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► To cite this version:

Camille Méplain, Pierric Calenge, Anne Mathis, Denis Mathis. Reconfigurations of the territorial organization of the Pays de Bitche following the departure of the army. International Symposium of LabEx DRIIHM 2024, Jun 2024, Montpellier, France. , 2024, 10.34972/driihm-95a882 . hal-04622338

HAL Id: hal-04622338

<https://hal.science/hal-04622338v1>

Submitted on 24 Jun 2024

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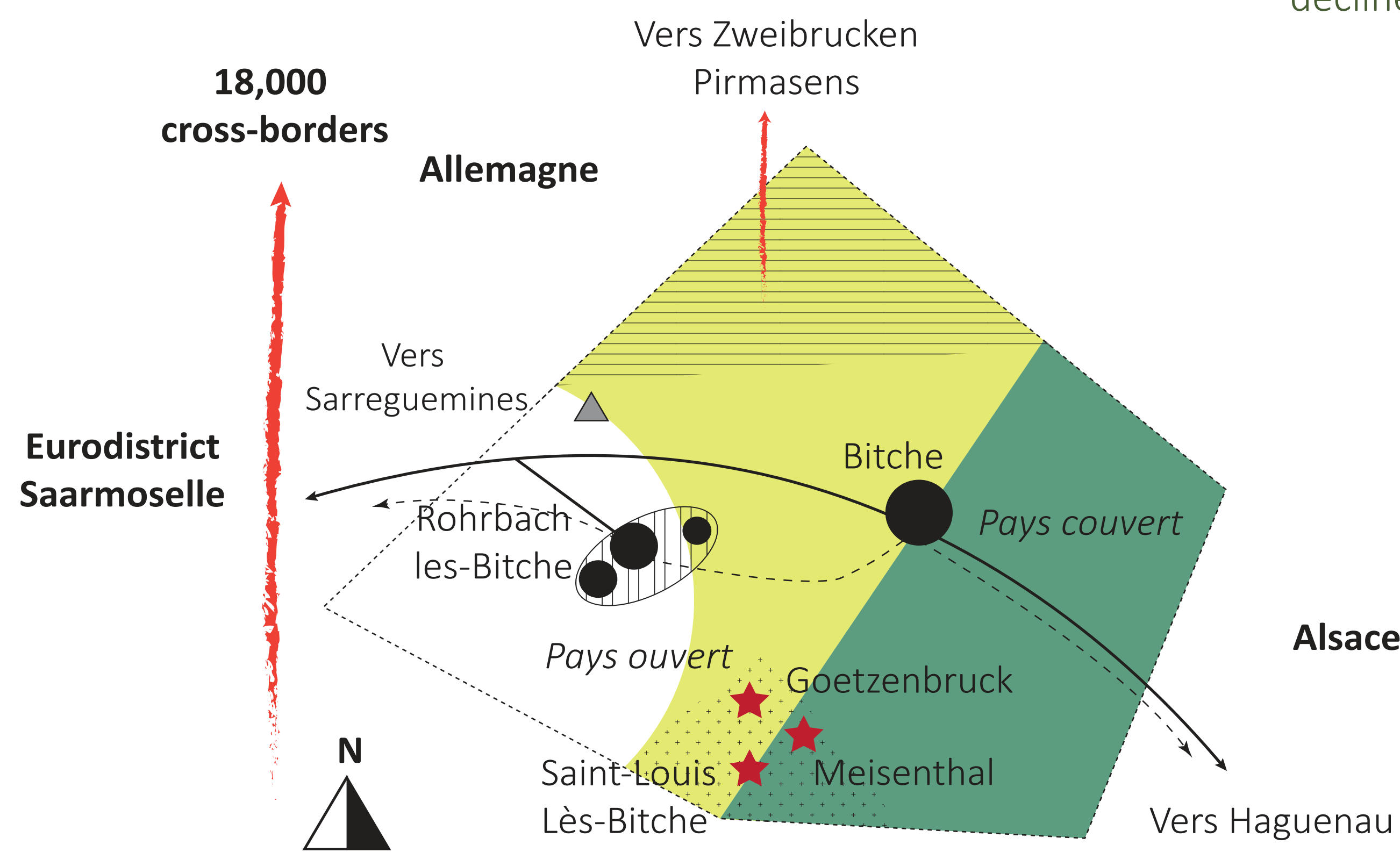
The border effect

