



HAL
open science

PERI-URBAN EXTRACTIVISM: The Political Economy of 'Cheap Sprawl'

Aurélie Delage, Max Rousseau

► **To cite this version:**

Aurélie Delage, Max Rousseau. PERI-URBAN EXTRACTIVISM: The Political Economy of 'Cheap Sprawl'. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 2025, 49, pp.1040 - 1062. <10.1111/1468-2427.13334>. <hal-05279418>

HAL Id: hal-05279418

<https://hal.science/hal-05279418v1>

Submitted on 23 Sep 2025

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire HAL, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 - Attribution - Non-commercial use - No Derivative Works - International License

Peri-urban extractivism: the political economy of “cheap sprawl”

Aurélie DELAGE

aurelie.delage@univ-perp.fr

University of Perpignan Via Domitia

UMR 5281 Art-Dev (Acteurs, Ressources et Territoires dans le Développement)

52, avenue Paul Alduy

66 860 Cedex 9

France

Max ROUSSEAU

max.rousseau@entpe.fr

UMR 5600 Environnement, Ville, sociétés / équipe RIVES

Ecole Nationale des Travaux Publics d'Etat

3 rue Maurice Audin

69518 Vaulx-en-Velin

France

Newsworthy sentences (50 words max)

By drawing on two case studies of “cheap sprawl” and by bridging the traditional North-South divide, this paper analyses peri-urbanisation through the lens of extractivism. Land and modest homebuyers are the resources exploited by the coalition of public and private stakeholders to extract value. Peri-urban extractivism is a predatory system.

Acknowledgements

We thank all the people we interviewed for their time and the valuable information they gave us, our colleagues for their comments during seminars, Andy Pike for their insights. We also thank the three anonymous IJURR reviewers for comment and feedback on earlier drafts of this article which helped to strengthen the demonstration. The research informing this paper is funded by the Agence Nationale de la Recherche (ANR) ["Géopolitique de la lutte contre l'étalement urbain / Geopolitics of combating urban sprawl", grant number ANR-16-CE22-0001], the Union Sociale de l'Habitat/Plan Urbanisme Construction Architecture ["Le logement en choc de densification / Housing in a densification shock"] and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) [grant number ES/V013696/1], in conjunction with the Agence Nationale de la Recherche (ANR) [grant number ES/V013696/1] and DFG Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft [grant number ES/V013696/1] under the Open Research Area scheme ["Beyond left-behind places"].

Abstract (200 words max)

This article explores peri-urbanisation through the lens of extractivism from a critical political-economic perspective. Our analytical framework sheds new light on peri-urbanisation. We examine the uneven nature of the process, unpack its *growth engine* and highlight its shortcomings. By shifting the focus from the demand to the supply of peri-urban housing, our approach overcomes the limitations of a traditional analysis based on land rent. Peri-urbanisation is thus considered in the light of resource exploitation (namely land), by a coalition of public and private stakeholders, whose methods include accumulation by dispossession. Land and modest homebuyers are the resources exploited by the coalition to extract solid value. Simultaneously, sprawl is the engine that provides a continuous supply of cheap land to sustain the process. However, when this coalition captures value from the urbanisation of agricultural land (and the creditworthiness of precarious homebuyers), the resulting irreparable soil artificialisation impedes future redevelopments. By drawing on two case studies of this type of “cheap sprawl” and by bridging the traditional North-South divide, this article provides empirical evidence to show that peri-urban extractivism is just that: a predatory system. Not only does it keep peripheral areas in a state of “non-development”, it also has a serious toll on the environment.

Key words: urban sprawl, peri-urbanisation, land rent, extractivism, North-South divide, peripheries, clientelism, political economy, climate crisis.

Pre-print authors' version. Please cite as :

Delage A., Rousseau M., 2025, « Peri-urban extractivism : The Political Economy of 'Cheap Sprawl', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 49, Issue 5, pp. 1040-1062. doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.13334.

1. Introduction: the peri-urban turn and its shortcomings

“Here, the main business is construction. (...) There is no more water but there is concrete” (*Marianne*, 19 November 2023). This national newspaper headline sums up a major change underway in a peripheral area in France. Over the last few decades, a former agricultural plain has been turned into a residential peri-urban area and is now facing severe drought. This situation is partly due to climate change (less water), but also to urbanisation (growing demand). According to a group of citizens opposed to a new housing development, there is not enough water for residential use. For the first time in the area, a growing number of voices are being raised to decry an economic model that has prevailed for decades: the peri-urbanisation of agricultural land.

This topical example is in keeping with existing literature, according to which the peri-urbanisation of agricultural land is not *an end* in itself: it is a *condition* for economic growth. The literature also suggests that the broad consensus regarding this economic model is crumbling because it leads to a dead-end. That is precisely what we intend to explore. Most of the research related to the peri-urban turn demonstrates how the majority of actors involved have interests in land intensification and, ultimately, growth (Fang and Pal, 2016). This applies at different scales (from local to global) and to various contexts. Here, the peri-urban appears as a transitional category, that of “the city-yet-to-come” (Follmann, 2022). The urban as a “growth engine” is not confined to the city limits, but extends into peri-urban areas. All in all, the burgeoning international literature on the political economy of urban sprawl considers peri-urbanisation as an element that serves “classic” capitalist local development. Our article makes a contribution to this literature. We unpack the specific peri-urban “growth engine” in agricultural areas impacted by the exhaustion of natural resources across the North/South divide. Drawing on the – initially rural and agrarian – notion of extractivism, we argue that what is qualified as “cheap sprawl” is the result of a process involving resource exploitation (namely land), specific methods (accumulation by dispossession), and expected results (the guarantee of social peace by encouraging access to private ownership). By shifting the focus from the demand to the supply of peri-urban housing, we intend to highlight the limits of a traditional analysis centred on land rent. In line with views that present peri-urbanisation as an uneven process (Bartels, *et al.* 2020), our critique of peri-urban extractivism reveals that sprawl is an irreversible predatory system, which hinders development in peripheral areas.

More broadly, our article addresses the ongoing “peripheral turn” (Ren, 2021), by shifting the analytical lens of urban studies from the city centre to the periphery, and from Western cities to cities in the global South. Our article draws on three streams of research. First, the increasing influence of the planetary urbanisation thesis (Brenner, 2014), which promotes an “ex-centric” perspective aimed at “decentring” urbanisation (Rousseau, 2024). Second, the recent scholarship on global suburbanisation, which internationalises the concept of “suburbanisation” (Güney *et al.*, 2019). Third, the rise of literature on agrarian urbanism, which explores peri-urban development from a postcolonial perspective, mostly in Indian metropolitan peripheries (Balakrishnan, 2019; Ghosh and Meer, 2020). In general, recent research in the field of peri-urban political economy demonstrates how the hinterlands outside metropolitan regions have been integrated globally through: food production (Filippini, 2015); manufacturing (Liu *et al.*, 2020); and the financialisation of the real estate sector (Sood, 2021). The global political economy perspective has also highlighted how mega-projects (Lauermann, 2018), industrial estates (Li *et al.*, 2018), infrastructure-led development (Kanai and Schindler, 2019), special economic zones (Jenkins *et al.*, 2015) and satellite towns

(Rousseau and Harroud, 2019a) are transforming peri-urban areas (see Follmann, 2022). Fuelled by neo-liberal urbanisation and the rush for private investments, the consequent peri-urban land grabs are considered to be as serious as “rural” land grabs (Steel *et al.*, 2019; Leitner *et al.*, 2022). But there are blind spots in this peri-urban turn. First, most of the literature focuses on dynamic metropolitan contexts, particularly (but not exclusively) in South East Asia and Africa. Second, few research projects actually compare peri-urbanisation in different national contexts (Charmes and Rousseau, 2022). When they do, they tend to focus on countries in the North (Hamin and Gurran 2009). Comparisons between countries in the South are rare (Chaléard 2014). This paper, therefore, aims to fill the gap, by applying critical political-economic approaches on urban sprawl in declining peripheries across the North/South divide. We focus on areas, such as the Mediterranean plains in Morocco and France, where economic activities are changing because agriculture is being affected by climate change and greater pressure on resources. By analysing the areas where few “urban” industries or services are likely to take up the slack, this article will help consolidate the peri-urban turn in global urban studies.

To chart this process, we consider three research questions. First, how does the process of peri-urbanisation unfold in peripheral areas, paving the way for extractivism? Second, who and what are the driving forces behind what we call an extractivist coalition? Third, what strategies do they use to extract value from the land and maximise profit? To answer these questions, the article is structured as follows. The next section draws on the conceptual framework of extractivism and proposes three analytical dimensions for examining peri-urban extractivism. Here, we consider that land and modest homebuyers are the resources from which the coalition extracts solid value, while sprawl is the engine that provides a continuous supply of cheap land. The following section presents empirical evidence. We then set out the article’s research context and the methodology used for the empirical analysis. We examine peri-urban extractivism and explore its various dimensions: the coalition, composed of public and private actors; the multifaceted strategies used (including taking advantage of legal grey areas); and the social, economic and environmental outcomes. In this way, the fourth section considers the peri-urban shift in the light of Lefebvre’s theory of the two circuits of capital. By drawing on our case studies, we show how the “secondary circuit” takes the form of peri-urbanisation, which is designed to counter the decline in agricultural profits, due to the climate crisis and higher pressure on resources. The fifth section presents the extraction coalition of landowners, public authorities and real estate developers. We describe how they extract added value from urbanised land. The significant rise in the value of agricultural land when it is converted to building land provides landowners and property developers with a new source of rent. The rent maintains (and is fuelled by) local or state clientelist systems, which are a specific feature of these hinterlands. Laws are bypassed in different ways to boost the rent value. For example, this may involve the granting of official derogations or more informal arrangements. The sixth section goes beyond the rent-based approach. Here, we consider how the extractive coalition becomes a “non-development” coalition, by causing irreversible damage to soil in the hinterlands and by extracting value to the detriment of the most vulnerable populations. Sprawl is often read as initiating a new round of capitalist accumulation. On the contrary, we argue that it gradually erodes any further development. In the conclusion, we suggest possible avenues for future research on peri-urbanisation, for example, an analysis of the extent to which the extractive, resource-consuming model ultimately produces *cheap* sprawl.

