
Landscapes of Globalization in Ordinary Towns: Logistics and Trade Apparatus

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The framework for our discussion is based on the observation of a paradoxical situation: the areas of logistics and of transport, although ‘gigantic and spectacular’, ‘go unseen’ and ‘are non-controversial’. Little attention has been paid in the social sciences to these areas of logistics and to the ‘merchandise’ section of transport. Yet, they shape our contemporary urban environments on a large scale and in-depth. This is, to an extent, the initial hypothesis for the study we been carried over the past two years in logistics spaces of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of France. More specifically, the study involves the Delta 3 multimodal logistics platform, situated in Dourges, which is part of the ‘Communauté d’Agglomération d’Hénin-Carvin’ (CAHC — the Hénin-Carvin urban community), on the southern edge of the Lille conurbation.

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The development of the digital economy is accompanied by the myth that globalized exchanges are de-territorialized. Individuals, alone at their computers, order products online. This act does not directly lead to the idea of a durable, developed urban settlement; instead, it is linked to vague localities, situated in an indeterminate, far-away elsewhere, often in Asia — the region where many consumables are produced.

However, people and merchandise circulate, structured into logistics distribution networks, making use of technical devices and means of transportation.¹ Far from being dematerialized, logistics activities are spatially ‘anchored’, especially at two stopping points. Firstly, the storage of goods, which requires the development of infrastructures, hangars and warehouses. Secondly, modal transitions; from boat to truck or train, in particular, and also from cargo to barge. The transitions take place in spaces built for long-term duration; mainly ports, platforms, airports and railway stations.

From these points of view, globalized exchanges take place in urbanized zones on a truly local scale, interacting with the entire conurbation and, onward, globally.² For the purpose of this study, it is also important to specify that these infrastructures are most often located at the outer limits of urban conurbations, as a result of the interactions of political orientation at local and regional levels.

In the social sciences little attention has been paid to these areas of logistics and to the ‘merchandise’ section of transport (Ascher 1995).³ Yet, they shape our contemporary urban

¹The work of Alain Tarrus (1992: 210) shows how forms of mobility and their networks work in space, qualify it, are anchored in it and establish it as resources and territory.

²The circulation processes of goods and information strongly overlap with situated production-consumption, as analyzed by Michel Savy (2006: 63).

³Numerous studies in geography and economics focus on the relationship between infrastructural equipment and the increase in added value of the regional territory. These approaches put forward the importance of the transportation network as a contributing factor to development. For more historical approaches, the networks of infrastructures underline the complexity of urban history. The question of the nature of the links between transportation and economic development is raised again in many

environments on a large scale and in-depth⁴. This is, to an extent, the initial hypothesis for the study that we have carried out over the past two years in logistics spaces of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of France. More specifically, the study involves the Société d'Economie Mixte (SEM), also called Delta 3, multimodal logistics platform. Located in Dourges, the Delta 3 is part of the 'Communauté d'Agglomération d'Hénin-Carvin' (the Hénin Carvin urban community, henceforth CAHC), on the southern edge of the Lille conurbation.⁵

The framework for our discussion is based on the observation of a paradoxical situation: the areas of logistics and transport, although 'gigantic and spectacular', 'go unseen' and 'are non-controversial'. Our research includes the recent arrival of the Amazon Corporation's 100,000 square metres warehouses located at the Communauté d'Agglomération du Douaisis (henceforth CAD). This event has drawn media attention in terms of the impact on the economy and employment, but not in terms of construction layout or spatial nuisances. Not far from this location, at a distance of just 2.5 kilometres, the multimodal Delta 3 platform covers nearly 300,000 square metres and has never provoked media or political outrage or bad publicity. It only includes warehouses, and the global infrastructure spans more than two square kilometres.

Our approach therefore consists of 'considering the unconsidered' in the sector of logistics localities, and in the two cases examined in our research, their capacity 'to not create controversy and go unseen', or at least to not become the focus of a passionate public debate on the infrastructure and the construction layout that they embody.

This article analyses, first of all, the process whereby logistics infrastructures emerge on the outer limits of urban environments. By expanding our analysis to the practice of consumption linked to the global economy, we proceed to describe the urban use incurred by this construction, the territorial transformations that result from such construction,⁶ as well as

works with the objective to question the structuring of economic development by infrastructure equipment. We also notice the existence of studies on logistics developed by management sciences from the point of observation of logistic methods and processes. In fact, apart from few publications from the points of view of geography and urban planning, few studies take a spatial approach to logistics or question the repercussions of the sector from the angles of organization, development and territorial balance. It turns out to be a recent problem and is beginning to develop in France, especially in the works of Raimbault et al. (2013) and Savy (2006). Several reasons can explain the absence of questioning the spatial and urban stakes of logistics. Among these, the hitherto unseen character and the rapidity of the development of their construction come into play, of which the catalyzing effect on the territories continue to be under-evaluated because of lack of data. In addition, opacity and the fact that many of the players in the construction chain of the sites devoted to transport and storage of merchandise are in the private sector is an element to take into account. As noted by Charles Goldblum and Manuelle Franck, 'The selective, hierarchical integration of urban territories into the world economy produces new urban scales, going from the town or city to the urban region, new forms at the urban scale, and new polycentric configurations at the regional scale' (2007: 230).

