le Passager clandestin, 2013.

COLLECTIF, “Charte de Tunis”, adopted on March 29, 2013 during the Forum Social Mondial de Tunis by the Forum against Useless imposed mega projects, online document.

COORDINATION, *ZAD partout. Zone à défendre à Notre-Dame-des-Landes, textes et images*, Montreuil : L’insomniaque, 2013.

COORDINATION DES OPPOSANTS AU PROJET D’AEROPORT, *Les arguments contre le projet d’aéroport de NDDL*, self-published booklet, 2013.

LES NATURALISTES EN LUTTE, « L’usage des communs à NDDL d’hier à aujourd’hui », [naturalistesenlutte.overblog.com](http://naturalistesenlutte.overblog.com), JUNE 24, 2014

<sup>7</sup> Henri Lefebvre did not agree with the definition of contemporary society as a “technology society” (Ellul, 2004 [1977]). In his opinion, this did not place enough emphasis on the role of urbanization in the process of forming a society: “It is correct that technology is a determining feature” (1968: 95), but “it’s in the city and through the city that technology enters into society” (1968: 98).

DES OCCUPANT-E-S ENRAGE-E-S DE LA D81, « Ils nous mettent à la rue, on occupe la route », pamphlet dated October 27, 2012, in *ZAD partout. Zone à défendre à Notre-Dame-des-Landes, textes et images*, Montreuil : L'insomniaque, 2013.

DES OPOSANT-E-S QUI ONT CHOISI DE VENIR VIVRE SUR PLACE, « Edito », *Lèse béton*, n° 2, March 2011.

RECLAIM THE ZAD, Call-Out to Reclaim the Fields against an airport project: "Reclaim the fields and the squats of the ZAD. For a fighting farm, let's squat the land!", May 7, 2011, online at <http://reclaimthefields.org>.

- Literature produced by AGO promoters:

SYNDICAT MIXTE D'ÉTUDES DE L'AÉROPORT DE NOTRE-DAME-DES-LANDES, « Aéroport et développement territorial », online at <http://aeroport-grandouest.fr>, rubrique Prospective.

- Excerpts from the media concerning the struggle against the AGO:

CHAUVEAU Flora, « Vivons l'instant présent », *Reporterre*, July 8, 2014.

COLLOMBIER Xavier, « L'inventaire du bestiaire et de la flore des naturalistes militants », *France 3*, January 27, 2014.

KEMPF, Hervé, « Une cause nationale », *Le Monde*, October 21, 2012.

KEMPF, Hervé, « Adieu Le Monde, vive Reporterre », *Reporterre*, September 2, 2013.

PORQUET, Jean-Luc, « Vive l'aéroport quatre étoiles ! », *Le Canard enchaîné*, November 2012.

- Work devoted to the struggle against the AGO:

KEMPF, Hervé, *Notre-Dame-des-Landes*, Paris: Seuil, 2014.

- Literature produced by promoters and activists in favour of degrowth:

CORNIL, Jean, LEGROS, Bernard, *La pertinence de l'escargot. En route vers la décroissance !*, Bordeaux : Sang de la Terre, 2013.

GRUCA, Philippe, « Non ! », in LEPESANT, Michel, (dir.), *L'antiproduktivisme, un défi pour la gauche ?*, Lyon : Parangon, 141-152, 2013.

LAROCHE, Dominique, MONGEAU, Serge, SILVESTRO, Marco, « La décroissance en milieu rural. Des idées pour lancer la discussion », For the Mouvement



québécois pour une décroissance conviviale (MQDC), online at <http://decroissance.qc.ca>, 2010.