The influence of the German border is omnipresent in the mobility dynamics of the region. In the German border towns, some of which are former garrison towns, there has been a repurposing of military buildings. For example, in Zweibrücken, the former airbase has been converted into a regional airport. Additionally, the town itself became attractive by building a fashion outlet with 120 shops spreading over 21,000 square meters, generating 1,200 direct and indirect jobs and attracting nearly 4 million visitors annually. The German border thus offers economic opportunities as well as recreational opportunities. Saarbrücken, Pirmasens, and Zweibrücken polarize the northern part of the territory. Consequently, these towns attract a significant portion of the mobility from the Bitche region (25% of which are cross-border mobilities), leading to substantial commuter migration that also generates nuisances such as traffic congestion, noise, and pollution.



Departure of the army

Since the late 1990's, the Bitche region has been hit by economic crises and administrative reforms. These changes have led to the gradual departure of the military, which, in the case of the Bitche citadel, have been at the heart of the region. Consequently, the demilitarization of this area has profoundly impacted it, leading to significant reconfigurations. Population, mobility, landscape of this region reflected these changes. Observing the town of Bitche, one can see empty and abandoned military buildings, closed and sold-out shops on the main street, making the erosion caused by the military's departure obvious despite the city's membership to the «Small Town of Tomorrow» program. Furthermore, the creation of a new, faster and more efficient road to destinations such as Germany and more dynamic cities don't benefit Bitche, but accentuates its decline.



A marginalised territory by the departure of the army

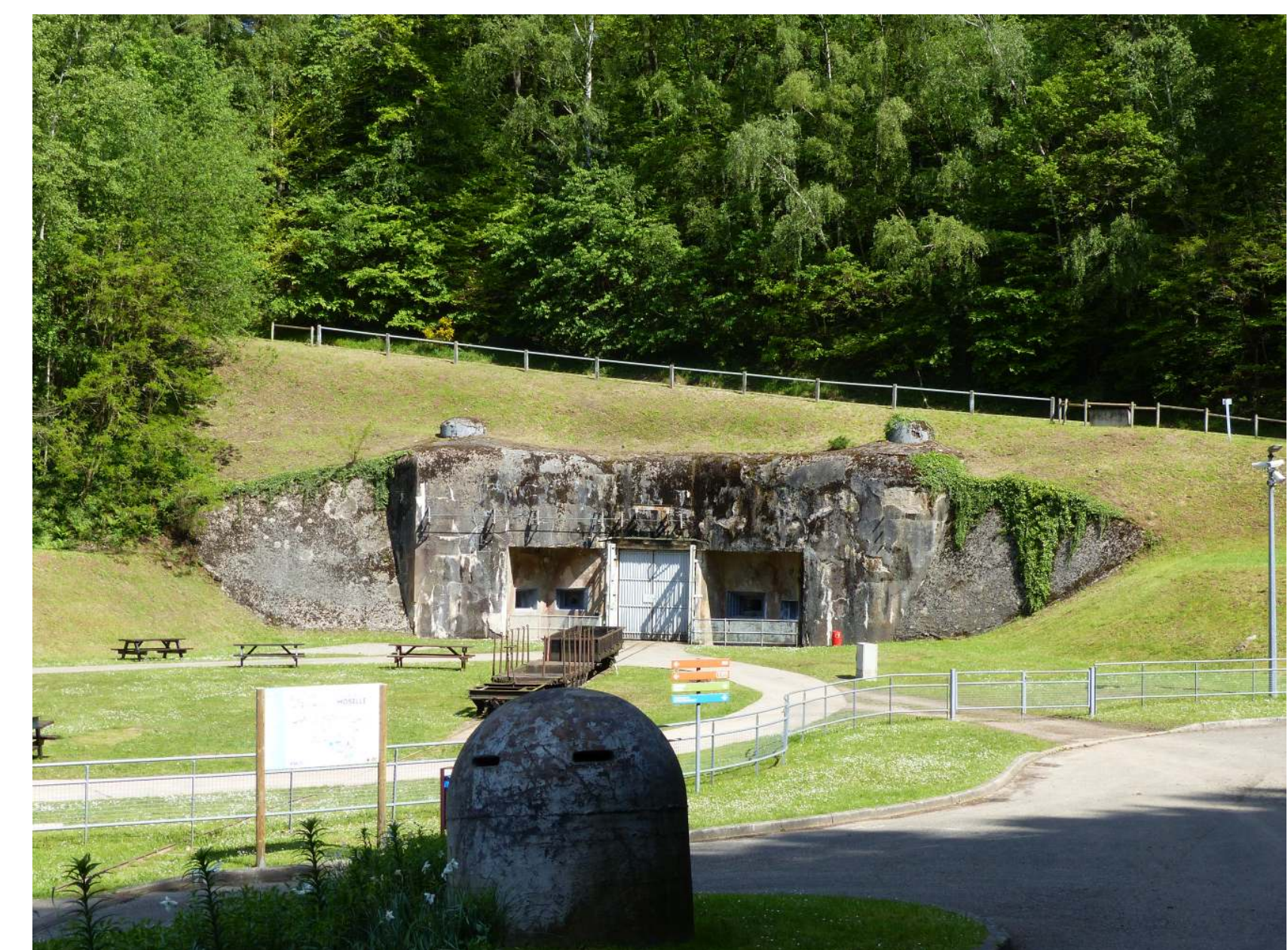
- Bitche is part of the «Small Town of Tomorrow» program to facilitate urban conversion after the decline of the military presence (loss of attractiveness, shops, difficult conversion of military sites, eco-subdivision...),
- ↘ Sarreguemines-Haguenau structuring axis (2x2 lane project since 1987),
- ↘ Rail connection interrupted-partial conversion to velorail,
- Territories on the margins that take advantage of opportunities around a «nature-resource» country associated in part with the PNRVN, the transboundary biosphere reserve. Space for outdoor activities (hiking, cycling, discovery...),