2. Extractivism: the political economy of peri-urbanisation

This conceptual section reviews the existing literature on extractivism. We show how extractivism, initially an agrarian and rural concept, has recently been applied to non-productivist urban (metropolitan) contexts. We take it a step further, by presenting it as the extraction of urban land value. Thus, we apply it to a peri-urban context, where the transformation of agricultural land is driven by residential sprawl. We propose analysing the concept of peri-urban extractivism in relation to three dimensions to better capture its specific features.

Looking from the peripheries: bringing extractivism into the “peri-urban turn”

The concept of extractivism comes from rural and agrarian research. It is now at the centre of heated debates about how to qualify the capital accumulation plans taking place in Latin American and North African countries (Mayaux and Rousseau, 2022). Extractivism refers to a method of appropriating massive quantities of natural resources, with or without vast amounts of capital, using a large and generally unskilled workforce. Once extracted, most of the resources are then exported as unprocessed raw materials (Gudynas, 2018). Extractivism goes back to the colonial era, when colonial powers considered their peripheral areas as simple reservoirs of raw materials and labour. From large-scale mining to intensive agricultural production for export, neo-extractivism perpetuates the age-old dependence on the centre. It is boosted by technological innovations, such as fracking (for mining) or desalination (for intensive agriculture). Thus, it is now seen as a powerful factor to explain non-development. According to Latin American critical literature, extractivism helps stabilise political regimes, by buying social peace through redistribution (Stahler-Sholk, Vanden, and Becker 2014). However, it comes at a price: the poor are exploited by a small elite and environmental destruction is accelerating (Acosta, 2013).

The concept of extractivism also designates the predatory monopolisation of primary resources, which are located in the (so-called) “rural” hinterlands. By analysing Chile’s “planetary mines”, Arboleda (2016) demonstrates the deep relationship between extractivism and planetary urbanisation - with emphasis on the extraction and export of raw materials. Recently, Latin American researchers have taken the urbanisation of extractivism even further, by transferring the notion to inner-city renewal in Buenos Aires. Here, extractivism refers to financial world’s increasing hold on the urban economy (Gago and Mezzadra 2017). The endless extraction of urban land rent is an important aspect of “accumulation by dispossession”, which is a contemporary feature of globalised capitalism (Harvey 2003). This urbanisation of extractivism links neoliberal urban development and the extraction of urban land value: “extractivism has also reached the big cities. But it is not the big landowners producing soybeans, nor the mining megacompanies, but the real estate speculation that in this case causes dispossession and displacements” (Svampa and Viale, 2014: 248; see also Streule, 2023: 265).

Following this urbanisation of extractivism, we propose to “peri-urbanise” the concept, i.e. apply the guiding principles of extractivism to the outer rings of cities, where former agricultural areas are now disputed primarily for residential use. In this case, land is the resource being exploited and monopolised by a few to the detriment of poor populations. The expected outcome is to guarantee social peace, by encouraging access to private ownership. Ultimately, our analysis of peri-urban extractivism contributes to the literature on urban

sprawl by highlighting the irreversible ecological damage and adverse impacts that so-called development has on peri-urban areas.

The three analytical dimensions of peri-urban extractivism

The concept of peri-urban extractivism is easier to grasp when it is divided into three analytical dimensions. This allows us to outline the key features, in particular, the actors and the strategies they adopt to sustain the process of extraction.

1) The extraction coalition: land as the fuel to create value

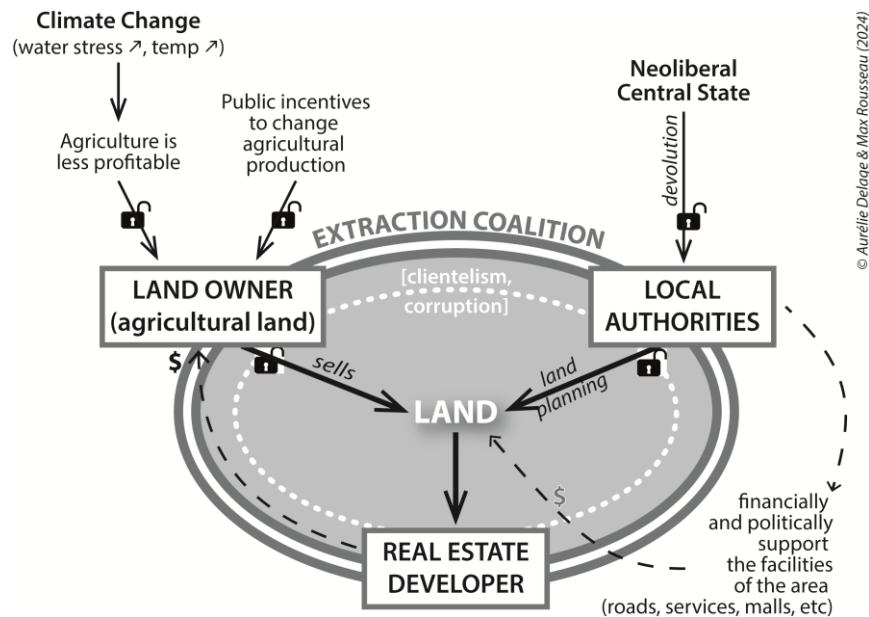


Figure 1: The Extraction Coalition: Land is the Fuel to Create Value (source: A. Delage, M. Rousseau, 2024)

As long as agriculture is profitable, agricultural land produces crops for export. However, the crisis in the “primary circuit”, triggered by the constant decline in agricultural profits due to climate change and pressure on resources (especially water), opens up a space for the emergence of extraction coalitions. These coalitions are based on a trio, each of which contributes to converting potential land value into actual profit. 1/ Landowners control the majority of agricultural land. Climate change, sometimes coupled with public incentives (see 4) are powerful levers for changing perceptions with regard to land use in areas where land is traditionally agricultural. Landowners are now more willing to unlock their land and sell. 2/ As local authorities are empowered by the central state, they make decisions about land planning, especially the decommissioning of agricultural land and its conversion into building land. This unlocks the land use laws and directly adds value to the land. Simultaneously, local authorities provide amenities to the area (by launching road building or authorising the construction of shopping centres), which is an indirect way to add value to land. 3/ Once the land use has changed, real estate developers can extract the final profit, by buying up plots of land that are cheaper than in urban areas. This trio aims to create and capture land value in the name of local (demographic, hence economic) growth. It behaves like a coalition, serving its members’ mutual interests. Like the “real estate politicians” in peri-urban India (Balakrishnan and Pani, 2020), some actors in the trio may play a double role, for example landowners may also be mayors or developers.

2) Rent extraction: cheap sprawl as the engine to capture value

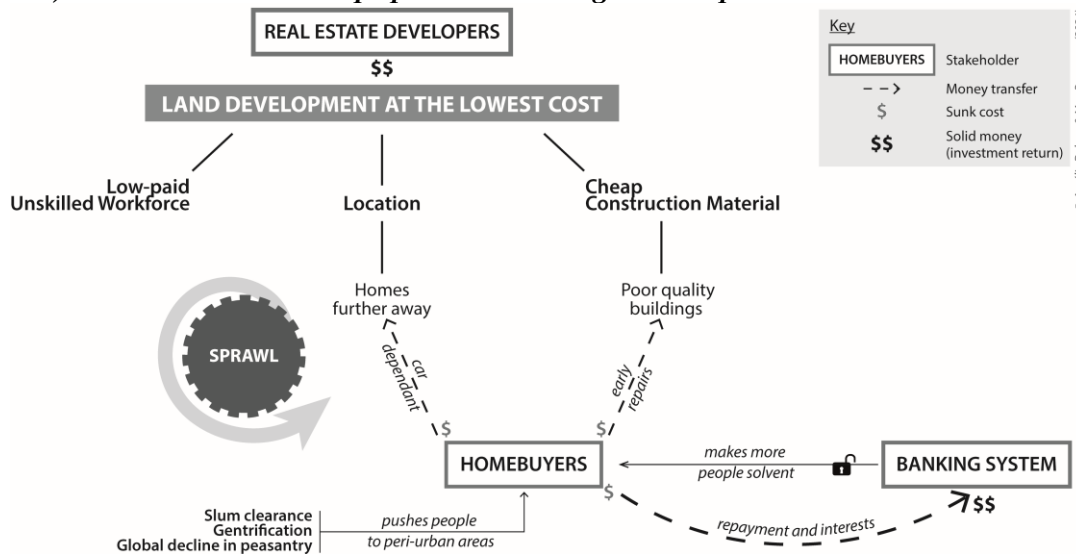


Figure 2: Rent Extraction: Sprawl is the Engine to Capture Value (source: A. Delage, M. Rousseau, 2024)

Once the land is unlocked, real estate developers step in to manage its development. In order to maximise profits, developers keep building costs to a minimum. They use numerous levers, which affect the whole production system, from building site locations to the labour costs and the use of cheap construction materials. Thus, sprawl is the engine that provides real estate developers with a continuous supply of cheap land. This follows the economic assumption that land prices diminish as the distance from the city centre increases.

In this way, the developers outsource a significant part of the building costs to homebuyers, who have to pay hidden costs. These include their daily commute (as they live further away from their workplace), or early repair work on their house due to the poor-quality construction.

Sprawl also fuels the profits in the financial sector. Making it easier to borrow money expands the pool of potential (lower-income) homebuyers, who would not otherwise be able to afford premium housing. As in any low-cost model, the profitability of this kind of land development depends on the production of a large amount of cheap housing. In this respect, the banking system is also part of the extraction coalition. It not only provides creditworthy homebuyers; it also benefits from the interest it charges to borrowers.