### **1) The ZAD: A space appropriation struggle for determining how the space will be used**

According to the opponents' committee, in 1973 there were 43 houses on the site of the ZAD. In October and November 2012, during "Operation César" carried out by law enforcement authorities, 13 were destroyed (6 had been destroyed prior to 2008 and one was destroyed in January 2013) as well as a number of "*shacks*" built by the zadists. During this operation, the symbolism of which is impossible not to react to, the issue for the opponents present was not so much to appropriate the space as to prevent law enforcement authorities from controlling it. Although "occupation" of the ZAD by the zadists is an expression that has been used since 2009, the use of terms such as "police occupation" makes it possible to understand the issue. This is a struggle for "exclusive occupation and control of the space" (Ripoll, 2005b), which continued until law enforcement authorities were no longer on site in the ZAD. This objective of the appropriation conflict must be differentiated from a second objective, which is dominant outside times of direct confrontations, and this is a struggle for "autonomous use" of the space, that is able to involve "diversions" provisionally changing "the function or objective" of an "already appropriated space" (Ripoll, Veschambre, 2005). This type of appropriation struggle is part of the long term, and goes beyond the time while the actual conflict is going on. Debates on the future of the ZAD in the event that the project is abandoned regularly occur in the bimonthly general meetings. During the 2013 Foire à l'Autogestion [tr.: self-management fair], in Montreuil, opponents of the AGO were able to have discussions with their supporters on "[tr.] the future of the land and inhabitants of the ZAD with regard to projects and collective management (legal status, development) of the land if the project were to be abandoned". Between control, occupation and autonomy of use, it seems necessary to give a picture, if incomplete, of the various competing objectives in the ZAD appropriation struggle.

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**“They put us in the street, so we occupied the road” (Coordination, 2013: 63)**

Starting in October 2012, one of the ZAD’s main – and therefore strategic – intersections and a road serving it were closed for a number of months by law enforcement authorities, creating “[tr.] *another form of pressure*”<sup>8</sup> on the inhabitants and compromising the communication link. Following the eviction period, testimony was abundant and brought out the fact that the police presence – which continued for a number of months after the evictions – had the effect of interfering with mobility, making journeys more difficult and tiring. The narratives of forced detours, across fields, improvised fords and climbing over barbed wire for cows give an account of the role of the occupation of space and its control in the struggles. The maps disseminated by the zadists are also revealing about this dynamic struggle for the appropriation of space. The perimeter of the ZAD is indicated: it is the only indication not subject to modification. Between October and December 2012, the regular updating of the maps made it possible to show the dynamic of the places (from “*inhabited*” to “*evicted*” to “*demolished*”) but also the appearance of new inhabited places (Illustration 1)<sup>9</sup>. Thus, during the “reoccupation demonstration” on November 17, 2012, a new collective place was self-built. While, according to sources, from 7,000 to 40,000 demonstrators were present for a march through the countryside against the AGO, at the same time some began the construction of five or six shacks on land loaned by a peasant – that would be expropriated from him a few days later (Coordination, 2013: 124). In order to protect this site, many tractors chained together circled it for a number of days. These new constructions were intended as a “[tr.] *collective place for the struggle*” following the destruction of the houses that had had squatters living in them; some of these houses had been a collective place for the struggle]. The mission of this place, which had sheltered supporters during the period of confrontations and housed the zadists whose homes

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<sup>8</sup> In this sub-part, the terms in Italics and quotation marks are from discussions with Zadists during the summer of 2013.

<sup>9</sup> This question of the use of maps as an activism tool should be gone into in greater depth; this use constitutes a hijacking of its traditional use, which Yves Lacoste, outside research, associated with military headquarters (1976). The symbols chosen here to illustrate the barricades and spaces under police control are eye-opening about this subversion.

had been destroyed, evolved afterwards. With its dormitories, community kitchen and large meeting room, it would become the preferred gathering and lodging point of collectives wishing to organize weeks around specific themes (collective workshops or worksites). If the importance of this collective space cannot be disregarded, it nonetheless does not replace the ZAD's "decision-making centre" where the general coordination meetings are held.



Illustration 1: The map as an activism tool. Status of the occupation(s) in February 2013.

Post card obtained in June 2013.

Although the unique period of confrontations was a time of unprecedented practices and challenges to "common sense" (as defined by Bourdieu close to the concept of *doxa*), this did not stop when the law enforcement authorities had gone. Thus, long debates took place concerning the use of the road once it re-opened. Should it function as before or should it be re-purposed? Some individuals proposed "[tr.] taking the time to exchange some ideas and initiatives on these roads that are travelled at full speed, in order to stop running, head down, towards the abyss" (Coordination, 2013: 63). This "place of passage" was peppered with barricades, tents

and shacks, thus becoming "*[tr.] as much a place for living as a place for the struggle*". The situation forcibly created by the closing of this road by law enforcement authorities appeared to some as an opportunity to subvert its use. Of course, one of the issues behind this debate was the physical appropriation of the road, in the sense of control of the space. As a compromise, traffic-calming chicanes now run its length – passage is possible but slow – and they can quickly become barricades again (illustration 2).



