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Creation of the Brie et Deux Morin Natural Park (France)

An Example of Implementing the European Landscape Convention

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Abstract

The Brie et Deux Morin Natural Park project in Île-de-France embodies the European Landscape Convention's focus on local action and citizen engagement. Spanning 96,000 hectares and 82 municipalities near Paris, the initiative tackles territorial planning and climate adaptation by integrating diverse perspectives—from farmers to urban newcomers—through participatory workshops and expert analysis.

Central to the project is rebuilding territorial knowledge. By combining historical maps, geological studies, and resident insights, the team uncovered how past practices shaped the landscape, revealing solutions for modern challenges like flooding and biodiversity loss. For example, restoring traditional water storage systems and reviving diverse agricultural sectors (e.g., hemp, livestock) address both environmental and economic needs.

The park fosters a sustainable local economy, partnering with businesses like organic mills to create value-added products tied to the region's terroir. This approach not only preserves landscapes but also empowers residents to adapt their lifestyles to environmental realities.

Ultimately, the project transforms the Convention's abstract principles into actionable, context-driven policies, proving that landscape management can unite ecology, economy, and community for resilient territorial development.

Keywords: Landscape Policy, Spatial planning, Europe

Introduction

The European Landscape Convention is now 25 years old. The approach to landscapes is evolving in a new context marked by climate change and sustainable development. The European Landscape Convention is a political instrument that, to prove its relevance, must address citizens' concerns. Global discourses generate a climate of anxiety stemming from a sense of powerlessness in the face of disruptions that seem beyond control. One of the strengths of the European Landscape Convention is its emphasis on local action, which allows for more effective territorial planning by prioritizing the local scale.

In the context of creating the fifth regional natural park in Île-de-France, the Brie et Deux Morin Park (France), the prefiguration syndicate responsible for the project is experimentally addressing two topics: territorial planning[1] and citizen participation[2]. In other words, the project focuses on mobilizing knowledge and engaging citizens, which are the two pillars of the local initiative. The natural park project encompasses 82 municipalities, 120,000 inhabitants, and 96,000 hectares. Its size and location near Paris (Figure 1), in areas under high pressure, make it an ideal setting for applying the principles of the European Landscape Convention. (cf Figures 2 to 4: Landscapes of the Brie et Deux Morin Natural Park project)

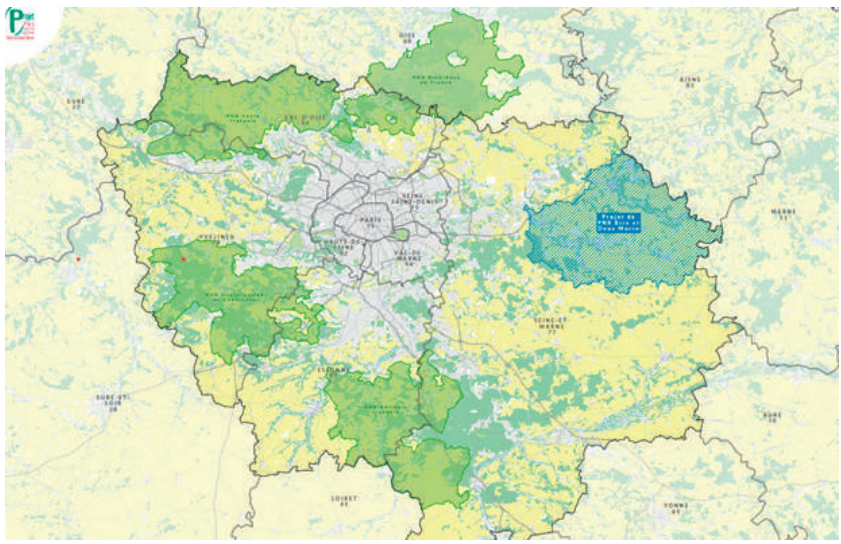


Figure 1. Location map of the Brie et Deux Morin Natural Par

1 European Landscape Convention, Article 5(d)
2 European Landscape Convention, Article 5(c)

Figures 2 to 4. Landscapes of the Brie et Deux Morin Natural Park project. Sketches by Armelle Lagadec.