⁵ In the geographical sense of the term, since the Lille conurbation and the CAHC are separate in terms of administration (Roncayolo 1990).

⁶The notion of 'territory' applied in this research can be political, economic or geographical, especially when we contextualize certain areas studied. Nevertheless, from a methodological point of view, we

the emergence of globalized landscapes. The idea is not that the processes of layout linked to logistics function in the same manner in all urban peripheral areas, but that these processes are the driving force of large zones. At the same time, on other sites beyond the urban limits, other processes may be in action, based on real estate, heritage and culture that alongside other economic activities (energy generation, industrial production, finance, and so on) have an impact on the spaces. These overlapping processes require us to stand back from the traditional opposition between centre and periphery in order to understand fully the dynamics of urban sprawl.

The Investigation

One of the characteristics of this research on the logistic activities and facilities is that it has brought together a team of landscape architects and a team of sociologists. A principle shared by the two teams is that the landscape can serve as a framework for integrating reflection and action and thereby become a tool for the emergence of a coherent and durable territorial action. The research group shared a consensual definition of landscape and territory as a ‘social construction’⁷ that the participative process and the tools of the landscape architects are able to deconstruct and objectivize. To this definition, the sociologists added the concept of the diversity of the developers beyond the image offered by the public institutions and the institutionally-approved developers of a territory, on the one hand, and the idea of the privatization of urban spaces for the sole profit of the all-powerful economic actors, on the other hand.⁸ There was no debarment of planning *a priori* in our approach, but we did take a close look at the plurality of the actors and of their logic, as well as at the dynamics that drive competition, conflicts, tensions, cooperation, adaption, and even indifference and lack of knowledge. The objective was to characterize the processes of implementation of a process of economic and environmental recovery of a given territory by identifying the actors, the scales of deployment and the origins of the process of recovery within a contemporary and historical time frame.

associate it to an anthropological definition of place as an interpersonal space of identity and history. We also add the notions of exchange and mobility from Tarrus (1997).

⁷ Retracing the contours of the space that landscape occupies today in institutions, teaching, urban planning, research at different levels, from local to international, Luginbühl underlines that ‘landscape as a social construct, a perceptible product of the interactions between social processes and biophysical processes, on the one hand, and between the material and immaterial dimensions of nature, on the other [...] is born relatively early in the recent history of landscape but is only taken into consideration recently’ (Luginbühl 2013b: 80)

⁸ See especially the work of Thierry Paquot (2015) on ‘the obliteration’ of public space and ‘urban disasters’. In his work, this expression refers to structures that, claiming to be modern, end-up by generating the unhappiness of their occupants; that is, a situation that increases isolation and subjugation.

Carried out in 2012, our approach is ethnographic in the framework of two research programs ITTECOP⁹ (MEDDE-ADEME) et Villes ordinaires (Ordinary cities) (MEDDE-PUCA).¹⁰ Several weeks of fieldwork were completed, providing the opportunity for *in-situ* observation, statistical and documentary data collection and the completion of nearly one hundred interviews with ordinary people, land developers and other key players. We also collaborated with *Passeurs*, a team of landscapers from Bordeaux led by Yves Luginbühl (2013a).

The junction between the production and the analysis of the material collected has taken place through a process that is characteristic of qualitative research, as it takes into account the unpredictable nature of the dynamics of the study — a constant relationship between problems and the data evidence collected, between interpretation and results. The generation of empirical material modifies the issues, which in turn modify the generation of data, which in turn modify the issues. The stage of generation of data thus functions like ‘a constant restructuring of the issues when confronted with the data and as a permanent readjustment of the framework of interpretation as the empiric elements accumulate’ (Delaporte 1995: 26-27).

