



Les friches urbaines : une forme de nature en ville ?

Urban wastelands: a form of urban nature?

Call for papers

International Symposium

Urban wastelands: a form of urban nature?

21-22 May 2019, Tours (France)

urbanwastelands.sciencesconf.org

Rationale

Since the last twenty years, research work on urban wastelands is constantly increasing and concerns several scientific fields, such as urban planning, geography, social sciences and more recently ecology and soil sciences. “Wastelands”, “brownfields”, “vacant lots”... Under different names and definitions, common characteristics emerge: these spaces have no official use, they are temporary, they are located in urban areas. Very variable in their shape and size, in their place on the urban gradient, in their longevity, urban wastelands are generally present in all cities, whatever their size. Urban wastelands are former cultivated fields encompassed in the city by urban sprawl, or former residential, industrial or services areas, involved in urban renewal or located in shrinking cities. In all cases, the existence of urban wastelands is closely linked to the evolution of cities: they are an integral part of them.

This symposium addresses the scientific community and practitioners. It will deal in particular with totally or partially vegetated urban wastelands, and proposes to question the roles played by wastelands in the green infrastructure, and in particular the differences with other urban green spaces (Saint-Laurent, 2000). We can wonder whether brownfields can be considered as informal green spaces (Rupprecht et al., 2015) and to what extent they can help to change the current perception of urban nature (Rink and Herbst, 2012). **Three aspects will be considered, linked to three major issues: social, ecological and urban planning stakes.**

1) Urban wastelands and residents: informal uses and perceptions

Wastelands are part of the urban landscape and everyday life of many city dwellers. Places for walking, for sporting activities or simply for passing through, playgrounds for children, areas of isolation for adolescents or for "marginal" populations... Urban wastelands are neglected by landowners and by public action, however they are often important for local residents who use wastelands more or less regularly in an informal manner. These uses have evolved in recent decades, in relation to changes in the use of public space by city dwellers: the use of urban wastelands as a playground for children, for example, has become marginal and is part of the "confinement" of children, during recent decades (Rivière, 2016). Moreover, the use of urban wastelands, especially when they are located in former industrial areas, is not free from threats to human health (Bambra et al., 2014).

The expected contributions can focus on the use of urban wastelands by city dwellers: are the informal uses the same as in public green spaces? What uses are specific to urban wastelands? To what extent are urban wastelands meeting the social demand for nature in cities and reducing, if not offsetting, the shortcoming of public green spaces?

Contributions can also focus on the representations or the perceptions of urban wastelands by city dwellers, particularly in comparison with the usual, more managed and frequented green spaces. Do urban wastelands represent more "intimate" spaces compared to public green spaces? Are they associated with the perception of nature? Are they synonymous with freedom and/or disorder in the city? One may wonder whether they contribute to improving the quality of life in the city or, on the contrary, to its degradation. The different representations of urban wastelands will be questioned, in relation to their location in the city, their informal uses, the socio-demographic profiles of the inhabitants.

2) Urban wastelands: biodiversity hotspots in cities?

Environmental NGO's, on the basis of recent research in urban ecology, pay growing attention to urban wastelands and consider them as valuable places for urban biodiversity. Due to their spontaneous vegetation, urban wastelands occupy a special place in the range of semi-natural spaces in cities: their management, where existing, is generally rare and irregular. Urban wastelands are thus the least managed areas in the city. Over a period of years, such sites can develop habitat structures unique to urban areas (Kowarik, 2013), providing valuable retreats as well as substitute or stepping-stone habitats for animal and plant species. As a result, plant and animal communities develop as a function of the characteristics of the wasteland (its surface area, period of abandonment, type of soil, microclimate, kind of previous use, etc.) and of the area surrounding it: contiguity to other vegetated areas or other wastelands, adjacent land use, height of adjacent buildings, etc. (Bonthoux et al., 2014). The weak management of these areas makes them the best indicators of the diversity and history of the urban landscape, both being potentially included in the soil seed bank (Johnson et al., 2017). Due to their very variable longevity and diverse characteristics, urban wastelands may potentially host a high biodiversity. As a result of the little intense management, they may however also provide habitats for alien, sometimes invasive species, arriving there in a spontaneous manner or having been introduced into surrounding spaces (Muratet et al., 2007).

Contributions can focus on the biological diversity of urban wastelands, and may relate it to surrounding land use patterns: for example, to what extent proximity to biological corridors, such as river banks or road verges, influences plant and animal communities in urban wastelands? Are communities changing taxonomically and functionally as a function of size, shape or place of the wasteland on the urban gradient? Are they related to the size of the urban spot? Are they affected by residents' attendance rates and uses? We could also conversely question the influence of wastelands on surrounding urban green spaces.

The submissions may also have a prospective dimension, e.g. in the context of climate change. In connection with the first theme, they may also focus on the relationship between city dwellers and the biodiversity of urban wastelands (Mathey et al., 2018; Brun, Di Pietro and Bonthoux, 2018): is it appreciated or simply perceived by the inhabitants who attend these places?

3) Urban wastelands and urban evolution: land and planning issues

In shrinking cities, the quantity of urban wastelands is increasing sharply. Conversely, in a context of urban growth, wastelands, waiting to be used, are generally promised to be built.. The injunction to densify cities, in order to limit urban sprawl, leads urban planners to systematically recommend the urbanization of these "empty places", excepted for those that can be transformed into urban parks (Darly et al., 2013). Reclamation of urban wastelands, for urbanization or transformation into recreational or agricultural areas, even for a temporary project, often needs soil decontamination, and represents important land and planning issues.

Contributions can focus on the evolution of urban wastelands production in relation to the evolution of urbanization. What urban dynamics reflect these wastelands? What are their past and future trajectories? What function is assigned to them in urban planning schemes? The submissions can highlight in particular the phases of acceleration or deceleration in the production of urban wastelands, by questioning their drivers.

Urban wastelands are also a concern for city managers, town technical services and local officials. These stakeholders, as well as property developers, generally consider them as building spaces (Hofmann et al., 2012). It seems difficult for them to imagine temporary uses (Lemoine, 2017), or quickly seek to frame the informal uses allowed by urban wastelands (Ambrosino and Andrès, 2008). The contributions will therefore focus on the actors of these changes, both public (notably local authorities, public developers) and private (individuals, companies, property developers): do they have converging perceptions of urban wastelands as "empty spaces to be built up"? Depending on the urbanization projects and real estate operations, do they interact with the residents living near the wastelands? One could also wonder what representations of these spaces emerge from the development projects: to reclaim a wasteland, would it necessarily be to build it up?

Submissions may fall under one or other of these three aspects, but transversal contributions are particularly welcome.

A selection of contributions will be published in a form to be defined.

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How to submit proposals

Contributions may be made as oral presentations or posters (A0 format), in French or in English (to be specified when submitting).

Proposals are to be submitted on the conference website: urbanwastelands.sciencesconf.org. They will include a title, 5 keywords, a summary of 3000 characters maximum (spaces included), in French or in English.

Deadline for proposals postponed to 20 November 2018.

Notices to authors: late January 2019.

Registration fees

The registration fees will amount to a maximum of 230 euros (half price for students): this is a provisional amount, which can be reduced later, and includes lunches and coffee breaks.