Illustration 2: A barricade: between a place for living and a place for the struggle.

Anne-Laure Pailloux. August 2013.

The "*liberated crossroad*" as it is called today, is on an ad hoc but regular basis marked by a controversial use, as "*[tr.] every week there is a non-market: this is roughly a time when the various gardens, cheese from Bellevue, bread from the Fosses Noires bakery and more, meet here and there you go – for two hours it's a time to find food and meet people...on the crossroad*". This place thus embodies, through its controversial appropriation and hijacking from its legal use, other types of

"marginal" or "*alternative*" uses that take place on a daily basis on the ZAD, whether in terms of dwellings (rehabilitation of old structures, construction of shacks), mobility (walking primarily), farming (truck produce, artisan bread production, participating in farm work with the peasants from COPAIN), exchanges (salvage, swap, short channel) or again, toponymy<sup>10</sup>.

### **A "right to alternative practices of autonomy"?**

Among these practices, some are rendered illegal by being located in the Deferred Development Zone. This is the case of cropping on "*occupied parcels*" by the Sème ta ZAD collective or the peasants of COPAIN assisted by zadists, notably the 120 hectares around the Bellevue farm, at the heart of the ZAD. Other practices are illegal regardless of the location (such as the occupation of vacant dwellings, the recovery and reuse of peasants' seeds), or on the basis of local urban development codes and plans (such as the establishment of "[tr.] *light, mobile alternative dwellings*"). If illegality is not a condition, all these practices are labeled as "[tr.] *concrete alternatives*" by the degrowth activists. Created as an action category enabling "*consistency*" with their ideas, they are primarily forms of legitimization guaranteeing the "degrowth" activist identity (Mège, Pailloux, 2014). At times compared to "neo-rural" practices, these practices are in fact related to working-class practices, like "[tr.] do-it-yourself work, recycling and salvaging, which mobilize the know-how acquired in great part outside the education system, in day-to-day experience in the territory" (Rosa Bonheur, 2014: 131). For all that, these "illegitimate" practices may be a re-appropriation by individuals of the middle and upper classes with high cultural capital as a "rehabilitation" process (Coulangeon, 2004). The ZAD, marked by these folk practices, seems to be the stomping grounds of these two distinct social categories, without being exclusionary: One class being defined by its (high) cultural capital and the other by its (low, if not very low) economic capital.

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<sup>10</sup> Naming goes along with the appropriation of places. In the ZAD context, toponymy is loaded with meaning: winks, references and hijackings are routine. Among the many examples, we can cite Le Far Ouest [the far west], Chat-teigne [tr. the mangy cat], the no TAV-erne, the Bison Futé [tr. clever bison] barricade, the Le communal [tr.: the Communal meeting place] and the No Name theatre.

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Since 2013, the Mouvement des objecteurs de croissance [tr.: degrowth objectors movement] (MOC) has been demanding the *"right to alternative practices of autonomy"*. This means that the degrowth activists are saying that they no longer simply want to defend these practices, validate them and participate in them; they also want to legalize them. The choice of terms was debated within the MOC in July 2013 because they were going to be printed on a new banner (which moreover was unveiled on the ZAD). What was the reason for this new expression *"alternative practices of autonomy"* rather than the expression *"minority experimentation"*, which had already been tried out and which especially makes it possible to claim a political heritage – as *"minority experimentation is a saying of utopian socialism"*? The collective preferred the following to that argument, referring to the social dynamic of these practices: *"It's not experimental because people are living it every day. These are practices of autonomy....Excuse me but I see some people living at the poverty line, they are not having fun experimenting, they're trying to survive in the place where they live."*

The second aspect of the debate related to inclusion in the law:

- "[tr.] today the law is the main problem for alternative dwellings (yurts, for example)...the opposition between law and alternative is what we want to put forward...What we want to put forward is a right to the alternative. "A right to" means that the alternative dwellings already exist, that we want them to be recognized" (Pascal, a retiree, also involved in the collective HALEM – in favour of light mobile alternative housing)."
- "Obtaining the right, that's a true measure of transition....we won't hesitate either to move into the area of civil disobedience, not meaning to strike down the law but we want to amend the law, change it...so, this demand is something very pragmatic" (Hervé, a teacher).

However, legalizing these practices would not achieve consensus among the AGO opponents, particularly due to their different political positions in relation to the State. Some of the inhabitants consider this illegal situation to be "invaluable" and deem that "regularization" of this space would involve the destruction of the shacks, not to mention the end of the "experimentation" (Chauveau, 2014).