While the notions of representativeness and comprehensiveness are not at the core of our ethnographic study, we base the scientific nature of our analysis on the ‘principle of saturation point’ that is specific to the social sciences (Delaporte 1995). That is to say, an observation of the facts until their replication stabilizes, accompanied by the systematic recurrence of observed facts and speeches. A ‘saturation point’ is reached when the researcher is obliged to diversify his informants to the greatest possible extent and feels that there is nothing new to learn, at least as far as the sociological objective of the study is concerned.¹¹

From Logistics to Supplying Merchandise

Initially, our observations concerned two spaces linked to logistics and the transportation of merchandise in the Lille conurbation: the Delta 3 multimodal platform and the logistics site of the Amazon warehouses. Then, we broadened the scope to cover all spaces linked to transportation and logistics, including road, rail and maritime navigation networks. These infrastructures attract analysts’ attention because of the surface area that they cover. We argue that they must be seen as part of the local urban dynamics, and that we need to understand how they generate new territorial uses as producers of a city, as opposed to municipalities along the outskirts of Lille.

Our field of research quickly brought out the link between these spaces and their urban use, and also pointed to other directly-linked spaces of consumption. Less than one kilometre away from the Delta 3 platform, there is an immense shopping complex: ‘Auchan–Noyelles-

⁹ ITTECOP - (Infrastructures de Land Transport, ECOsystème set Paysages) is a research program of the French Ministry for Ecology and Sustainable Development, (MEDDE), in coordination with l’ADEME Agency for Energy.

¹⁰ MEDDE- PUCA (Plan Urbanisme Construction Architecture).

¹¹ See, for example, Demazière and Dubar (1997), Beaud (1996) and De Sardan (1995).

Godault'.¹² There, the juxtaposition of logistics and consumption facilities is evident, as is the coherent ensemble of territorial uses, structured around worldwide merchandise arrivals and their transportation, storage and consumption.

By considering the way these territorial systems intertwine, one territorial element of the logistics world becomes clear; that is, the interconnection through mobility networks. The infrastructures of multimodal services and storage are always connected in transportation networks, including roadways, railways and train stations, waterways, ports and airports. These networks also territorialize the logistics infrastructures in the urban environment.

The Status Afforded by Multiple Transportation Infrastructures

Cahc's website reads, 'Ideally situated at the crossroads of large cities such as Lille, Arras, and Paris and accessible by several major communication links (toll roads A1 et A21, North European TGV [fast train], Lille-Lesquin Airport) the territory of Hénin-Carvin is exceptional due to its exceptional cultural and mining heritage, its vast organized natural areas, the dynamics of its economy, sports, and associations and the agreeable and sought-after quality of living and working conditions that should be maintained.'¹³

In every development of space, such as the urban space of the metropolitan outskirts considered here, the challenges of today and tomorrow are at play, as well as those of past history (Tarrus 1997).

The process that has led to the important presence of logistics and transport infrastructures in the territory under study involves multiple approaches: economic and contemporary-social, but also inherited situations and constructions that have developed over varying lengths of time.

At the urban and regional level logistics infrastructures build upon recent or pre-existing transport infrastructures interlock and allow for the previously mentioned transitions towards the global scale. In this way, the CAHC and the CAD appear as multimodal knots of communication channels:

- From the oldest means of communication, such as navigable waterways, rivers and streams, but also canals that began to be dug in the 13th century — for example, the Deûle Canal, which crosses the Delta 3 logistics infrastructure and which has today been widened to allow the passage of large barges;
- To the means inherited from the industrial revolution — that is, the railways — along with today's rolling motorway system for freight, from Great-Britain, Belgium and Germany to France and Italy;

¹² The retail zone is composed of an Auchan 'Big Box' supermarket with a surrounding shopping mall, containing more than 80 name-brand shops, all surrounded by around 50 independent retailers.

¹³ See Cahc's website <http://www.agglo-henincarvin.fr>.

- To the more recent means that began with the automobile industry; in particular, the A1 motorway built in 1954, which crosses the A21 motorway, also called the ‘rocade minière’ (a sort of ‘ring road’ encircling the mining area), which replaced the RN455 road in 1971.

On a continental scale, these communication channels have been built along the economic axes established during the industrial revolution, and which draw on an exchange process that began in the Middle Ages. The Nord-Pas-de-Calais region is at the heart of the northern European range of major ports: Ostend, Zeebrugge, Anvers (the second-ranked port in Europe), Amsterdam (ranked 5th) and Rotterdam (number one in Europe). Three other major ports are also located along the coast of this region: the great maritime port of Dunkerque (200,000 TEU containers per year), the Calais port (flows of both passengers and merchandise), and the port of Boulogne-sur-Mer (the premier fishing port in France). Together, these three ports represent the leading port complex in France, with the regional maritime port activity accounting for 50,000 jobs.

If transportation infrastructures allow understanding of the logistics development process, historically other more political elements also converge here to make the CAHC and the CAD what they are. The past processes that brought about the development of logistics structures and construction not only involves the history of transportation but also economic history, which in this case is also political history.