3) Extractivism as a predatory system: a one-shot value capture

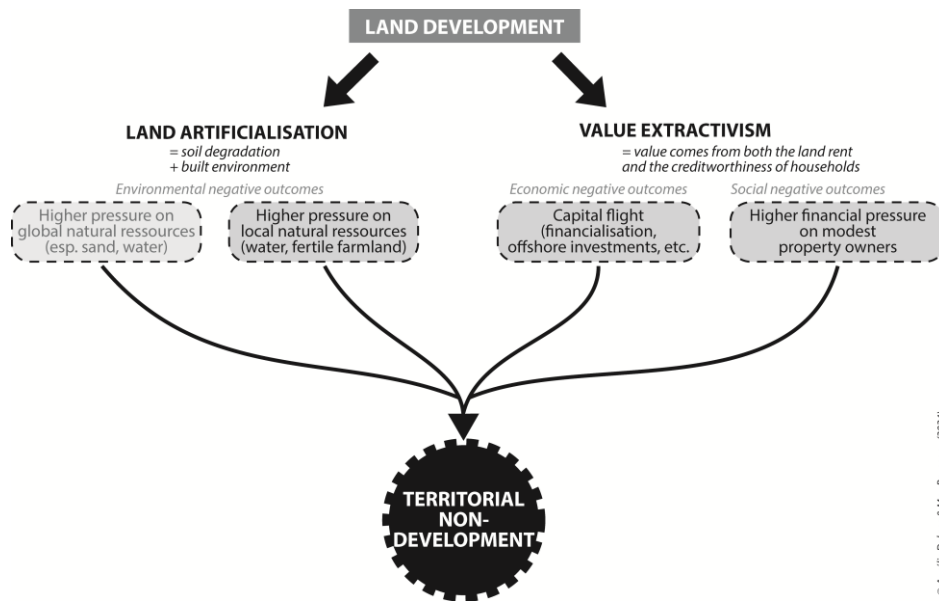


Figure 3: Extractivism as a Predatory System: A One-shot Value Capture (source: A. Delage, M. Rousseau, 2024)

This way of extracting rent comes at a price. First, it relies on a classic system based on the dispossession of natural resources through land division and enclosure. Second, once the land is artificialised in peri-urban areas, it is difficult to restore it to natural or agricultural uses. This undermines the traditional links between cities and their hinterlands. Contrary to central urban spaces (with urban amenities), where land rent can be renewed through new uses (e. g. from industrial brown field to creative campus), peri-urban areas remain stuck in a car-dependant residential model. This is particularly the case in the outer rings of cities, where there are few job opportunities and little public transport. Moreover, in the declining peripheries, urban sprawl is not accompanied by new “urban” economic activities, such as industry or services. Lastly, this process gradually undermines positive externalities, such as landscape heritage, which constitutes a substantial part of the land value in peri-urban areas. This path dependency to “cheap sprawl”, combined with capital flight (the money extracted is not reused in the area), a low-income population and growing pressure on local natural resources, hinders local development. In fact, it even induces what we call territorial “non-development”. This notion calls into question the frequent claim made by local stakeholders that “growth = development” (see section 6.)

3. Looking at France from Morocco and vice-versa: understanding two rentier peripheries

To demonstrate the relevance of “peri-urban extractivism”, this paper is empirically based on two case studies, which are driven by similar dynamics: the Chaouia (Morocco) and Roussillon (France) plains (Fig. 4). Admittedly, the two plains differ in terms of demographic scale: the Chaouia is dominated by Casablanca, a metropolis with a population of 3 million, whereas the Roussillon Plain is polarised by Perpignan, a city with an estimated population of 120,000 (205,000 in the urban area). Nevertheless, both plains have a number of similarities worthy of comparison. On an economic level, the agricultural activities in both territories are threatened by water shortage. There is intense transit (import and export of unprocessed

goods) and trafficking (smuggling and drugs in both cases, plus illegal gambling and prostitution in the Roussillon Plain). Thus, both regions play a similar role as interface between the periphery and the centre. Their population is growing, which might suggest that there is a polarising force, but that is only a façade: the inflows and outflows reflect a social and generational selectivity. Both territories are also dominated by an annuitant culture. Overall, the re-emergence of a rentier bourgeoisie, capable of defending its interests at public authority level, is increasingly being documented in countries in the North, like France (Piketty 2013). What is more, this annuitant culture has been studied in depth on a local level in Roussillon (Solans, 1993; Sistach, 2012). In turn, like many countries in North Africa and the Middle East, Morocco is often described as a “rentier state” because of its dependence on the export of raw materials (phosphate), which generates profits for a small elite (Beard, 2013). On a political level, both plains have been controlled by dynastic rentier and clientelist elites (in the case of Morocco, see Liddell, 2010 ; for Perpignan, see Giband, 2006). Chaouia Plain is controlled by powers that are decentralised from the state (*caïds* and *pashas*), whereas the Roussillon Plain has been governed for years by strong local political systems, involving a complex relationship with the central powers (Giband *et al.* 2021). The two systems are linked by the striking de-ideologisation of the parties. The fact that the local leaders’ notability is more important than their party membership has actually caused a crisis in political legitimacy (Liddell 2010; Giband *et al.* 2021). Lastly, both regions have a direct link, forged by close economic ties and intense waves of migration.

We draw on a qualitative analysis conducted simultaneously in the two peri-urban areas over five years, as part of a national research programme encompassing the two Mediterranean). Further research was carried out on the limited land use in urban and peri-urban areas. Regarding the conceptual framework, we certainly agree with Follmann’s definition of peri-urbanisation as “an *umbrella concept* that can embrace diverse, situated conceptualizations of current processes at the urban periphery” (Follmann, 2022). To stabilise the comparison, we chose a technical definition that stems from an early French regional planning term, *périurbanisation* (see Follmann, 2022). This definition is used by most of the actors we met in France and Morocco. It links peri-urbanisation to land-use change and agricultural loss beneath the expansion of (mostly low-density) built-up areas on the outskirts of urban agglomerations (Perpignan and Casablanca in our case). The narrative provided in this paper gradually emerged during informal discussions with peri-urban dwellers, farmers, real estate agents and (in the Moroccan case) *moqadems*¹. For each case study, we conducted twenty-five semi-open interviews with city councillors, local civil servants, urban planning agencies, real-estate developers and national consultants in spatial planning, in the central cities, as well as peri-urban municipalities. Some of the interviews were conducted with the help of interns.

¹ The *moqadems* are the representatives of power in urban neighbourhoods or rural villages (*douar*), who carry out the orders of the *makhzen*.

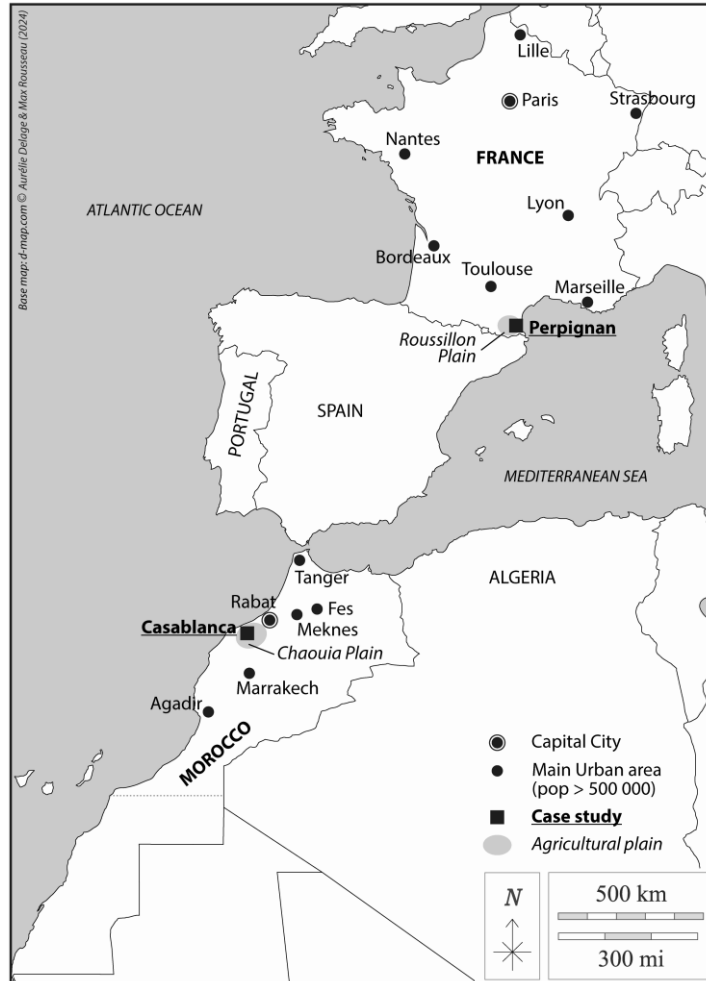


Figure 4: Map showing the location of the two case studies across the Mediterranean Sea (source: authors, 2023)

4. From an agricultural to a residential economy: land as a key resource

This section focuses on the peri-urbanisation process, which paves the way to an extractivist model in the Mediterranean hinterlands. We rely on Lefebvre’s theory of the two capital circuits. Developed in the early 1970s, the theory considers urbanisation as a relay for the crisis in the productive economy, which hit the industrial sector hardest. In order to transfer this theory to a contemporary situation (our case studies), we shift the focus to: the agricultural sector, which is now reeling from the environmental crisis; and to the periphery because peri-urbanisation has overtaken urbanisation as a relay for capital accumulation.

Climate crisis and the “primary circuit”: sacrificing the agricultural economy

In the Roussillon Plain, as in Chaouia, agricultural yields are increasingly impacted by the climate crisis. Excessive exposure to sunlight damages the Roussillon vineyards and water shortages are detrimental for market gardening in Morocco. These two peripheral areas are in a similar situation: their productive economy is in crisis.