I: Putting territorial knowledge at the heart of the project. *The first step of the project is to create a genuine shared culture of the landscape by moving beyond individual or collective perceptions that are often partial, contradictory, or false, and to put territorial knowledge back at the heart of the project.*

A: How to reconcile contradictory perceptions.
According to the terms of the convention, a landscape is a part of the territory as perceived by its inhabitants[3]. The convention also recommends identifying and qualifying landscapes through field research conducted by professionals, involving local populations. By linking the perception and qualification of landscapes, it essentially raises the question of identity.

However, in a territory like Brie et Deux Morin, located near Paris, the population is very diverse. The image of the Tower of Babel, whose

3 European Landscape Convention, Article 1(a)

construction was halted by the inability to communicate, is particularly relevant here.

Should we then seek to reconcile different viewpoints? What common ground can unite farmers and city dwellers, long-time residents and new rural inhabitants, those who move away from Paris for a better quality of life, and those pushed further to the periphery by high housing costs and suffering from the distance? How can coherence be restored to a territory torn apart by contradictory economic, social, cultural, and urban influences?

The answer emerged naturally from heated public meetings where tensions reached a peak, rendering any reconciliation efforts futile. Amidst these outbursts, a common ailment surfaced: amnesia. Everyone is actually unfamiliar with the territory they inhabit. The path for the natural park project was thus clear: to place the knowledge of the territory at the heart of the initiative, understanding to decide and act.

B: Foster dialogue among residents to build a shared narrative, enriched by expert knowledge. *The purpose of this collaborative dialogue is to conduct a thorough assessment of the territory, identify its natural characteristics and the dynamics shaping it, and develop a strategy for living in harmony with its natural foundations.*

Given that this is a mechanism for the reappropriation of the territory by heterogeneous populations, the co-ordinators teams opted for a cross-disciplinary approach. This involved mobilizing expert knowledge, newcomers to the territory, on one hand and the insights of inhabitants on the other. Cross-referencing these sources confirmed or refuted the accuracy of the diagnoses. The methodology thus follows the general economy of the convention, serving the objective of collective landscape acculturation.

Regarding expert knowledge, we first characterized the natural foundation, including geomorphology, topography, soils, and hydrology[4], to understand their characteristics and functioning. We then studied the history of human occupation and how it has shaped the natural foundation. For example, Figure 5 shows how villages are built on solid limestone layers, avoiding flood-prone areas and clay soils that are too malleable to support buildings.Comparative analysis of 18th and 19th-century maps and

4 Landscape Strategy Note – G. de Beaulieu: https://www.pnrbrie2morin.fr/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Proposition-strategie-paysages-version-def_compressed-1.pdf

plans revealed the organizational logic of the landscape established about 250 years ago[5]. It also helped identify and explain all the transformations affecting the territory's morphology over time, particularly the evolution of woodlands, habitat patterns, hydrology, and land use. All analyses contribute to a cartographic corpus in GIS format.