From this point of view, an abstract perspective would cast the urban area of Lille as one homogenous territory, even including the coal mining area: the gateway to a territory engaged in a common development. Nevertheless, this perspective would clash with the historic distinction, cooperation, competition and dependence between the city of Lille and the coal mining area, which is located along the southern edge of the Lille urban environment (in the geographical sense). In the interviews that we carried out, the hegemony of Lille came into play in the domain of logistics and transport. For the people of Lille, the stigmatization of the mining territory is similar to a ‘natural’ expulsion and is considered harmful for the city of Lille.

Indeed, the establishment of the logistics platform in the 1990s was meant to anchor infrastructural development to both the mining site and the regional economic fabric, which was greatly impacted by industrial restructuring. The site’s selection was equally justified by the need to relocate the Saint Sauveur terminal, which was completely enclosed within urban Lille and considered to be no longer sufficient. Increasing property prices and the difficulty in finding space in Lille drove developers to invest in the mining zone, where property was abundant and less expensive. The main criteria for choosing this site, an industrial wasteland situated in the territory of Douges, a town 20 kilometres south of Lille, included: top-quality service by rail, road and river networks, a location near the barycentre of flows originating from or arriving to the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region and, lastly, a space that was vast enough to establish a terminal capable of handling the three modes of transportation and the associated logistics areas.

As noted by Raimbault et al. (2013), the establishment of the Delta 3 platform reveals that property cost and road accessibility compensate for the increased distance from urban markets. Historically, this coal mining area was strongly dependent on Lille and, notably, the textile industry. As it was a supplier of raw materials for energy (coal) engaged in a single industry (mining), the relationship of dependency took on hierarchical aspects of servitude between the elite of Lille and the working-class mining community. This relationship strongly marked the interactions among local people and is perpetuated today in a relationship between ‘us’ and ‘them’ based on the ever-stigmatized representations of the mining area population.

On yet another scale, the coal mining area is not homogenous. Although the Delta 3 Platform and the Amazon site are situated less than five kilometres away from the mining area, they are surprisingly and absolutely not the result of an inter-communal dialogue, or of a common municipality. The builders of Douai (CAD) and Hénin-Carvin (CAHC) took an economic approach similar to that that made the logistics and transport sector a major element of territorial development in economic terms and in terms of building and layout. Nevertheless, the communities in the mining area appear to be in a competition that does not stop at Hénin-Carvin and Douai, since the urban areas of Valenciennes and, to a lesser extent, Lens are also trying to attract logistics business services, such as loading, storage and transport.

The southern edge of the Lille urban area thus appears increasingly like a storage and merchandise redistribution area, with the task of supplying the city of Lille (now rid of the nuisance of the presence of this type of activity in the city centre) and the rest of France, from the region of Paris to the Rhône-Alpes region, by means of traditional transportation channels — mainly railways and roadways — that date to the industrial revolution.

An Innovative, Mixed Political and Economic Model

The coal mining territory was strongly impacted by the industrial crisis and experienced many social and environmental consequences. Local authorities had to try to erase the past in search of new economic perspectives. Beginning in the 1990s, the implementation of a post-mining plan began to accelerate. The response of key players in territorial development was the result of a program for urban, social, environmental and economic restructuring in the mining area. The best solution seemed to be a focus on logistics and transport, especially concerning the pre-established infrastructures and the recent major expansion of international trade. Thus, this declining territory looking to rebuild its economic activity was a perfect match for Lille’s need to remove harmful activities from the city centre. The local authorities recognized this opportunity.

The establishment of the Delta 3 platform was a successful example of how public powers could be involved in the development and implementation of public policy in territorial layout and construction. Taking this into consideration, the process of implementing this infrastructure appears as though imposed from outside. Although the main developers come from the city of Lille (Mayor Pierre Maurois, for one), the legal and administrative organization resists all attempts at simplification and illustrates the complexity in the chain of those who contribute to building logistics territories (Raimbault et al. 2013). In addition, the

influence of economic heavy-weights — among others, the Mulliez family, who own the worldwide group Auchan — came to bear in this political interplay. The Auchan commercial centre, near Delta 3, is ready to open. Thus, the pattern is reproduced of the domination of Lille and the mining district's dependence on it; a pattern that can be projected into the future.