The Chaouia Plain: market gardening and the water shortage

Traditionally, Morocco's main cities were located near the most fertile plains. Hassan II's development strategy sought to preserve and keep control of the agricultural community because it was regarded as the guarantor of the regime's stability (Leveau 1985; Rousseau and Harroud, 2019b). However, the end of the twentieth century marked a shift towards intense urban spread and, thus, Casablanca's urbanisation continued across the fertile Chaouia Plain, a vegetable producing region. Today, pressure from urban growth is concentrated in the peri-urban area, where two types of farming co-exist: rich modern capitalist farming, a legacy of French colonisation, with huge irrigated plots geared to export; and poor small-scale rainfed farming (*bour*). In fact, Chaouia is one of the zones most at risk from water shortages on a global level (World Resources Institute, 2019). The fall in annual precipitations is already affecting people's daily lives (see Moroccan news website *le 360*). The absence of regulatory policies increases the inequalities between farms: the over-exploitation of wastewater benefits large-scale agriculture (Berahmani *et al.* 2012). The decline in yields on small farms managed by farmers with little cultural capital (Salik, 2019) is pushing them to sell land to large farmers and city dwellers. Above all, they tend to sell to the unofficial brokers, who are combing the plain and are responsible for the *ad hoc* urbanisation of plots of land. Large farms provide sites for large-scale construction operations, despite their high agricultural potential.

The Roussillon Plain: viticulture and the climate crisis

The Roussillon Plain has the combined advantages of a Mediterranean climate and a well irrigated alluvial plain. Traditionally, this territory in the south of France was based on family farms with polyculture systems geared to food production. In the nineteenth century, when France's production systems were reorganised, the plain was oriented towards vegetable and fruit production and, above all, large-scale speculative viticulture (Bernard and Carrière 1992). Now, climate change has brought hotter summers and a more marked drought period (Lereboullet *et al.* 2014), which impact agricultural production in general and winegrowing, in particular.

In reality, the climate crisis is exacerbating the agricultural crisis, which has been apparent for some time as a result of various factors. Fruit and vegetable trading was a major economic activity in the Roussillon Plain. It was polarised by the Perpignan market, which was of national importance. It has been facing competition from Spain since the latter's accession to the European Union in 1986. The Roussillon vineyards are also struggling because of the global overproduction of wine and the decrease in wine consumption. To limit overproduction, the European Union launched a premium scheme in 1980 to rip out vines. The premiums were higher when vines were uprooted definitively. The combination of these premiums and a change in local town planning rules (see next section) paved the way for the massive conversion of vineyards into land for urbanisation – its value increased a hundredfold. In this way, 10 000 hectares of vineyards have been ripped out in the local

county (“département”²) since the 1980s, particularly in less profitable areas (source: SCoT, 2020³).

In both our case studies, the end of a productive economy is accelerated by a combination of environmental and economic factors. These factors not only create vacant land, they are also encouraging a swing to a non-productive economy, coupled with political choices that are exterior to the territory. In the French case, with the collapse of capitalistic vineyards inherited from the nineteenth century, property owners accustomed to lucrative land-based rent needed a quick fix.

Cheap sprawl as the engine of the “second circuit”

As pointed out by Lefebvre, the crisis affecting the first network (the productive economy) requires public authority intervention to encourage the transfer of capital to the second network (urbanisation) (Lefebvre 1970). In France and Morocco, the central or decentralised state plays a major role, not only in terms of housing policies, but also with regard to housing production methods. For example, the state issues directives for land rights and provides indirect grants for property developers or fiscal incentives for landowners (Gobillon *et al.*, 2019). The resulting urban forms differ depending on the goals pursued. Developments with individual houses are fairly standard in France (Gateau and Marchal, 2020), while in Morocco huge operations and informal housing are the norm.

Chaouia: eviction in the centre and social housing on the periphery

In Morocco, much like in France, the most prized land is traditionally located near the major cities because it can immediately generate a high value added, provided that urbanisation is controlled (Harris and Lehrer 2018). In the peripheries of Casablanca, different forms of peri-urbanisation coexist: informal neighbourhoods and *douars*, informal industrial units, large social housing projects, and large real estate, tourism and tertiary development projects, including malls, leisure parks, logistics platforms or more industrial and pharmaceutical units (Rousseau and Harroud, 2019b).

Sacrificing rural agriculture began in the mid-1990s, when King Hassan II decided to construct 200 000 social housing units, as a “peri-urban solution” to absorb the slums threatening city centres (Rachik, 2002; Rousseau and Harroud, 2019a). For political reasons, the regime entrusted this mission to private property developers. Gradually, especially after the 2000s, the strategy also generated economic gains. Land formerly occupied by slums in central Casablanca constituted a potentially lucrative market for new private developments. Slum clearance was flanked by (largely infructuous) incentives to move to “third-party neighbourhoods” (Beier, 2021), but it also led to violent eviction by the police (Portelli and Lees, 2018). Resettlement to new social housing schemes in the Chaouia Plain involved the “mobilisation” of the new sector of private property developers. Tax incentives and even total exemptions were offered (Barthel and Zaki, 2011). Land sales undercut the market prices and

² The department is one of the three levels of government below the national level, between the administrative regions and the communes. There are 96 departments in mainland France and Perpignan is the main city in the Pyrénées-Orientales department.

³ SCoT stands for Schéma de Cohérence Territoriale, an intercommunal planning document whose perimeter encompasses the Roussillon Plain.

state investment programmes were launched to guarantee lucrative private investments. These programmes reoriented Moroccan capitalism from its traditional anchorage in the primary sector towards the real estate sector. This is illustrated by the Addoha group, which originally operated a ghassoul mine. Similarly, the Chaabi group originally specialised in food processing (Rousseau and Harroud, 2019b). Their priority is to build on large plots of land with a high return on investment.

Vast amounts of public farmland on the periphery of cities were released to develop sites for slum relocation. This policy aroused great interest and, in the mid-2000s, led to mega projects to create new cities. The goal was to house more than a million people in an area covering more than 5 000 hectares of land (Rousseau *et al.*, 2021). Gradually, the peri-urban solution, implemented on a huge scale since the 2000s, condemned the very fertile land. This development reflects a profound break in the political economics of an agricultural country, governed by an authoritarian regime. It involves massive state intervention: the state not only makes public land available, it also delegates peri-urban development to the private sector with no guarantee of urban services. Therefore, the peri-urban development is extremely lucrative for some (costs were kept to a minimum, profits were maximised), at the expense of quality housing (lack of facilities, minimum building standards).

The Roussillon Plain: sunseekers move to peripheral housing estates

In France, access to car ownership and the dream of a detached house are generally considered to be the drivers of urban sprawl. In the early 1980s, sprawl was also facilitated when decentralisation laws gave mayors the key responsibility of managing land rights and granting planning permission. This decentralisation led to an extremely fragmented situation. It limited the overall picture of urbanisation across a broad territory, making land rights more vulnerable to local pressure, particularly from landowners (see 5).

Urban sprawl has developed on a massive scale in the Roussillon Plain. It accelerated sharply in the 1980s and 1990s before slowing down after the 2000s. Generally, urbanisation increased by 34% between 1990 and 2012, largely to the detriment of farmland, particularly vineyards (ScoT, 2019). Urban sprawl is driven by demographic growth due to one of the most important migratory flows in France (over 4 000 new inhabitants each year). The people relocating from northern France tend to be low-income retirees and disadvantaged households, drawn by the sun and the area's beautiful landscapes. Unable to afford the prohibitively expensive French Riviera, the influx of these households in the Roussillon Plain has earned the area its nickname "the poor man's California". The "solution" provided by urban sprawl to counter the decline in land rent does not rely on industrialisation, but on mass seaside tourism. This has been promoted by the state as part of its national development plan, since the 1960s.

However, this demographic growth hides major economic problems and social inequalities. According to the National Institute of Statistics Agency (Insee, 2018), the Pyrénées-Orientales, which has almost 20% unemployment, is the third poorest of the French mainland departments. It attracts a vulnerable population that depends on social benefits (PLUi-D, 2019). This is apparent in the urban form. Overall, huge housing estates with individual houses have been developed on the edge of traditional winegrowing towns. Although individual villas are prevalent, the size of plots and houses varies greatly. This reflects very different social rationales, ranging from dense, charmless housing estates to residential districts where luxury villas are built in the middle of huge plots of land. In some cases, a

minimum plot size is imposed to guarantee the high cost of “admission” to the neighbourhood. Nonetheless, the first category (dense housing developments) is the most common. It is geared to the poorest working households and plot size has actually diminished over time. In contrast, affluent pensioners prefer investing in luxury condos and well-equipped flats on the coast.

Thus, on both sides of the Mediterranean, this early stage of peri-urban extractivism is evident. It shows how the crisis in the first circuit triggers the need to find a solution that induces a peri-urban shift. First, the presence of capitalistic agriculture, which is geared to production for sale outside the region, encourages dependence on quick profits. In the absence of an industrial culture or a long-term strategy, and with public authority incentives at local and national levels, private stakeholders seize the opportunity to capture land value on a large scale. The situation is further exacerbated by an anti-urban context in both countries, where the central city’s image merges with that of a poor, potentially dangerous population (Rachik, 2002; Delage and Giband, *forthcoming*).

5. Clientelism and land rent as the cornerstones

With the change in land rent in the second network (urban sprawl), the clientelist system has been reorganised to keep the annuitant system alive. New stakeholders have emerged in the form of property developers, who may also be landowners and/or local elected representatives. The coalition prospered in both territories in our study at a time when the local town planning documents were being drafted. This major event involved intense, sometimes secret negotiations. This section analyses the coalition and its methods to maintain control over land and capture its added value when urbanised.