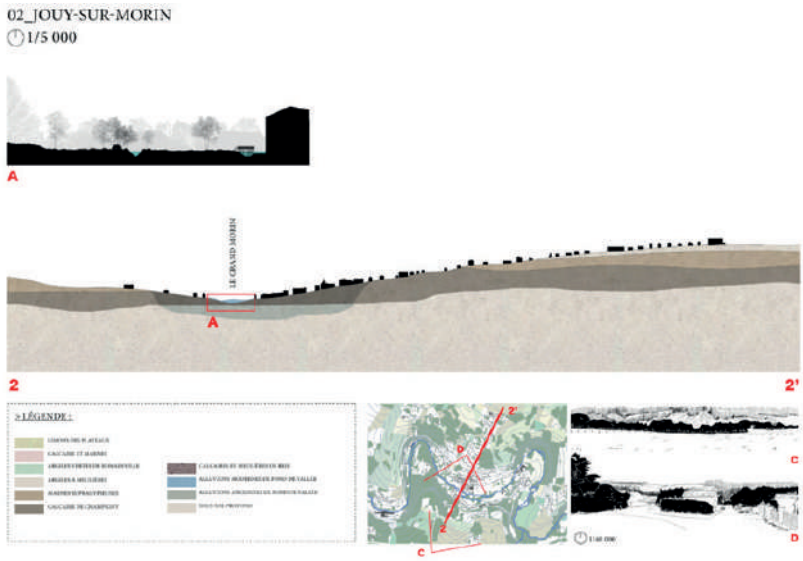


Figure 5. Landscape analysis, impact of geology on village layout. Sketche by Camille Langry.

Regarding the inhabitants' insights, the co-ordinator team organized workshops titled «Understanding the Territory We Inherit to Better Inhabit It.» (in french, Comprendre le territoire hérité pour mieux l'habiter) Participants (inhabitants and elected people) were invited to discuss the territory by comparing cartographic documents and aerial photographs from different eras. The narrative emerged from the participants' collective knowledge. However, it contained gaps, contradictory information, or misinterpretations.

The project team then compared this narrative with expert insights, which made it possible to address all the points in question and to share all the information with the residents. For example, residents believed that the function of the ponds that existed in the 18th century was fish

5 Archaeo-geography Report – Catherine Fruchart, Cédric Lavigne https://www.pnrbrie2morin.fr/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Archeogeographiques-evolution-du-territoire_compressed.pdf

farming, whereas their actual purpose was to store water to supply navigable waterways during dry periods.

The primary benefit of the workshops was to make participants aware that the territory has been entirely shaped by its inhabitants and is constantly evolving due to changes in lifestyle, technological advancements, and economic imperatives. These necessities have led to profound transformations that the inhabitants inherit but may not be adapted to current territorial and environmental challenges. For sustainable territorial planning, it is essential to consider the territory's specificities (geology, topography, hydrology, soil nature, etc.). The central challenge of the natural park project is to invent lifestyles in harmony with our environment, to inhabit rather than consume it. This rediscovery of the territory captivated all the residents and profoundly changed their perception of the landscape. From that moment, a new project dynamic began to take shape, as the Brie and Deux Morins Natural Park project aligned with their concerns.

II: Propose avenues for reflection to address the territory's problems. *The second step of the project is to develop a concrete problem-solving approach, demonstrating to residents and political decision-makers that solutions exist to remedy past mistakes and live in harmony with the natural environment, thereby limiting the impacts of climate change.*

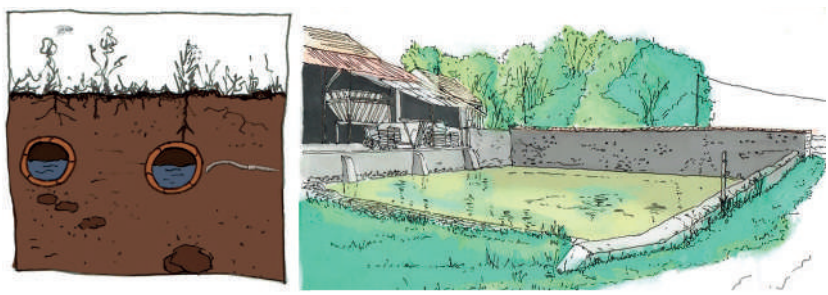
The value of the inhabitants' insights is in reaching a shared understanding of the territory's vulnerabilities: landscape banalization, soil erosion, and floods, which prefigure the project's axes. The value of technical insights is in supporting the notion of territorial resilience. It reveals the cause-and-effect relationships of observed disorders, spatializes the issues, identifies actors to mobilize, and provides tools to address them. The diagnosis shows that action is possible despite the significant disruptions we face. It also provides the necessary insights to facilitate political decision-making that ensures future coherence between the natural foundation and the lived territory.