Project ownership is ensured by regional governments. A mixed group of actors handles the platform. It is made up by the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region, the Pas-de-Calais department, the urban community surrounding the Lille municipality, the CAHC, the CAD and Lens-Liévin, which includes the community of the south Pévelois township. In the framework of the development agreement, the project's completion is the responsibility of a semi-public company — the Delta 3 — with investors including the mixed group, public and private bank investors and the French national railway network (SNCF). The terminal is operated by a special purpose entity, which was established in December 2000 and transformed into a local public development company in 2011. It must be noted that one of the aims of this semi-public company is to sell the warehouses built on the site. This point raises questions, since it includes the expropriation of agricultural workers in the interest of public land development, and the resale to the private sector of spaces containing newly constructed warehouses. Between public actors and semi-public companies, public requisition and privatization, we find evidence of the argument (Raimbault et al. 2013) that the sector of logistics land development is not legally well-defined. In this field, key players must constantly innovate and question the boundaries between the public and private economic sectors.

In this externally imposed model, the local government is faced with Lille's hegemony as they search for socio-economic development solutions. From this point of view, the problem of environmental recovery is also at the heart of land development logistics.

It is noteworthy that, in the 1990s, logistics activities were not presented as a route to economic development for the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region. It is a result of the end of mining and steel industries and the catastrophic unemployment that this view has changed.¹⁴ The logistics economy is not the only one under consideration in the region. Elected officials attempt several approaches, especially regarding tourism and heritage, as is demonstrated by the classification of the Mining Basin as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2012 or the building of the Louvre branch in Lens in 2012. Nevertheless, observation suggests that the logistics activity is identified increasingly strongly as the unique *serious* means of development of the Mining Basin.¹⁵ The alliances between the public and the private sectors, between municipalities, greater metropolitan areas, the Nord-Pas-de-Calais Region, the French State are not linear. They but form and dissolve depending on how the different interests are assembled or opposed.

¹⁴ The closing of the Metaleurop plant on the Cach in 2003 in Courcelles with the suppression of 830 jobs is, from this point of view, both a real and a symbolic termination.

¹⁵ Other avenues are under consideration, such as the 'green' economy of recycling. But in fact, the most substantial investments in infrastructures today are those of transportation of merchandise and sale thereof. Especially, interviews with elected officials reveal that the choice of logistics is the only one seriously considered to be a 'true' economic activity due to job creation.

There exist other paths for the development of the urban conglomeration of Lille than the logistic economy: tourism, heritage, recycling. However, 25 years after the onset of the decisions favouring the development of the logistics activity, this area appears to be a priority in the choices for future development for the region and is dominant simply in terms of existing infrastructures. Not all the urban conglomeration is affected. We are not dealing with a binary model with an historical centre on the one hand and a logistics rim on the other. Instead, we could talk about logistics zoning since large zones are concerned by this activity, notably along historical travel routes that have become toll roads or train lines.

From Grey to Green: Environmental Recovery and Non-Problematic Development Situations

The specificity and intensity of the past problems in the coal mining area make it a territory of special attention concerning the reclassification of industrial wastelands. The regional policy for ‘reclassifying damaged spaces’ is characterized by the progressive shift from a ‘scar’-repairing policy to a finalized policy. In December 1998, the Inter-Comité Interministériel d’Aménagement et de Développement du Territoire (Ministerial Committee of Territorial Building and Development — CIADT) ratified previously acquired knowledge in a White Paper titled *Une Ambition Partagée Pour l’Après-Charbon* (A Shared Post-Coal Ambition), which is found in the ‘Post-Mining’ (‘après-mines’) section of the State-Region Plan Contract 2000-2006. To complement the general endowment provided by the Plan Contract, this Post-Mining section provided financial assistance and technical engineering to the area’s programme of urban, environmental, social and cultural restructuring.

Since the nineteenth century, the combined growth of different industrial activities has proved detrimental to the natural environment of the zone, and there have been numerous consequences in the aftermath of these negative influences, the kind defined by Guy Chautard and Bertrand Zuideau (2001) as ‘non-sustainable’ development. The former coal mining area seeks to reverse the trend with determination.

Aiming to ensure proper integration with the landscape and global coherence among the various structures, building the Delta 3 platform led to the implementation of a bill of architectural and landscape recommendations focused on the logistics zones, the service centre and the combined transportation terminal. The general networking of the platform was organized around the axis of the Deûle canal, which cuts across the site. The important structures are set parallel or perpendicular to this axis, with manoeuvring and parking areas also organized in the same direction.

The landscaping concern at the heart of the redevelopment of the former mining site involved heritage and the environment. Consequently, it resulted in the reclassification of the entire zone into green spaces. This ‘green’ dimension of reclassification permeates the new representations of the site and brings energy to public debate regarding the land development. The Delta 3 platform is thus classified by key figures in the territory as ‘a major asset to the region and to ecology’, ‘a beautiful result, not too badly integrated into the landscape’, or even as ‘a big breath of fresh air’. This paradox originates in the fact that this space was originally confiscated when it was politically convenient to do so and was then returned to a

population that was experiencing economic hardship, for their own leisure and regulated landscape enjoyment.