New polarities: borders that are disappearing

- ▲ Obergailbach gas site (franco-russian gas pipeline)
- ▨ New peri-urban centralities in connection with Sarreguemines. The Pays de Bitche is an associated partner of the Saarmoselle Eurodistrict (18,000 cross-borders),
- ▨ The North of the Pays de Bitche is polarized towards the towns of Pirmasens and Zweibrücken (25% of the workforce is cross-borders),
- ↗ Cross-borders,

New labels to keep the story continued

- ▨ The fire arts road has made it possible to identify a territory of know-how around the glass sites (UNESCO labelled)
- Agricultural mountains area



The creation of new centralities

While the medium-sized city of Bitche experiences decline (residential erosion, commercial vacancies), rural agglomerations like Rohrbach-lès-Bitche, Bining and Petit-Réderching (with a combined population of 4,900 inhabitants), linked to Sarreguemines, are thriving. The connectivity to main roads of these villages and the quality of life they offer (rural tranquility, individual properties, proximity to amenities) have led to residential expansion (urban sprawl, farmhouse rehabilitation, establishment of businesses), to the detriment of Bitche. Consequently, the divisions between the «covered countryside» are becoming increasingly apparent in mobility patterns, living arrangements and landscapes.



Regeneration by tourism

The departure of the military has given scope to new or rediscovered activities that are revitalizing the area. The region has developed ecotourism. As a result, the Bitche region is attracting an increasing number of tourists. This shift towards a tourism-oriented economy is relatively recent, marked by the establishment of the intercommunal tourist office of the Bitche region in 2010, as well as the labeling of various sites. For example, the glassmaking center of Saint-Louis-lès-Bitche was recently added to UNESCO's list, making it a recognized and dynamic hub of expertise with an influence that extends beyond the region. The skills and heritage of these areas are becoming tools to revitalize the territory and reconfigure it. The countryside is now crisscrossed with hiking trails, tourist sites and leisure spaces. Despite the heavy legacy of its military past, parts of the Bitche region are reinventing and repurposing their heritage to create an attractive and vibrant area.

Conception-réalisation : Camille Méplain

Crédits photographiques et cartographiques : Camille Méplain, Anne Mathis, Denis Mathis