The first example is that of the flooding affecting the territory. Residents were not aware of the territory's hydraulic functioning. Raising awareness about this issue enabled them to understand it, identify the causes of the flooding, and propose solutions to mitigate its effects.

The diagnosis entirely renewed the understanding of the territory's hydraulic functioning. The first element highlighted is the impact of the

natural foundation. The topography naturally generates a very dynamic hydraulic system, favoring the rapid evacuation of large quantities of water from plateaus to valleys in a torrential regime. Additionally, the clay nature of the soils does not favor deep infiltration but rather rapid water resurgence.

To ensure safety and meet their needs, humans, until the end of the 18th century, regulated the speed of water flow, created ponds to store water for agriculture, energy production, and navigable waterways for transporting goods. This regulation was based on four complementary principles: upstream drainage of soils to favor infiltration (Figure 6) and collection of rainwater and storage in ponds and pools (Figure 7), downstream regularization of natural river courses, and the creation of locks for navigable canals.



Figures 6 and 7. Agricultural drains and ponds. Sketches by Armelle Lagadec.

Figure 8. Navigable canals. Sketch by Armelle Lagadec.

Since the end of the 18th century, the hydraulic system has gradually been stripped of upstream storage and infiltration infrastructure (disappearance of ponds, filling of pools, modification and artificialization of soils, channeling of streams, etc.), while the downstream system for concentrating flows has persisted.

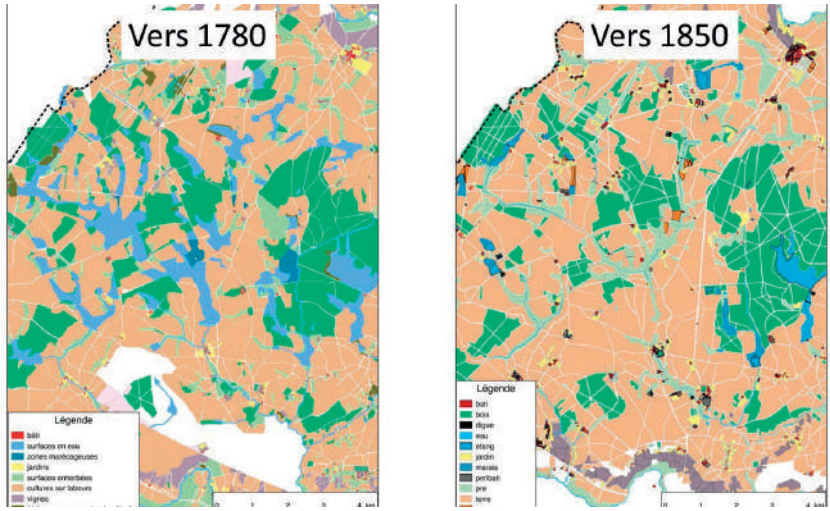


Figure 9. Comparative state of ponds, 1780-1850. Maps by Catherine Fruchart et Cedric Lavigne.

The disruption of the hydraulic system results in a loss of inertia, particularly detrimental in the context of climate change. During rainy episodes, flows become increasingly dynamic, causing significant floods in the valleys. Conversely, during droughts, the storage is increasingly low.

The diagnosis demonstrates that, given the specificities of the inherited territorial planning and the constraints linked to the urbanization of valleys, the target sectors for improving the territory's hydraulic inertia are primarily the upstream parts of watersheds, where the causes of disorders reside, rather than the valleys, which are currently the focus of risk management strategies[6].

The second example is the collapse of biodiversity, whose local causes are not understood, which prevents effective solutions from being implemented.

The dominant perception among local actors engaged in biodiversity protection was that agriculture destroys habitats. However, the diagnosis shows that the dominant dynamic is a loss of landscape and habitat diversity, leading to a massive increase in wooded areas. (Figure 9, evolution of woodlands between 1780 and 2020) This results from the disappearance of entire sectors of activity such as livestock farming, arboriculture (Figures 10

6 Hydraulic Strategy Note – G. de Beaulieu (*publication forthcoming*)

et 11) and viticulture. Maintaining landscape and habitat diversity requires diversifying agricultural sectors by relying on Brie traditions or developing new sectors[7].