The redevelopment operation is therefore presented in a positive light, in terms of new jobs, we were told. It is also represented in terms of ‘natural’ reclassification, as it moves from being a grey zone to being a place of leisure with a landscape that highlights heritage and biodiversity. The logistics spaces — trans-shipment, train tracks and containers — are hidden at the residents’ request, which they expressed when Delta 3 organized a consultation on the land layout (landscaped mounds and dikes) in the early stages of construction. It is also important to note that the large green spaces are filled with plants and grass, with a visual opening onto the former mine’s slagheap (number 116/117). Neighbouring the infrastructure, this feature is valued as a strong element in the landscape, both by the platform’s builders and developers and by the elected officials and local stakeholders. The dimension of heritage is also stressed as an element of conservation, represented by the mine entrance (number 9/9bis), which has been converted into a cultural centre for concerts, performances and exhibits. The overall mining area, composed of the entrance, slagheap number 110, and the garden city of De Clercq, is one of the five greatest mining history sites.

As the logistics and transport spaces remain hidden, the pacification relative to this type of development is largely based on a combination of two dynamics. On the one hand, there are new perspectives for economic development, essentially related to changes in the service sector and to the quality of the territory’s geographical position. On the other hand, there is a political will to anchor territorial development to the project of environmental reclassification. This was encouraged in the decade following the year 2000 through the ‘Green and Blue Framework’ policy (*Trame verte et bleue*), which aimed at preserving natural habitats and valuing the tourism and landscape potential of former industrial wastelands, mining heaps and piles of rubble.

We observe a non-problematic situation of development, because people who are not concerned with the project do not debate the stakes involved in development and because the people directly concerned (residents, political and economic key players and others) hardly ever come forward. Certain agricultural workers would have the power to criticize the project, but they do not have the sufficient publicizing capacities to denounce the land development problem. The absence of external opposition to a project that appears largely consensual, the weak participation of the public during the dialoguing campaigns staged by the Delta 3 operators and, more broadly, the fact that these logistics spaces do not generate problems, must be situated in the visible context of ‘greening’. This can be interpreted as the highly positive perception of landscapes and industrial wastelands moving from ‘grey to green’.¹⁶ In other terms, it is trees themselves, here rolled out as a fence, that function as a screen. The ‘greening’ of the coal slagheaps also hides the contradiction that spans public policy, from the

¹⁶Also, note the environmental paradox that does not provoke observable mobilization in other regions: under the guise of ecological arguments to reduce CO₂ emissions, the Delta 3 platform would benefit from prioritizing transportation by barge and train. Instead, we witness an increase in heavy transport truck traffic in the CAHC.

concern to increase the competitiveness of the ITT-irrigated territories on the one hand, to the attention given to major environmental harm on the other (Villalba 2013). However, between landscape camouflage and the hope for an economic restart, this development plan of orthogonal, rationalized inspiration has consequences on the use and representations of this territory, at the level of local communities and beyond.

Logistics and Trade Apparatus – Landscapes of Globalization

Apparatus: ‘a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions — in short, the said as much as the unsaid’ (Foucault 1977: 194).

At the heart of our working hypothesis is the idea that there is a certain correlation between the presence of Delta 3 and Amazon in this area, as it lies simultaneously on the outskirts of the metropolitan territory and within the vast spaces of ‘mass distribution’ in the CAHC. The notion of a logistics and trade apparatus imposes a functional point of view but also, perhaps above all, a point of view linked with anthropology and urban development.

Concerning accessibility to mobile structures, the process of setting up the Auchan shopping centre in Noyelles-Godault can be analysed along lines similar to those used in the analysis of the Delta 3 in Dourges and the new French Amazon logistics platform in the industrial zone of Lauwin-Planque (Douaisis). Located in a communications hub composed of the motorways A1 and A21, railways, waterways and airways, the shopping centre is halfway between Lens and Douai and less than thirty minutes from the centre of Lille, in the municipality of Hénin-Beaumont. The shopping mall benefits from merchandise supply facilities and ‘optimal’ accessibility, expanding its ‘consumer base’ much further than the CAHC. It is easy to access from Lille and beyond. There are many potential consumers among the population of three million inhabitants in the area (Bonjour and Capot 2012), including Lille and its suburbs.

Our first field investigation suggested that the *logistics and trade apparatus* consists of three dimensions:

- Infrastructures linked directly to logistics: platforms, warehouses, wharfs, and spaces for the related services;
- ‘Cosmetic’ infrastructures: landscaped areas (embankments, hedges, dikes, ‘natural’ fences or barriers, seeding and planting), parks, paths, ‘green and blue framework’;
- Infrastructures of trade and service linked to these flows (‘big box’ mass-merchandisers, hotels, restaurants, various equipment).