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Starting from the question of appropriation of a space through “alternative” practices, the concept of autonomous use of the space is what stands out. Moreover, it is the collective appropriation, defined as “[tr.] autonomous use of space” that Henri Lefebvre introduces as the “foundation of the right to the city” (Veschambre, 2005). However, although the fact that how the space is used is decided on the spot – collectively, as implied by the definition of autonomy – makes it possible to define the spaces as autonomous, this must not lead to forgetting that the uses are part of a space constrained by its status as a deferred development zone. As has been seen, the AGO project regulates how the land may be occupied and the types of dwelling, and its supervision by the police modifies the actions or, more important, imposes the developers’ schedule on the opponents. Therefore, the struggle for autonomy is part of the everyday, in the practices opposing the framework imposed by the project, but it also necessitates the (re)appraisal of the uses chosen by the occupants for this local space, which requires the construction and dissemination of autonomous narratives.

## **2. ZAD and UIMP: A struggle about classification and representation of space**

Struggling for “autonomous use” of the ZAD and its land as part of this appropriation conflict is also a legal struggle with the contradictory support of experts. Therefore, contradictory arguments concerning land use portray space differently, particularly rural space. By the same token, the struggle has also affirmed, from the narrative perspective, that the ZAD was not an isolated case but was directly involved in a UIMP network and supported well beyond a local scale.

### **Construction of the UIMP and ZAD activist classifications**

“[tr.] ZAD... There is nothing more heinous and cold than this acronym – Deferred Development Zone – plastered on a field following some studies by a consulting firm in January 1974. Bureaucrats decided to erase an inhabited area as abruptly as drawing a plan on an architect’s table to build an airport. This was done with the narrow-minded certainty that living, breathing people would agree to disappear...”

Such was how the sinister content of the acronym and its predictable future came to be. But a number of the inhabitants didn't go along with the game: By clinging to that which fed them, they became resistance fighters, outlaws despite themselves. They developed a new base – and chose that.

[They were] anchored to the land, to the fields and other resisters, armed with new and methodical knowledge of the issues and a fierce obstinance. All these traits were woven together to create one fabric that was simultaneously a crucible and a refuge, a battleground for demanding a different way of life...And the more things happened, the more the acronym lost its original meaning. In its place, there was construction, friendships, moments of pure poetry, but also internal quarrels that were not always overcome, discordant voices, and suppressed distrust; and all that helped – through incessant meetings, heartfelt words, common practices, and solidarity in the face of a common enemy – to make this place into a Zone to be Protected" [translator's note: The acronym ZAD works in both cases in French: Zone d'Aménagement Différé and Zone À Défendre]. (Coordination, 2013: 4).



Illustrations 3 and 4: Examples of "ZAD partout" [tr. ZAD everywhere] posters.

Source: zad-nadir.org



Classifying the space where the struggle took place and one's living space in order to change the meaning and purpose: this activism work, which was local with regard to the ZAD and supra-national with regard to the UIMPs, can be understood as a will to re-appropriate the issues of the struggle and redefine its terms: "to protect" a space from a "useless imposed" future. Indigenous, thus autonomous, categories, ZAD and UIMP are against "designed space" (Lefebvre, 2000). This heteronomous space, "[tr.] the space of scholars, planners, urban planners, and 'cut-and-pasting' technocrats" (Lefebvre, 2000: 48). This designed space, which Lefebvre criticizes in *Le Droit à la ville* [tr. The Right to the City], is embodied according to the opponents of UIMPs by developments that were initially differentiated from one another in terms of activism (anti-nuclear and ecological struggles, or those against the "consumer society", for example). Uniting these struggles under the same label is interpreting them as coming under the same way of producing space that the activists are resisting. But it is also affirming that the scale of the struggle is not the individual scale of each of these struggles but a scale that encompasses all of them; it "opens up" the struggle, making a "quantum leap" in scale (Ripoll, 2005a: 642) for the purpose of building supra-local resistance. Defining and imposing the classification of a struggle and its scale is an ongoing issue which involves activist research, networking and communication, one of the goals of which would be to prevent – or minimize – NIMBYism and localism, new pitfalls of activism taking the former place of protectionism. The "no TAV" movement against high-speed rail lines (LGV), which is especially strong in Italy but which has nonetheless been established as European, and the signing of the Hendaye Charter in 2010 by Spanish, French and Italian "no TAV" associations and collectives, marked the beginning of the UIMP classification being presented as a framework for struggle that was European first and then global. Indeed, in 2012, the 2<sup>nd</sup> European forum against UIMPs was held in Notre-Dame-des-Landes, and in 2013, a charter against UIMPs was adopted at the World Social Forum in Tunis<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> The English translation of the French expression GPII evolved over these gatherings: "enforced useless major projects" in 2012 settled on the acronym UIMP in 2013, but wavers between "useless"