In Chaouia: the weight of the colonial legacy

In Morocco, urban sprawl has destroyed farmland and farm jobs. It primarily benefits property developers (ranging from large listed corporations to clandestine developers), landowners and local politicians. Resettlement to new social housing schemes led to the emergence of a private development sector. Although it is largely made up of SMEs, it is dominated by a handful of powerful private development groups with close ties to the political regime (Zaki, 2011). With this “Cronyism capitalism”, a feature of the Moroccan economy, the national real estate champions are typically the founders of these powerful groups (Zeroual, 2022). For example, Addoha, one of the largest real estate groups in the country and even in Africa, has benefited from the sale of public land at low or modest prices, as well as from the discretionary award of public contracts (Saadi, 2017). In fact, private landowners are increasingly the winners in a context characterised by the shortage of publicly-owned agricultural land in peri-urban areas and growing competition between developers to secure coveted land.

Private landowners also use urban sprawl to maximise short-term profits, by taking advantage of a political context that is increasingly favourable. In the Chaouia Plain, which was colonised in the first half of the twentieth century, the French were the biggest landowners. After independence, to guarantee the bourgeoisie’s allegiance, Morocco’s political regime redistributed the highly fertile land to the groups (the military, senior officials, etc.), who were

deemed the most crucial for the monarchic regime's stability. Besides these huge landowners, there are many small landowners who swapped plots of land in the hope that they would be urbanised.

The rural hinterlands are governed by rural regulations, which facilitate land fragmentation. The presidents of rural municipalities appear to play a crucial role with regard to the increased number of housing developments: they introduce the new population to the clientelist system and collect direct levies on land rent.

“Rural municipalities are actually peri-urban municipalities, where for years there was no town planning scheme. Little by little, we tried to draft one, (...) in town planning schemes, the law prescribes the identification of zones for urbanisation plus an ‘agricultural reserve’. In the agricultural reserve, the president of the municipality has the right to grant planning permission on plots of at least one hectare at a density of 0.2. That doesn't upset the gentlemen farmers. So this land, which should be farmland, is developed. Then the poor arrive. The least poor say ‘Mr Mayor, 1 hectare? But I have 5 children: can't we make 5 x 200 m² plots instead?’ That's how the president of the municipality starts to divide and issue planning permission for smaller and smaller plots: 2 000 m², 1 000 m², then 500 m², and sometimes 150 m², depending on the negotiations. This fragmentation leads to an urban form that consumes a huge amount of land” (interview, urban planning consultant, 2019).

This sprawl is also making the agricultural crisis in the Chaouia Plain worse because farms in interstitial spaces are in direct competition with residential use, especially for water. Incidentally, in a country where the motorisation rate remains low, sprawling housing developments induce car dependency. This further increases inequalities, especially because most non-farm jobs are in the city centres. Priority is given to maximising land rent and the close ties between landowners and local politicians, which is why there is a disparity between discourses and practices in the fight to reduce the artificialisation of agricultural land:

“The town planning department, the town planning agencies, everyone is talking about urban sprawl but without setting a feasible goal to limit it. (...) Each time I have to deal with local politicians asking for urban extensions. (...), the only strategic issue is land rent. Or the promise of rent because some people can wait 5 or 10 years...” (interview, urban planning consultant, 2020).

The owners of the large farms inherited from the colonial era are elected through the clientelist system. Even poor, often illiterate people from the rural exodus, who depend on the big landowners to eke out a living, are initiated to this system. In this way, the control of land merges with political power. This is not simply a local problem; it is apparent at a national level. In fact, large landowners are frequently elected to be members of the national assembly. Drawing on the case of the Rabat-Salé periphery, Abouhane explains how the coalitions, which include local politicians and landowners (who may be one and the same), are responsible for transforming the agricultural hinterlands into clandestine districts for the poor:

“The landowner sells farmland with no plans or permission, organises buyers into pressure groups, gets elected on the local council, provides various infrastructure facilities and blocks all the planning, development and restructuring projects in the district. Accession to parliament means the president of the town council is in a significantly stronger position than the technical services at the local level. He requests exemptions and even violates the central standards, by arguing that it is because of local circumstances, and the technician often has no way of defending himself against the council's attacks. The governor also avoids any conflict with the town council and instead seeks its support and collaboration. Given his parliamentary and political activities, the deputy president represents a permanent danger with regard to politicising local problems. But this very threat is an incentive for the governor to find a compromise.” (Abouhane 2012: 128).

In this way, the rentier system not only benefits from plural mandates, but above all from the power asymmetries between elected representatives and the technical services.

In the Roussillon Plain: a powerful coalition to extract land rent

In France, for years, a system of plural mandates meant that local interests were well represented at higher levels of government. But the Roussillon Plain is also characterised by an extreme “rentier culture”, based on a combination of three features of local agricultural production: low profits, heavy reliance on sub-contracting and seasonality (Solans, 1993). In a context of “permanent deindustrialisation” (Marty, 2013), resorting to land rent provides a secure placement and does not involve labour management. Therefore, when rural mayors were able to open up the rights to urbanise, it was a windfall for the traditional big landowners. The latter were able to sell some of their land directly, in the form of different sized building plots. The operation was extremely lucrative because farmland sells for 1 to 10 euros per square metre (depending on soil fertility), whereas a building plot easily fetches 400 euros/m² in areas close to Perpignan. The temptation to sell land was even greater because the winegrowing crisis was already a reality. In addition, the subsidies for uprooting vines meant landowners could cash in twice: first when they uprooted vines, then when they sold the land. The added-value was greater still – with no real risk - because in both cases, it was guaranteed by a public framework (see 4). Buyers who could mobilise the necessary capital fast, seized the opportunity (like in the extractive model), even if it involved setting up “speculative wasteland” (to use a term coined by a local technician, interview 2019), until the plots could be developed.

Therefore, the mayor is central to urban sprawl. Since the decentralisation laws in the 1980s, the mayor controls the land, by drafting local town planning documents. Generally, mayors are keen to increase the housing supply to attract new households. But they are also interested in satisfying their electorate, which includes farmers. Indeed, farmers can generate an additional income (for their retirement or for their heirs), when their land is covered by urban zoning. This is deemed legitimate compensation for the reduced profitability of winegrowing (Langumier, 2008). As one mayor explains:

“To compensate slightly [for the crisis in viticulture], my predecessor opened up zones for urbanisation so that plots with vines could be included and so that they [the landowners] did not lose out in terms of their incomes” (interview with the mayor of a distant peri-urban municipality, in Rotg 2021, 52)).

In the Roussillon Plain, many elected representatives were in office for several decades until the 2010s. In addition to their strong local anchorage, they are sometimes landowners as well. This proximity encourages collusion. In fact, peri-urbanisation often involves big landowning families, who have a direct role in demarcating land for zoning, as this technician explains:

“I didn’t agree with following the contour [of plots on the zoning document] in terms of the municipality’s big families (...). That’s still what happens sometimes” (interview with the local farm land agency, in Rotg, 2021: 52).

Along with the mayor and the landowner, the developer is the linchpin of what is the “golden triangle” of urban sprawl in the Roussillon Plain. The developer prospects for land, then puts a seller in contact with a buyer and liaises with the local authorities. Although the term “developer” is very broad (Theurillat *et al.* 2015), here it involves a large number of big or small local developers and builders. They tend to build individual detached houses. This type of development is the preserve of large landowning families with strong local connections. Consequently, national developers drawn to the region about 25 years ago, struggle to become established and generally focus on collective housing projects.

The local alliance between the mayor, the landowner and the developer is based on a combination of influence and power. For example, real estate actors can be on the municipal council, where they have access to certain strategic information. Obviously, this is not a specific feature of the Roussillon Plain, but here the phenomenon seems particularly widespread because of the combination of land rent and political clientelism. It is difficult to prove because the code of silence rules. Yet, field work reveals that there is very broad consensus among official representatives at different levels. Indeed, within local authorities and the state's central services, official representatives criticise the perverse effects of land rent. During an informal interview, one official described the techniques, which developers use to persuade landowners that they could generate substantial added value. For example, they encourage landowners to sell a plot to the local authority for a municipal housing development project at a regulated price. In exchange, they promise that the zoning for another plot of land will change in future, so they can launch their own lucrative private development. Another official mentioned prior agreement between developers to protect their self-interests on a geographic level. This is an illegal practice used to distort competition for public procurement contracts. Off the record, they all have stories, albeit hard to verify, which end up amounting to substantial evidence.

Land rent and speculation go hand in hand with local clientelism. Elected representatives seek to consolidate their political base and maintain the income linked to their mandates (Giband and Lefèvre, 2014). The system can be characterised by fast, low risk profits, which are linked to the high demand in an attractive region. Overall, for the three main stakeholders in the coalition, it is a win-win situation that has been fuelling urban sprawl for the past four decades. Lastly, in some cases, there is a total fusion between land ownership and political power at the municipal level, much like in Morocco. For example, in a town in the Roussillon Plain:

The (local zoning document) is mind-boggling: there is the shopping centre and [the mayor's] vineyard, the whole of which [he] has converted into building land (...) The shopping centres, (...) were in exchange for jobs for the unemployed in the municipality to give him a political base. So inevitably people voted for him again." (Interview with a local councillor, 2021).

While this may be an extreme case, it shows the scope of the system linking land rent, political clientelism and local employment in a department where the construction and commercial sectors are the major employers. The coalition of elected representatives-landowners-developers ultimately restricts access to the land resource using various mechanisms. It has control over land rights, the economic capital necessary for transactions and construction operations. This is coupled with corruption, which was an intrinsic part of the system and can be found on both sides of the Mediterranean. In the Mediterranean region in France, corruption is a major aspect of regulation (Perrin *et al.* 2018).

"The corruption here is petty corruption. Laundering, undeclared work, corruption involving real estate developers, who pay left and right to get their planning permission. They work partly with businesses, partly undeclared..." (interview with a local councillor, Roussillon Plain, 2021).

"Corruption is very widespread and everyone accepts it. (...) It is because that doesn't work that corruption is needed: if urban legislation was compatible with practices and living standards, we wouldn't need corruption" (interview with a consultant, Chaouia Plain, 2019).