These three dimensions work together simultaneously and in-depth on the qualities, use and territorial balance of the urban outskirts. Entering this zone is to enter ‘another world’, in the sense of a specific culture built around globalized trade, producing an in-depth territorial realignment at the local scale. The small towns at the urban outskirts are characterized by the

developments described here, but socio-cultural aspects are also important in order to develop a multidimensional understanding of this setting.

Urban Use and the Territorial Balance of the Logistics and Trade Apparatus

The logistics and trade apparatus involves technical assembly, as well as social assembly (Hennion and Latour 1993). We are interested in showing how it shapes and characterizes the urban world at the metropolitan outskirts.

From a landscaping point of view, at the level of the CAHC these developments characterize the spaces and urban limits at the edge of the Lille conurbation. These infrastructures and the landscape they compose directly reflect the evolution of urban use and territorial balance. An ethnographic analysis of these spaces allows us to identify the visible material qualities of these specific developments, the inhabitants' representations and the constraints and utilization opportunities that they offer.

Concerning logistics spaces, we note that one of the principle characteristics of these developments is their spatial segmentation. Around the Delta 3 and Amazon sites, the spaces are often inaccessible, protected by fences, barriers or embankments, and they are under video surveillance. The logical way to move around is to bypass the infrastructures, be they storage hangars or trans-shipment zones. The roads can be at right angles in the open country, with successive roundabouts often leading to dead-end roads awaiting future development projects. On the one hand, it is impossible to go from one place to another in a straight line; one must constantly weave around fenced-off plots of land. On the other hand, one must constantly climb bridges and road ramps to cross from one lane to the next. The roads are superposed on a tangle of bridges, ramps, roundabouts and underground passages. The distances travelled are considerably long.

The private car is the vehicular unit of reference. Urban spaces are rectilinear, and the logistics and trade corridors, parking and access roads are all dedicated to automobile use. There are very few pedestrians and other immediate proximity users. Life in the urban outskirts requires an automobile; indispensable for travel, it encapsulates life in an air-conditioned compartment, cut off from the outside. In this context, following Gibout (1998), it could be said that cars also acquire the character of a symbol of urban modernity and the achievement of individual driving freedom. One individual freedom is that automobiles allow people to cross the centre of the CAHC. This barrier, impassable on foot and more than 100 meters wide, is the major north-south axis of European industrial development. It allows the movement of people and merchandise alongside the A1 6-8 lane motorway and the rail tracks for the local, regional, high-speed and freight trains (*TGV, Intercités, TER, convois de fret*).

This logic applies to the spaces dedicated to commerce that surround the Auchan shopping centre in Noyelles-Godault. Only automobiles have access, passing through winding roads, bridges, tunnels and roundabouts. The technical logistics and trade apparatus dictates the order of transit. The segmentation of space around the logistics platforms continues around the retail area of the Auchan shopping centre. The difficult access results from the intertwining of successive developments. On leaving the A1 motorway, one realizes that the Auchan shopping centre is much broader than tall; it is no higher than a three-story building.

It is surrounded by dozens of smaller retail shops, restaurants and cinemas. The Holy Grail of consumption, it soon appears nearly unattainable because of the winding, tangled access road — there it is, barely 200 meters from A1 exit 26, but it takes one more than twenty minutes to enter it, pushing a gigantic shopping cart.

The buildings and their flashy logos may be eye-catching, but in terms of surface area most of the shopping complex consists of a vast parking space. White paint contrasts with the black tar (asphalt) in mathematical, orthogonal rationality. Paradoxically, once parked, the automobile world is transformed into a world of long-distance walking, excluding of course those with limited mobility. The world of ‘big box’ shopping is a world for people in good physical health.

The Aesthetic of Globalized Landscapes: A ‘Standard’ World

As this fragmented landscape continues to expand over cultivated fields, the farmlands begin to look like anomalies: spaces that are not built over are surrounded by new, tightly built suburbia. Older neighbourhoods persist here and there, the houses lining the roads like post-war anachronisms. The aesthetic qualities of the landscape are totally artificial. Compared to existing models, we are now dealing with an additional degree of standardized anthropization.

Incidentally, an ethnographic study of this world could begin from the interior of a hotel room in this area, where one finds a plastic bathroom moulded from one individual block and placed next to the standardized bed. Situated in the area surrounding the Noyelles-Gaudault Auchan mass retail zone, the Cerise hotel hosts the early-morning ethnographer, waking up in a custom-sized world. The layout of the austere room is visibly rationalized to the millimetre, at the lowest possible cost. With one step, a guest can cross from one side of the room to the other. The only signs of irrationally dangerous behaviour that could possibly disrupt the sterilized atmosphere include a plastic toilet tank melted by cigarette butts and a mixed smell of stale smoke and cleaning products. But this could also be interpreted as an intentional mark of violence and disgust, inflicted against this kind of room layout. Soap, shampoo and standard-format towels are provided for the shower. No need to hurry, coffee is served 24/7 by a machine in the lobby.