This resistance work against “representations of space”, defined by Lefebvre as “[tr.] the dominant space”, was completed by the ZAD classification, embodying other “spaces of representation” (i.e. “dominated, therefore subjected, space”) through “spatial practices” (Lefebvre, 2000: 48-49). This intrinsically local category is first of all associated with the Notre-Dame-des-Landes struggle, even though the opposition is not limited to the local scale. It has become a “national cause” (Kempf, 2012) through its support committees<sup>12</sup>, the pooling of activism materials (posters, pamphlets, badges, etc.) and arguments making it possible to organize events similar to the “*sème ta ZAD*” appeal elsewhere in France in the spring of 2013. The media relay of certain editorials also played a role<sup>13</sup>. Finally, the ZAD category was spread in 2012 and 2013 through “*dispersion*” of other ZADs forming on sites intended for UIMPs, like the Bois du Tronçay in the Morvan, or the Décines near Lyon. The ground swell symbolized by this other slogan: “*No to the airport and its world*” (illustration 5. My italics) that is promoted by the slogans “[tr.] *ZAD everywhere*” and “[tr.] *Not here and not elsewhere*” (illustrations 3 and 4) is added to this large-scale construction. This “world” is that of dominant representations of rural space which the opponents deem antagonistic representations.

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and “unnecessary”. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> forums in Stuttgart, Germany in 2013 and Rosia Montana, Romania in 2014 used “unnecessary imposed mega project”. Here I chose the expression “useless imposed mega projects” because this is what appears in the charter of Tunis, the text used as a reference.

<sup>12</sup> In January 2013, there were more than 80 support committees in various regions of France. They were for the most part formed starting in October 2012 at the time of the evictions by the police. Since then, not all have remained active.

<sup>13</sup> Beside the ZAD self-managed media which broadcast locally on a pirated highway frequency managed by Vinci, alternative and environmental media participated in this dissemination, proposing regular follow-ups of the situation (*Reporterre*, *Bastamag*) or inventories – French or European – of UIMPs (*Silence* and *Rue 89* but the magazine *Mouvements* as well). We note that among the newspapers with large circulations, only *Le Monde*, through its reporter Hervé Kempf, regularly followed the events. Thus on October 21, 2012 Kempf published, before the representatives of the political parties officially supporting the AGO opponents, “Une Cause nationale” [tr. A National Cause] for the purpose of putting an end to the silence that had dominated for five days everywhere except in Notre-Dame-des-Landes (the mass eviction of the zadists had begun on October 15). Resigning from *Le Monde* in September 2013, Hervé Kempf spoke out against his management’s “[tr.] censorship which prevented me from continuing in this newspaper the investigations and special interest stories on the Notre Dame des Landes file” on which he had published his first article in August 2009 (Kempf, 2013).



Illustration 5: Sign along a road during the re-occupation demonstration on November 17, 2012. Source: zad-nadir.org

#### **“Crested newts against reinforced concrete”<sup>14</sup>**

This clash of the earth relationships – or representations – is made visible by the battle concerning the water law (under the auspices of the European Union Water Framework Directive protecting in particular wetlands which make up over 90% of the ZAD), as well as by the set of environmental compensations it involves. In the event of destruction of a protected ecosystem, the law requires “[tr.] re-creation or restoration of wetlands of equivalent functionality and biodiversity” “[tr.] over an area at least 200% the size of the area eliminated” “[tr.] in the same catchment area” (Opponents coordination, 2013). Since Vinci does not have double the area devoted to airport infrastructure, this compensation measure would be “qualitative”: it would be governed by an “experimental method” introducing a system of various coefficients based on “compensation units” for the purpose of getting past the problem of the lack of available land (*ibid*). However, it remains unachievable according to many opponents who denounce the “[tr.] creation of a new market, like that of carbon rights” (*ibid*). More broadly, it’s the commercial use of space reduced to “ground” that is standard and interchangeable that the AGO opponents are speaking out against, a use allowed by the capitalist system, based on lucrative private property and which makes the consumption of spaces possible in a certain regulatory framework.