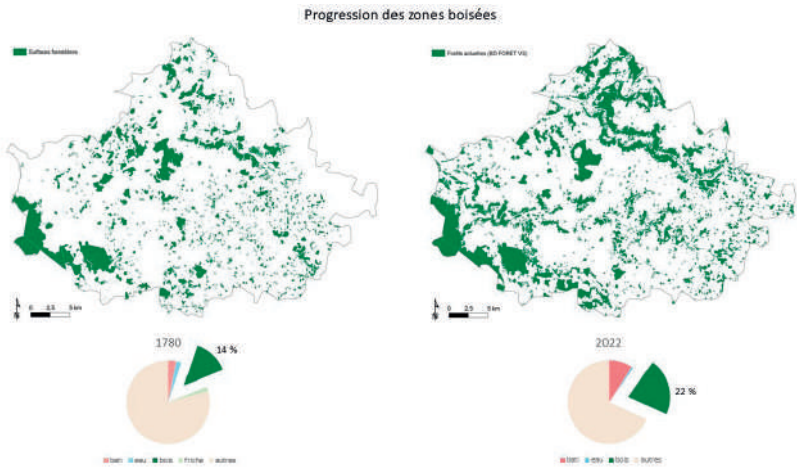
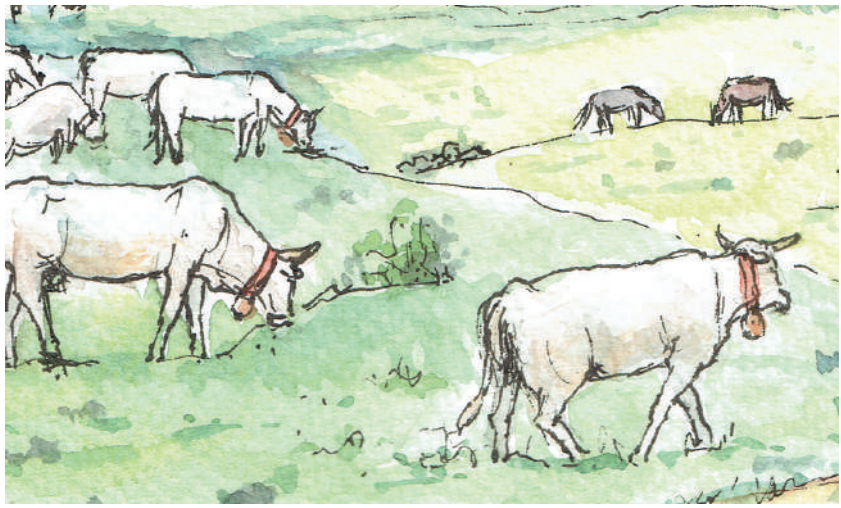


Figure 10. Progression of wooded areas between 1780 and 2022. Maps by Catherine Fruchart et Cédric Lavigne.

7 Biodiversity Strategy Note – G. de Beaulieu Beaulieu: https://www.pnrbrie2morin.fr/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Proposition-note-strategique-biodiversite-V4_compressed.pdf



Figures 11 and 12. Livestock farming and arboriculture, activities threatened with disappearance. Sketches by Armelle Lagadec.

III: Discussion on the relevance of operational tools for implementing the European Landscape Convention: landscape quality objectives.

The convention's recommendations invite us to link form (i.e., the elements and structures composing the landscape) with social perception systems and the natural, social, and economic dynamics that produce or transform them.

However, the concept of «landscape quality objectives»[8] only imperfectly reflects this ambition. It aims to preserve landscape elements (features and structures)[9] but separates them too much from the processes that produce them. Yet all landscape dynamics are linked to technical, economic, and social changes. Each evolution leads to a transformation of the landscape.