After a brief discussion with the man behind the reception desk, we learn that we can eat at the Poivre Rouge restaurant across the street. He specifies that we can have ‘standard’ food. ‘If you want fresh products’, he continues, ‘there’s another restaurant in the centre, but it’s expensive!’

However, once outside the hotel, among the parked cars, we can appreciate the establishment’s soundproofing; here, our senses are no longer spared the aggressive sounds of globalization. Cars and trucks speed non-stop behind a sound-proofing wall placed less than 15 meters away. A little further the TGV train flies by at top speed. If observing landscapes requires all five senses, the landscape of the logistics world demands them to be on full alert.

In this landscape, the prefab, plastic, PVC and other cheap, standardized materials reign. It is also the world of raucous lights — neon or coloured LEDs. There is a continuity between these facades and interior decor. The senses are constantly stimulated as, for

example, the dull roar of road and rail traffic outdoors gives way to ambient music and promotional announcements inside the local establishments.

As we enter the shopping mall surrounding Auchan, we note that it is organized like a street in the city centre, with squares, benches, café terraces and signs (street names, directions, and so on). As we stop to eat, the waiter asks if we want to sit ‘inside or out’. We do not really understand. All evidence shows that we are already inside, but for him, the terrace is outside, even if the glass roof protects us from any climatic disturbance.

The first time we arrived in the city centre of Hénin-Beaumont, we were slightly in despair over finding nearly no cafés or restaurants. The streets were nearly empty, and the activity seemed to ‘move in slow-motion’. The contrast is high with the abundant activity in the shopping mall, the swarming multitudes of people there and a sort of effervescence deriving from the colourful atmosphere and cheerful children playing in the central square. Downtown Hénin-Beaumont seems to have been transported here, along with all its commerce. Around these retail spaces, representations of an attractive, consumerist modernity are at play, like on a stage where big names in the agri-business industry boast their ‘authentic’, ‘traditional’ and ‘natural’ qualities that look like a nose-thumbing at the downtown heritage that the inhabitants have turned their backs on.

However, the anthropological sense of the downtown public space often goes beyond the urban function of commerce. The identity function is at the heart of urban representations. As Tarrus (1997) argued, in the city centre we live together as urban beings; meetings give a sense of freedom, and the markers of citizenship — the city hall, prefecture and museums — are there. If the supply of provisions is now situated in the outer retail areas, social interaction, cultural fun and leisure activities are also widespread.¹⁷ Going to the movies, eating in a restaurant as a family, having a drink with friends, letting the children ride a carousel— all this is conceivable and possible in the mass-merchandising retail zone. It remains to be seen whether the ‘markers of citizenship’, also markers of belonging and identity, can be found here as well? From this point of view, a visible difference between these shopping malls and the downtown area is the absence of ‘politics’ and its symbols.

Territorial Evolution and Recomposing Urban Centralities

The territorial balance of the CAHC has been profoundly affected by the structural developments of logistics and commerce. Our working hypothesis is now that there has been a shift in activity from the former city centre to the Noyelles-Godault Auchan shopping mall. A reconstruction of urban centrality, the centres of small suburban towns seem to have been snatched away by these colossal shopping complexes, in terms of activities, representations and use.

Faced with large-scale commercial developments, artisans and small business owners cannot survive and close their shops one after the other; they either join the shopping zone or disappear. In the old, economically bleak centres, the price of real estate follows this decline.

¹⁷ On the importance of shopping districts and the diversity of practices in these spaces, see Bordreuil (2002).

These newly abandoned areas present opportunities for those with low investment capacity, such as immigrants. By means of a sales proposition not included in mass-market retailing (including but not limited to Kebab restaurants), they can develop a viable, ethnically based business that also satisfies other members of the population.

Concerning these springboard neighbourhoods,¹⁸ we need to ask to what extent they bring out the link between evolution at the metropolitan level and the reclassification of former city centres at their outer limits not only in economic terms, but also in terms of socio-demographic development. At least this is a hypothesis that we will follow in the work that we will be carrying out.

¹⁸ Thus they are described in *La Ville Ordinaire*. Published in 2012 by French Ministère de l'Ecologie PUCA. Research Program *ITTECOP* (Infrastructures de Transports Terrestres EcOsystèmes et Paysages), ADEME.

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