<sup>14</sup> This sub-title is that of the ZAD website: zad-nadir.org.

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According to a degrowth activist, this is part of the “[tr.] very traditional social-productivism vision where nature is a bottomless reservoir we can continuously draw from” (Cornil, Legros, 2013: 18).

So, these are two opposing concepts of rural space: A market logic allowing the displacement of an ecosystem, and an environmental, if not naturalistic, vision protecting a unique environment deemed important due to its value or intrinsic characteristics<sup>15</sup>. Stating the impossibility of re-creating an ecosystem, the “*Naturalists in the struggle*” inventoried the biodiversity in the ZAD, the head of two catchment basins where twelve rivers have their source, and protected grove with 170 kilometres of hedges and 200 ponds (Collombier, 2014). Their counter-assessment also counted 130 protected species, four of which are affected by the compensation measure. Moreover, following the example of other activists, the matter of common people (Naturalists, 2014) and “*common goods*”, rests on opposition to the “*privatization*” of land and more broadly, rural space. This opposition refers back moreover to “value of exchange” as opposed to “value of use” (Lefebvre, 2000). These arguments can be made using other binary opposites found on this “[tr.] *crossroads of society’s choices*” (illustration 6).

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<sup>15</sup> If the struggle against the merchandization of land and its artificialization – or “*concretization*” – is shared by the opponents, their ecological sensibilities must not be seen as homogenous. Similarly, although the “*police occupation*” of winter 2012-2013 strengthened the opponents’ solidarity, a range of political positions remains.



Illustration 6: Signage on the August 3 and 4, 2013 gathering site at Notre-Dame-des-Landes. Source: <http://spirale.attac.org>

The search for autonomy seems to be grappling with another problem: while “spaces of representation” of AGO opponents are focussed on rural space and its uses and purposes, the denounced “representations of the space” are determined by “the dominant space, that of the centres of wealth and power”, i.e., urban space (Lefebvre, 2000: 61). Would autonomy in rural space then be through a change in the relationship with urban space?

### **3) Towards an autonomous rural space? A struggle against urban domination**

In their analysis of the AGO project, Jean Renard and Cécile Riolland-Juin point out that “two concepts of progress and the future of areas are clashing” (2013). Through the production of an autonomy discourse, supported on representations – or concepts – of rural space that are opposed to capitalist and productivist visions, which make it standardized, specialized merchandise space, if not mere land to be

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developed, the AGO and UIMP opponents as much reveal another relationship to the world – as a dominant system – as they do another relationship to the space. In this context, they are part of a challenge to the “urbanization” philosophy that is key to neoliberal globalization (Harvey, 2004). Finally, in this criticism of the organization of space dominated by the city, is it not possible to see a challenge to the scales of organization as proposed by degrowth activists?

### **Between the land and Earth: Struggling against urban domination**

One of the issues revealed by the groundswell of the speeches of UIMP opponents is knowing who these projects are intended for. Jean-Pierre Garnier notes that the AGO does not aim to serve rural spaces as it is part of an attractiveness dynamic meant to serve the metropolitan area and its most important populations. “Who should [the city of Nantes] attract? The usual: investors on the one hand, and brainpower on the other. In other words, bankers, business owners, managers, developers, senior technicians. Rolling out the red or green carpet – sustainable urban development requires as much – for the operators and intellectual middle class, huge consumers of “cultural” events (quoted by Porquet, 2012). This sociological interpretation is along the same lines as the arguments in an open letter to President Hollande entitled “[tr.] Hold firm!” in which the inhabitants of Bellevue Farm demonstrate that rural space is being removed to the benefit of urban philosophy: “[tr.] the city is always the centre of attention, economic development, speed, running, flying, communicating, travelling, and LET’S GO! no more need to eat, be nourished, to enjoy” (Bellevue, 2013). Speaking out against this urban draw is supported on the AGO promoters’ leaflets, like the joint association for studying the Notre-Dame-des-Landes airport, which states that “[tr.] the territories have entered into a competition-based philosophy in order to attract investment as well as events for branding and economic benefits”. It is this philosophy that the opponents are fighting against more than an airport. They are not only speaking out against the consumption of *their* land but are struggling against the take-over of “*crop land*” by artificialized land, and against the competition-driven philosophy that leads to “*Land (and resource) grabbing*” in the North and South alike.