In both the Chaouia Plain and the Roussillon Plain, the analysis of coalitions reveals not only the proximity between political, economic and landed stakeholders, but also the conflicts of interest. In both peripheral areas, the clientelist system allows "casual deals between friends"

and much bigger deals as well. The following sub-section focuses on one specific deal that takes advantage of derogatory systems.

Circumventing the law, "optimising" land

The extraction coalition almost systematically circumvents town planning regulations, which are locally managed. The commissions that grant derogations authorising the coalitions' actions lack transparency. As a result, local rumours persist, suggesting that urban sprawl in the peripheries is largely driven by corruption. Different channels are involved in both cases. In Chaouia, derogations concern residential programmes directly (and increasingly logistics). In contrast, in the Roussillon Plain, they concern commercial planning, which is associated with sprawling residential developments.

The derogation system in the Chaouia Plain

The increasing power of real estate developers in Morocco, particularly around Casablanca, is associated with the almost systematic use of derogations to circumvent town planning regulations. Derogations were introduced in Moroccan law in the 2000s. They allow developers to proceed with an urban project that is not authorised by the town planning scheme. A request has to be submitted to the commission controlled by the *wali* (the regional representative of the central state). The derogation system is vital for explaining urban sprawl.

A report by the Court of Auditors (2010) shows the huge impact that derogations have had in the Casablanca region. Between 2005 and 2009, over 5 000 hectares was urbanised, 21.4% of the total area of the urban region, following a derogation. Almost two thirds of the projects authorised by the commission are real estate projects, while industrial and tourist projects only represent 15% and 20%, respectively. The report also underlines that derogations in Casablanca “are not subject to common criteria” because certain requests were given “preferential” treatment (Aljem and Bkiri 2019). Derogations are frequently granted for new social housing projects in exchange for the development of infrastructure, which is usually the responsibility of the municipality.

“Big developers operate in two ways. If they want a large site, they will say ‘I want to develop a social housing project, build 5 000 housing units, but to do that you must give me land for free.’ So they will choose a plot from the state’s private domain. They draw up a masterplan, with avenues [in the form of a racecourse]. So to obtain permission to build the housing development, they negotiate with the municipality, then with the urban agency. There are backhanders [and] then plots of land start being sold. Then it peters out... Then another town is built a kilometre away, with the same racecourse pointing in a different direction; but they have no intention of finishing either of them... And so another derogation is granted and plots are sold. Even further away, they build a new housing development...” (Interview, consultant, 2019).

Most major projects that are granted dispensation increase land speculation in the surrounding area. That is the case for projects to rehouse people from the slums (which are seldom finished). It also applies to gated community projects built in the inner ring. A few kilometres from the gated communities, many small family farm plots are being urbanised spontaneously in the outer peri-urban ring. This land is in the rural zoning category and, therefore, is not subject to the town planning scheme. Consequently, a developer or a mere landowner can buy a plot and build a villa on it. The only legal requirement is the plot size of at least 1 hectare. Even in these cases, derogations can be obtained:

“What is in force is the general regulation of agricultural land, which only requires a minimum plot: if you have 1 hectare, you can build on plots of 250 square meters. But alongside the derogation procedure

for large investment projects, there is a *small derogation*, even if it is not designated as such in the regulatory texts. This derogation makes it possible to overcome the legislation of the rural world: even if you do not have a minimum plot, you can still build if the special commission considers that your construction project will not generate scattered housing. (...) So when there is no town planning document, it comes down to opening up to urbanisation in all its forms” (interview, urban agency operating in Chaouia, 2019)

The combination of “large derogations” in the inner ring and “small derogations” in the outer, rural ring has exacerbated peri-urbanisation, which spreads randomly. The resulting landscape is a juxtaposition of small farm plots for poor farmers, bourgeois villas and often half-finished social housing developments. This type of zone is no longer rural, but it is not the city either because it has no urban infrastructure.

A recent official report describes the problems that occur when urban planning is systematically bypassed. It qualifies this form of urbanisation as a “permanent exemption”. Given that the poor population (i.e. insolvent demand) is displaced on a large scale and evicted from the city centres to the hinterland, over 30% of the constructions built each year are built on peripheral farmland with no planning permission (CESE, 2014). As for the social housing projects built with a derogation, they end up becoming relegated areas that are cut off from the city centre and its jobs, with no economic base of their own or basic infrastructure (Rousseau and Harroud, 2019a). By making way for the gentrification of the city centres, they offer high returns for the major development corporations. They encourage the social control of former slum dwellers: social housing units are sold to the latter, which means they are tied by mortgages. Hence, despite the fears occasionally expressed by the Ministry for Agriculture, the urbanisation of farmland continues to be very profitable and satisfies various interests.

Commercial derogations in the Roussillon Plain

In the Roussillon Plain, residential sprawl goes hand in hand with the spread of shopping centres. The second major employer in the Roussillon Plain is now the powerful retail supply chain, Auchan. It owns a hypermarket and a shopping centre, covering a total area of over 30 hectares. By developing a great deal of land (for buildings, warehouses, car parks), and creating employment, leading retail supply chains are indispensable. This dual influence gives them political leverage.

Here again, commercial urbanisation in France is traditionally driven by derogations to town planning regulations: applications are processed by expert commissions that lack transparency. When the first hypermarkets opened in France, the Royer bill was passed stating that new shopping complexes required authorisation from commissions, in which local politicians play a determining role. According to the central corruption prevention department (2014), this bill “set the conditions for corruption on such a huge scale that it was eventually condemned by some of the retail supply companies themselves.” This corruption sustains several channels: funding for public infrastructure for the municipality, political party slush funds and even personal gain.

In the Roussillon Plain, commercial exemptions drive urban sprawl with the development of road networks. Their impact is exacerbated by the lack of inter-municipal cooperation. Although Perpignan, the main city, has several shopping centres, it is competing with other municipalities in the same inter-municipal region because they want “their own” shopping

centre, even if it is only 3 km away. The situation is even more blatant in municipalities that belong to a different inter-municipal body because they are not subject to the same commercial regulations that apply on a larger scale.

The derogation systems in both countries have legal loopholes, which can be used for property optimisation. While not necessarily illegal, this type of optimisation takes advantage of the “grey areas” in regulatory urban planning. In France, the rights to urbanise are being limited in the case of urban extension. When it comes to land optimisation, developers focus on municipalities with old town planning documents, which are more lenient than more recent urban plans. In general, the municipalities concerned are remote rural areas with a limited technostructure located a long way from urban centres. This situation causes urban spread in a third outer ring.

The rentier culture in both countries paves the way for extractivism. This is because the major stakeholders are used to making substantial profits fast. In addition, they control the main levers for action, either directly or through their personal networks. Our analytical framework of extractivism enables us to go beyond this rentier-based analysis. When the added value has been cashed in once and for all, the rent-based strategy no longer exists because the “base material” for generating rent, i.e. land, has been transformed irrevocably. Therefore, the predatory extraction coalition that we have described turns out to be a non-development coalition, as discussed in the next and last section.

6. Growth without development: peri-urban non-development coalitions

In the field of global urban studies, we are witnessing a “peripheral turn”. Scholars are challenging the city-centric view, by shifting their focus to urban peripheries in the Global South, particularly the sprawling hinterlands outside metropolitan regions. Despite its merits, even with this type of decentralised approach to “the urban outside the city”, the classic theory is being applied to the peripheries: urbanisation = growth. Indeed, for many local stakeholders, growth = development.

Our two case studies of peripheral areas prove this equation wrong. Peri-urbanisation and its promise of formal demographic growth actually go hand in hand with the destruction of the agricultural economy. No other productive activities have been developed to replace it. In the Pyrénées-Orientales, while nearly 16 000 people were employed in farm work in 2016, 92% were seasonal (CCI, 2020). In contrast, the retail sector employs over 21 000 staff and the figure is rising. Retail has become the major sector of employment in the department, way ahead of tourism, construction and public works. Our detailed analysis has led us to qualify this politico-economic system as a “non-development coalition”.

In both peripheral areas, the non-development coalitions thrive by extracting rent from poor populations: the slum dwellers from Casablanca in the Chaouia Plain; and the precarious households from northern France who move to the Roussillon Plain. In Morocco, the central state plays a decisive role. First, it provides slum dwellers with subsidized plots of land in rural areas, up to 30 km from Casablanca. This is known as the “third-party” system. However, many cannot afford to build. Instead, they do their utmost to resist eviction and to sell their plot. This explains why many resettlement neighbourhoods remain empty (Beier, 2021). Second, the state plays a crucial role in the massive construction of large public housing estates. It provides cheap land to private developers and credit facilities for ex-slum

dwellers. Since the early 2000s, the state has guaranteed social loans, which private banks provide to low-income buyers. Typically, the credit repayment for a household buying a social apartment in the peripheries of Casablanca varies between 800 to 1500 dirhams per month (the equivalent of 70 to 140 euros in a country where the minimum wage is 170 euros/month). The state provides cheap land to private developers, who build tens of thousands of social housing units on the outskirts of Casablanca at a huge profit. A single apartment in a new social housing unit costs 250,000 dirhams (23,000 euros).

"Each dwelling makes it possible to realize an average profit of up to 100,000 dirhams. The cost price of a dwelling is only 150,000 dirhams, including land" (interview, civil servant, peri-urban municipality, 2022).

Major developers often sub-contract to the informal sector to cut costs.

"They give a lot of work to informal construction companies but pay them on a flat-rate and low-cost basis. So these companies can only get by playing with standards" (interview, member of an association protecting the rights of social housing dwellers, 2022).

The quality of this type of peri-urbanisation is dubious and, ultimately, its future is unclear. As one resident explains, it is the new residents who bear the brunt of the non-development coalitions:

"The people who buy these houses are obliged to redo everything, including the networks. We have a lot of problems with collapses but the developers buy the press" (interview, social housing resident, 2019).

