

A participative approach to preserving agricultural activities in the Saclay plateau: the Terre et Cité initiative in the Paris region.

Summary

Terre et Cité is a local organisation which works in a semi-urban region which is under significant land pressure to encourage citizens to actively participate in the defence of agricultural activities.

Key words

Citizen participation, **local initiative**, agriculture in semi-urban areas, urban-rural connections

Context

The Saclay Plateau is an area close to Paris where several research and teaching establishments have been based for several years. This rural area, which is dominated by major farming activities (particularly the cultivation of cereals), is rapidly urbanising and being populated by people who know little about the local activities.

Partners

The Terre et Cité organisation was created in 2001 by local farmers to defend the agricultural values of the Saclay Plateau. It brings together inhabitants, associations, researchers and locally elected officials. Its objective is to enable all regional stakeholders who feel involved to construct the future of the Saclay Plateau.

Activities

One of the main activities was to conduct an environmental audit, which demonstrated that agriculture was seen by the inhabitants as a fundamental characteristic of the identity and future of the region. In 2003, this awareness led some regional stakeholders to get together and create one of the first AMAPs in the Île de France: the AMAP



des Jardins de Cérès.

In 2005, the members of the AMAP created a Société Civile Immobilière, called Terres Fertiles, to buy back 20 hectares of agricultural land threatened by urbanisation. Since then, several farms have assessed the value of closely related sectors and qualitative approaches such as organic farming.

The Terre et Cité organisation believes it is crucial to explain how farms work and the importance of farmland, because it is something of which inhabitants are rarely aware. It also seeks to put local inhabitants in a position to create ideas and plans for the future of the region, ensuring that a dialogue with local politicians and researchers is encouraged. It seeks to reach a wide variety of audiences (inhabitants, pupils, students, non-resident workers, etc.) through awareness raising activities: exhibitions, walks, conferences, etc.

In 2012 and 2013, it also undertook a consultation exercise:

- A second environmental audit was conducted, based in particular upon several individual interviews with regional stakeholders.
- Two one-day open forums each brought together around a hundred stakeholders to jointly develop the priorities for the region. The first open forum focused on closely-related sectors and the second on discovering and promoting the region.
- 10 follow-up workshops were organised on subjects that the participants had identified as priorities during the open forums. The outcome of these workshops was a summary report which now structures the work of Terre et Cité.
- Working groups will continue this consultation to ensure the measures are implemented in practice.

Results and prospects

The Terre et Cité organisation has managed to launch a wide debate on the future of the region across several municipalities, ensuring that politicians, public institutions and inhabitants participate in the debate on an equal footing. This is notably due to the fact that the organisation consists of local politicians, inhabitants and farmers. This gives it a certain legitimacy which raises its profile, and proposes a method enabling everyone to be heard.

Because of this heterogeneity, however, discussions within the organisation are lively. As a result, there is no single agreed message on the direction to take. It is primarily defined as a place for discussion. This ongoing internal debate within the organisation does not



compromise its ability to put actions into practice: the development of short circuits, discovery activities, an interactive and cooperative map of the region, the Regional House project, application for the Leader programme.

Comments

Many local initiatives try to involve inhabitants and promote debate to define the direction of development and 'regional projects' etc. These dynamics are sometimes driven by local authorities and sometimes by local inhabitants who are opposed to changes with which they disagree: plans for tourism, town planning, abandonment and disappearance of services etc. The origins of the Terre et Cité organisation were that the region has undergone rapid and sudden urbanisation, which has led to a strong local dynamic.