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"Many peasants are seeking to cultivate the land based on criticism of an agro-food industry that is synonymous with globalized economic exploitation, environmental destruction and social management. They are dealing with many obstacles. One of the major problems is the difficulty accessing land due to concrete, the takeover by factory farms, and the ongoing expansion policy of existing operations.

Growing numbers of people and communities, especially in the city, are trying to find the means to feed themselves locally and to deal directly or produce some of their food. This process is also hindered by agricultural policies, current forms of urban planning and land grabbing" (Reclaim the ZAD, 2011).

This criticism of the dominant use of farmland shows all the heteronomy involved. Thus, the claims are "simple": access to the land to cultivate it and the ability to "*cultivate the land*" outside the contested philosophies...according to their own philosophies. In short, finding a certain peasant autonomy that has been jeopardized in part by "*current forms of urban planning*".

### **"Human scale" living spaces**

For rural spaces, gaining autonomy could thus necessitate leaving the city's sphere of attractiveness. According to degrowth activists, the city has physically exceeded its ecological limits – the city depends on the country at least as much as it exploits it – in addition to having politically "[tr.] undermined citizens' basic control over their work and daily life" (Gruca, 2013). Therefore, what should be challenged is the organization of space as a whole, which has been thought of in terms of "land management" based on metropolises since its institutionalization in France (Box 1). Based on "*relocalization*", which is key to degrowth philosophy, reconsidering the local scale is fundamental to an organization of space based on "*caring for*" the land and its resources. Moreover, local space is the most able to make autonomy possible, as defended by these authors living in Quebec:

"Let us state at the outset that for us, user-friendly degrowth is by definition a collective undertaking and that our preferred basic political organization is the commune both in the city and the outlying areas. And based on this model, we currently deem that today's cities are too big and the villages are often too small and scattered. So a certain displacement of the population as well as a splitting up of cities would be desirable, *if we want to achieve*

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*communes that are able to be as autonomous and self-sufficient as possible*, interwoven into a confederating network. And to do this, rural communes must be made more attractive and more welcoming” (Laroche, Mongeau, Silvestro, 2010, my italics).

Unlike the economically driven metropolitan attractiveness philosophies, they propose, occasionally under the term “*de-urbanization*”, to (re)appraise rural space and to organize as communes, a scale guaranteeing more “*autonomy*”. This is also what Philippe Gruca, an authority on the philosophy of Günther Anders and director of the degrowth theoretical and political journal *Entropia*, stands up for when he proposes “[tr.] to enshrine society in the everyday” in order to lay the foundations of a “human scale world” (Gruca, 2013). This proposal suggests a reconsideration of the scale of social and political organization by reconsidering the role of “everyday-ness” as the “main product” of present-day society (Lefebvre, 1968: 141). According to Lefebvre, “[tr.] it is at the humble “everyday” level that “large” problems forcefully arise and are resolved, often with violence” (Lefebvre, 1968: 112).

### **As a conclusion...**

Among the various opponents to UIMPs, who struggle against “[tr.] these projects which are part of a philosophy of exacerbated competition between territories and involve the endless flight toward “bigger, faster, more expensive, more centralizing” (Collective, 2013), it is this “humble ‘everyday’ level” that the zadists have chosen. In a context of an ultra-constraining time and space relationship imposed by the deferred development zone and the philosophies of the dominant society of the “airport and its world”, the opponents, in developing the most autonomous practices and uses possible, seem to respond to the Lefebvre’s remarks, as prescriptive as they are descriptive, when he stated in 1968 that “[tr.] today the overtaking of economism is starting to take shape.... This is an overtaking by and in practice; [it is] a change in social practice” (2009: 118). Could this overtaking correspond to “*zones to be defended*” becoming “*zones of definitive autonomy*”?<sup>16</sup> or does it involve “sowing” ZADs everywhere, including in our representations? By working to free the

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<sup>16</sup> Translator’s note: The author has added another meaning to the acronym ZAD with the French *zones d’autonomie définitive* [zones of definitive autonomy]. SWM



countryside from both the physical and philosophical subordination to the city through autonomous practices, uses and speeches, the AGO opponents show us an attempt at right to the village, or in other words, construction of an autonomous rural space.

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