In France, a developer can use two mechanisms: 1) prospecting for cheap land; 2) juggling with plot size. In the Roussillon Plain, the value of viticultural land – which is generally worth more than grassland – is the lowest in France. It costs 10 000 euros per hectare, 150 times less than vineyards in Champagne (Safer 2019). Reducing plot size brings down prices, which partly offsets the increase in land prices. For the same budget, a modest household can buy a property in a peri-urban area, if they accept the idea of moving away from the city centre and major roads. Potential buyers may not be aware of the hidden cost of mobility and do not always budget for fuel price hikes. The social demand driving urban sprawl combined with the growing supply of building land has sealed the Roussillon Plain's shift. It has become a second class "residential" economy, where standards of living and purchasing power are generally low. Rent is extracted, generating a profit because of the large number of cheap properties. Standard architecture and low-grade material help keep down prices for what some developers have pejoratively nicknamed "house and barbecue, aka horizontal collective housing" (interview, 2023). What is more, this intense urban production drives an entire socio-economic system. It creates employment in the construction and public works sector in a region where there is no real alternative. The use of a large unskilled labour force to produce sprawl is an important feature of the extractive model.

The concept of peri-urban extractivism highlights the fact that the rent extracted by landowners and developers is extracted irreversibly. Capital is not reinvested in production and different forms of extra-territorial evasion have emerged. For example: foreign investments in agriculture or the black economy, especially cross-border prostitution clubs, which are actually a cover for international drug trafficking (Alduy and Tarrus, 2018: 134). These examples illustrate how the non-development coalition sucks up local resources and pumps them abroad, thereby condemning an already poor region. This non-development, which fits into a trajectory specific to the region, was long considered to be the outcome of a

form of “internal colonisation” (Lafont, 1971). This situation echoes Morocco’s past: in the early twentieth century, the French Protectorate totally reorganised the Moroccan economy around agriculture and mining for export. This established Morocco’s role as a peripheral region.

Land rent extraction is remarkably short-term in both countries. When land rent is derived from agricultural production, it guarantees an annual turnover that fluctuates with the harvests. In contrast, land rent based on urban sprawl, though more lucrative, is a “one shot” strategy that cannot be renewed. In an extractive model, irreversible resource exploitation is constantly expanding. Similarly, with peri-urbanisation in both our case studies, the annuitant rationale can only be maintained if more and more natural or agricultural land is converted into building land. Although once abundant in both countries, land resources are dwindling and stricter town planning regulations are limiting construction. This is especially true in France, where the fight against soil artificialisation is now a major public policy goal.

7. Conclusion: “cheap sprawl” as a dead end

Shifting the focus from the centre to the periphery, and from dynamic peripheries to declining peripheries, changes our perception of the peri-urbanisation process. We investigate what lies behind peri-urbanisation in declining peripheries and demonstrate that the predominant economic model that has transformed rural and agricultural peripheries into residential areas, is not simply based on land rent, but on extractivism. This process is driven by a coalition of private and public stakeholders whose aim is to exploit land value to the detriment of local populations and the environment. We reveal how this process causes the artificialisation of agricultural land and promotes “cheap sprawl”. It does not contribute to sustainable development, but rather to non-development. This situation perpetuates social precariousness and increases environmental degradation at a time when the climate crisis is making matters worse. The methodological and analytical approach presented in this paper makes a useful contribution to academic literature and public debates.

First, we attempt to bridge the North-South divide (Roy, 2014), by drawing on two sets of empirical material. This approach has proven to be fruitful, albeit challenging. It allowed us to grasp the mechanisms behind the process of peri-urbanisation in the North, in the light of a more clear-cut situation in the South, where corruption and clientelism are more apparent. However, the in-depth and direct comparison of two very different national systems remains challenging, particularly because the situation in Morocco regarding access to statistical data and freedom of expression is more complicated. Considering the South through the Northern lens calls for further reflection on the post-colonial situation. This type of North/South comparison helps broaden our understanding of peri-urban dynamics on a global scale. It invites us to reconsider the extractive economic model, from a critical and ecological perspective, in order to identify more sustainable alternatives.

Second, by focusing on extractivism, our analysis helps us understand why declining peripheries are stuck in a non-development trap. As explained, extractivism is a predatory system for many reasons. Profit accumulation depends on dispossession in terms of both natural resources (e.g. soil artificialisation), and financial resources (low-income homebuyers). The extraction coalition invests its profits outside the area, which hinders future local development. It also widens social inequalities by targeting modest households. This

system holds together because all the components involved, be it land, labour, building materials and even oil, are *cheap*. As Moore argues, “cheap” sprawl – as in “cheap natures” (2016) – shows how the capitalist stakeholders in the extraction coalition “*capitalize* rather than appropriate” (*ibid.*: 88). As Moore points out, “the costs of socio-ecological reproduction start to show up ‘on the books’.” (*ibid.*). Sprawl is a process driven by extractivism, with irreversible and adverse impacts. This predatory system has been sustained in Morocco and France for years, due to the deeply rooted idea that urbanisation was an unlimited process. Yet, in recent years, some serious limitations have started to emerge. In both countries, the water supply is becoming critical in newly urbanised areas. Rapid and ill-planned urbanisation has a serious toll on natural resources at a local level: in the Chaouia, the water pressure must be reduced; in the Roussillon Plain, there are tap water shortages even in the spring. On a broader scale, peri-urbanisation puts an additional strain on global resources, with pressure on sand and water resources, needed to produce concrete and other building materials, not to mention the energy required to transport resources around the world. Cheap sprawl no longer appears to be a solution to local decline. Instead, it is a dead end for genuine local development.

This impasse is potentially explosive, from a social and political point of view. For decades, peri-urbanisation has been a tacit means to ensure social peace in many ways. But a historical and global perspective of the situation reveals that this peace was largely based on the use of fossil fuels (Charbonnier, 2024). Peri-urban areas rely on car-dependency and non-renewable materials. At a time when the planet’s limits have to be taken into account, and in areas where social gaps are widening, the conditions for maintaining this social peace are no longer met. The situation in the peripheries in France and Morocco calls for further investigations, with the rise of the far right in the former and the emergence of social protests in the latter. This could help shed light on the relation between peri-urbanisation, non-development and the rise of populism or the geographies of discontent (De Ruyter *and al.*, 2021).

References

Abouhane, A. (2012). *Gouverner les Périphéries Urbaines de la Gestion Notabiliaire à la Gouvernance Urbaine au Maroc [Governing Peripheral Urban Areas from Notabiliary Management to Urban Governance in Morocco]*. Paris; Rabat: Éditions L’Harmattan.

Acosta, A. (2013). “Extractivism and Neextractivism: Two Sides of the Same Curse.” In *Beyond Development: Alternative Visions from Latin America*, edited by M. Lang and D. Mokrani. Amsterdam: Transnational Institute and Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

Alduy, J.-P., and Tarrius, A. (2018). *Perpignan, laboratoire social et urbain: modernisation d’une ville pauvre et cosmopolite [Perpignan (France), a social and urban laboratory: modernising a poor, cosmopolitan city]*. Bibliothèque des territoires. La Tour-d’Aigues: Éditions de l’Aube.

Aljem, S., and Bkiri, I. (2019). “Limites du ‘plan’ comme instrument de l’action publique dans la ‘fabrique urbaine’ des grandes villes marocaines : Cas de Casablanca et de Rabat.” [“Limits of the ‘plan’ as an instrument of public action in the ‘urban fabric’ of major Moroccan cities: the cases of Casablanca and Rabat”], *African and Mediterranean Journal of Architecture and Urbanism*, 35-45.

- Arboleda, M. (2016) "Spaces of Extraction, Metropolitan Explosions: Planetary Urbanisation and the Commodity Boom in Latin America." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 40(1), 96–112.
- Balakrishnan, S. (2019) "Recombinant Urbanisation: Agrarian–Urban Landed Property and Uneven Development in India." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 43(4), 617–632.
- Bartels, L. E., Bruns, A., and Simon, D. (2020) "Towards Situated Analyses of Uneven Peri-Urbanisation: An (Urban) Political Ecology Perspective." *Antipode*, 52(5), 1237-1258.
- Berahmani, A., Faysse, N., Errahj, M., and Gafsi, M. (2012) "Chasing Water: Diverging Farmers' Strategies to Cope with the Groundwater Crisis in the Coastal Chaouia Region in Morocco." *Irrigation and Drainage*, 61(5), 673–681.
- Bernard, M.-C., and Carrière, P. (1992) "Les grandes exploitations agricoles en Languedoc-Roussillon (1970-1988)." ["Large farms in Languedoc-Roussillon (1970-1988)."] *Revue géographique des Pyrénées et du Sud-Ouest*, 63(2), 219-254.
- Brenner, N. (2014) *Implosions/Explosions: Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanisation*. Berlin: Jovis.
- Chaléard, J.-L. (Ed.). (2014) *Métropoles aux Suds: le défi des périphéries*. [Metropolises in the South: the challenge of the peripheries]. Hommes et sociétés. Paris: Karthala.
- Charbonnier, P. (2024) *Vers l'écologie de guerre: Une histoire environnementale de la paix*. [The Shift to War Ecology. En Environmental History of Peace] Paris: La Découverte.
- Charmes, É., and Rousseau, M. (2022) "What's in a Name? That Which We Call Sprawl: Introduction to the Special Issue: Losing Growth Control." *disP - The Planning Review*, 57(3), 22-32.
- Delage, A., and Giband, D. (Forthcoming) "De la ville déclassée à la ville du déclassement. [From the declassified city to the city of declassification]" In *Perpignan, ville RN: Déclassement(s) et populisme(s) dans une ville moyenne du Sud de la France* [Perpignan, city of the Far-Right: Downgrading and populism in a medium-sized town in the South of France], edited by N. Lebourg. Perpignan: Éditions du Trabucaire.
- De Ruyter, A., Martin, R., and Tyler, P. (2021) "Geographies of Discontent: Sources, Manifestations and Consequences." *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 14(3), 381-393.
- Fang, Y., and Pal, A. (2016) "Drivers of Urban Sprawl in Urbanizing China: A Political Ecology Analysis." *Environment and Urbanization*, 28(2), 599-616.
- Filippini, R. (2015) *Food Production Potential of Periurban Agriculture: Contribution of Periurban Farms to Local Food Systems*. Agricultural Sciences. AgroParisTech; Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna di Studi Universitari e di Perfezionamento.

- Follmann, A. (2022) “Geographies of Peri-Urbanization in the Global South.” *Geography Compass*, 16(7), 1-20.
- Gago, V., and Mezzadra, S. (2017) “A Critique of the Extractive Operations of Capital: Toward an Expanded Concept of Extractivism.” *Rethinking Marxism*, 29(4), 574–591.
- Gateau, M., and Marchal, H. (2020) *La France pavillonnaire: Enjeux et défis [Suburban France: Issues and challenges]*. Levallois-Perret: Bréal.
- Ghosh, S., and Meer, A. (2020) “Extended Urbanisation and the Agrarian Question: Convergences, Divergences and Openings.” *Urban Studies*, 58(6), 1097-1119.
- Giband, D. (2006) “Les événements de Perpignan ou la fin d’un système géopolitique local. [The Perpignan riots or the end of a local geopolitical system.]” *Hérodote*, 120(1), 177-189.
- Giband, D., Lebourg, N., and Sistach, D. (2021) “La Prise de Perpignan par le RN: Chronique d’une Conquête Annoncée. [The RN takeover of Perpignan: Chronicle of an Announced Conquest]” *Pôle Sud*, 54, 91-110.
- Giband, D., and Lefèvre, M.-A. (2014) “Les ‘nouveaux maîtres du Sud’? Déclin des systèmes géopolitiques et recompositions du paysage électoral à Béziers et Perpignan. [The 'new masters of the south': the decline of geopolitical systems and the reshaping of the electoral landscape in Béziers and Perpignan]” *Hérodote*, 154(3), 107-119.
- Gobillon, L., Lambert, A., and Pellet, S. (2019) “The Suburbanization of Poverty: Homeownership Policies and Spatial Inequalities in France.” Documents de travail 250. Paris. https://www.ined.fr/fichier/s_rubrique/29347/working_paper_2019_250_assisted.loans_home_ownership.fr.pdf.
- Gudynas, E. (2018) “Extractivisms: Tendencies and Consequences.” In *Reframing Latin American Development*, edited by R. Munck and R. D. Wise, 61–76. London: Routledge.
- Güney, K. M., Keil, R., and Üçoğlu, M. (2019) *Massive Suburbanisation: (Re)Building the Global Periphery, One Large Scale Housing Project at a Time*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Hamin, E. M., and Gurrán, N. (2009) “Urban Form and Climate Change: Balancing Adaptation and Mitigation in the U.S. and Australia.” *Habitat International*, 33(3), 238-245.
- Harris, R., and Lehrer, U. (2018) *The Suburban Land Question: A Global Survey*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Harvey, D. (2003) *The New Imperialism*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kanai, J. M. and Schindler, S. (2022) "Infrastructure-led development and the peri-urban question: Furthering crossover comparisons". *Urban Studies*, 59(8), 1597-1617.
- Lafont, R. (1971) *Décoloniser en France: les régions face à l'Europe [Decolonising in France: the regions and Europe]*. Paris: Gallimard.

- Langumier, J. (2008) *Survivre à l'inondation: pour une ethnologie de la catastrophe [Surviving the flood: an ethnology of disaster]*. Sociétés, espaces, temps. Lyon: ENS éditions.
- Lauermann, J. (2018) "Geographies of mega-urbanization". *Geography Compass*, 12(8), 1-12.
- Lefebvre, H. (1970) *La Révolution urbaine [The Urban Revolution]*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Leitner, H., Nowak, S. and Sheppard, E. (2022) "Everyday speculation in the remaking of peri-urban livelihoods and landscapes". *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*.
- Lereboullet, A.-L., Beltrando, G., Bardsley, D. K. and Rouvellac, E. (2014) "The Viticultural System and Climate Change: Coping with Long-Term Trends in Temperature and Rainfall in Roussillon, France". *Regional Environmental Change*, 14(5), 1951-1966.
- Le Tellier, J., and Iraki, A. (Eds.) (2009). *Habitat social au Maghreb et au Sénégal. Gouvernance urbaine et participation en questions [Social housing in North Africa and Senegal. Urban governance and participation]*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Leveau, R. (1985) *Le fellah marocain défenseur du trône [The Moroccan fellah defends the throne]*. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.
- Li, J., Webster, D. and Cai, J. (2018) "Manufacturing-led peri-urbanisation in central China: The case of Wuhan's Dongxihu District". *International Development Planning Review*, 40(2), 175–202.
- Liddell, J. (2010) "Notables, Clientelism and the Politics of Change in Morocco". *The Journal of North African Studies*, 15(3), 315-331.
- Liu, R., Wong, T.-C. and Liu, S. (2020) "The peri-urban mosaic of Changping in metropolitanizing Beijing: Peasants' response and negotiation processes". *Cities*, 107, 102932.
- Marty, N. (2013) "Une désindustrialisation perpétuelle? Comment (ré)évaluer le cas du Languedoc-Roussillon? [Perpetual deindustrialisation? How can we (re)evaluate the case of Languedoc-Roussillon?]" . *Rives méditerranéennes*, 46, 63-80.
- Mayaux, P.-L. and Rousseau, M. (2021) "Extraire la ressource, s'extraire du conflit. Réguler la surexploitation des mines et des eaux souterraines au Maroc [Extracting resources, escaping conflict. Regulating the over-exploitation of mines and groundwater in Morocco]" . *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée*, 28(3/4), 125-153.
- Moore, J. (2016) "The Rise of Cheap Nature". In *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?*, 78-115. PM Press.
- Perrin, C., Nougarede, B., Sini, L., Branduini, P. and Salvati, L. (2018) "Governance Changes in Peri-Urban Farmland Protection Following Decentralisation: A Comparison between Montpellier (France) and Rome (Italy)". *Land Use Policy*, 70, 535-546.
- Piketty, T. (2013) *Le Capital au XXI^e siècle [Capital in the Twenty-First Century]*. Paris: Seuil (English edition: 2017, Harvard University Press).

Rachik, A. (2002) *Casablanca, l'urbanisme de l'urgence [Casablanca: emergency urban planning]*. Casablanca: Imprimerie Najah El-Jadida.

Ren, X. (2021) "The Peripheral Turn in Global Urban Studies: Theory, Evidence, Sites". *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, 26.

Rotg, A. (2021) "Comment l'étalement urbain perdure dans les communes de troisième couronne périurbaine ? (Le cas d'Opoul-Périllos) [How urban sprawl persists in third-ring suburban municipalities (the case of Opoul-Périllos, France)]". MA dissertation in Urban and Regional Planning: University of Perpignan.

Rousseau, M. (2024) *Planetary urbanization reloaded. A radical theory for the burning issues of our time*. In M. Martinez (Ed.), *Research Handbook on Urban Sociology*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Rousseau, M. and Harroud, T. (2019a) "Satellite cities turned to ghost towns? On the contradictions of Morocco's spatial policy". *International Planning Studies*, 24(3-4), 341-352.

Rousseau, M. and Harroud, T. (Eds.). (2019b) *Mutation de la gouvernance des systèmes alimentaires urbains. Le cas de l'agglomération de Rabat-Salé [Changes in the governance of urban food systems. The case of the Rabat-Salé conurbation]*. Note technique, no 47, Agence française de développement.

Rousseau, M., Amarouche, M. and Salik, K. (2022) "Requiem for a Rural Hinterland. The Contradictions of Laissez-Faire Regulation and the Urbanisation of Grey Areas in Rabat (Morocco)". *disP - The Planning Review*, 57(3), 68-82.

Roy, A. (2014) "Worlding the South: Toward a Post-Colonial Urban Theory". In S. Parnell and S. Oldfield (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South*, 9-20. New York: Routledge.

Sistach, D. (2012) "« Perpignan la Catalane », le vote Front National et ses crises identitaires [\" Perpignan la Catalane\", the Front National vote and its identity crises]". *Fragments sur le Temps Présent*, août. <https://tempspresents.com/2012/08/29/dominique-sistach-perpignan-la-catalane-le-vote-front-national-et-ses-crisis-identitaires/#prettyPhoto>.

Solans, H. (1993) *Essai sur l'économie des Pyrénées Orientales [Essay on the economy of the Pyrénées Orientales - France]*. Perpignan: Le Publicateur.

Sood, A. (2021) "The Speculative Frontier: Real Estate, Governance and Occupancy on the Metropolitan Periphery". *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, 26.

Stahler-Sholk, R., Vanden, H. E. and Becker, M. (Eds.). (2014) *Rethinking Latin American social movements: radical action from below. Latin American perspectives in the classroom*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.

Steel, G., Van Noorloos, F. and Otsuki, K. (2019) "Urban Land Grabs in Africa?". *Built Environment*, 44(4), 389-396.

Streule, M. (2023) "Urban extractivism. Contesting megaprojects in Mexico City, rethinking urban values". *Urban Geography*, 44(1), 262-271.

Svampa, M. and Viale, E. (2014) *Maldesarrollo. La Argentina del extractivismo y del despojo [Maldesarrollo. The Argentina of extractivism and dispossession]*. Editorial Katz.

Theurillat, T., Rérat, P. and Crevoisier, O. (2015) "The Real Estate Markets: Players, Institutions and Territories". *Urban Studies*, 52(8), 1414-1433.

Waterbury, J. (1970) *The commander of the faithful: the Moroccan political elite - a study in segmented politics*. Modern Middle East series, vol. 2. New York: Columbia University Press.

Zaki, L. (Ed.). (2011) *L'action urbaine au Maghreb : enjeux professionnels et politiques [Urban action in the Maghreb: professional and political issues]*. Paris: IRMC-Karthala.

Zeroual, A. (2022) "Pouvoir politique et grand patronat au Maroc [Political power and big business in Morocco]". *Mondes en développement*, 198(2).