Within the Brie and Deux Morin project, the priority is not to focus on the form of the landscape, but to promote economic and social processes that shape the landscape in a way that is adapted to the territory and therefore more sustainable. These processes can contribute to the conservation of current landscapes or create new ones. Thus, managing change primarily depends on the human factor.

8 European Landscape Convention, Article 1(c)
9 European Landscape Convention, Article 1(d)

The objective is to strive for overall harmony between the environmental foundation and the lived territory. In this configuration, adapting lifestyles, practices, and know-how protects, produces, or requalifies the landscape form. Thus, the project's driving force consists of all inhabitants who adapt their lifestyles to the environmental foundation and contribute to positive interactions benefiting the population, the landscape, and the environment. By putting public action at the service of inhabitants, the landscape project truly acquires a political dimension, which is the only way to gain the adherence required for any change management process.

A: Driving change by relying on committed stakeholders. *Managing change begins with an initial phase of identifying, engaging in dialogue with, and structuring networks of committed stakeholders who already exist in the territory but are poorly identified.*

Nevertheless, there can be no dialogue without interlocutors. The park provides an institutional and operational framework to build and support the territory's future, but nothing can be achieved without local actors[10]. It is therefore essential to know the territory's strengths, assets, dynamics, and wills to implement effective and context-adapted tools, whether geographical, economic, or cultural.

Structuring networks of actors is thus crucial. The diagnosis highlights the importance of agriculture, which is at the heart of all the territory's issues. However, it is also evident that farmers do not attend the workshops. It was therefore imperative to establish a dialogue with them, as their practices shape the landscape. Their role is thus primary.

The choice of interlocutors focused on leading figures in the territory who reflect on evolving practices, experiment, influence, and are vectors of change. The expertise of these actors is irreplaceable, as it testifies to what is realistic to develop locally in agronomic and economic terms and under what conditions. It also testifies to the personal difficulties encountered by the actors interviewed: resistance from their environment, loneliness, and economic risk-taking, among others.

10 *Travel Journal: Encounters with Local Stakeholders* locaux: https://www.pnrbrie2morin.fr/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/carnet-de-voyage_compressed-1.pdf

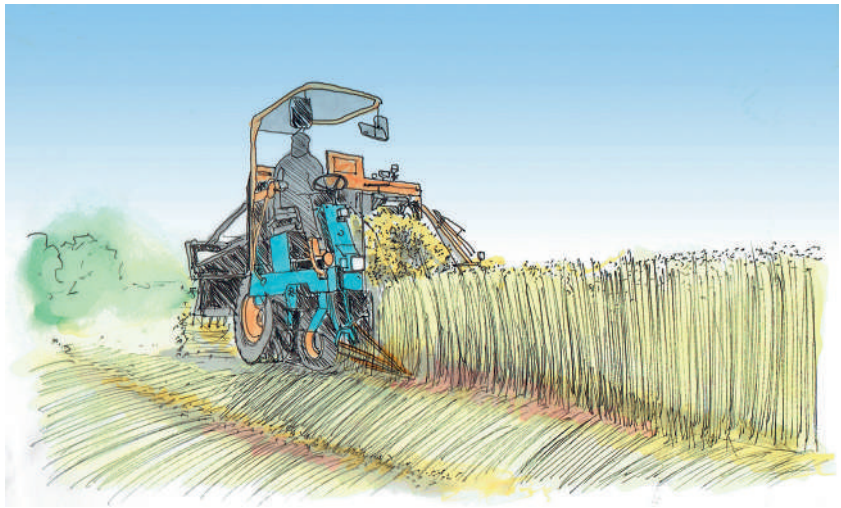


Figure 13. Meeting with actors, flax harvesting. Sketch by Armelle Lagadec.

The discussions also focused on the contribution that the future natural park could make to support these initiatives. The first axis of collaboration that emerged from the discussions is the structuring of networks, the development of experience sharing, and the mobilization of research.

B: Developing a virtuous economic model: *The landscape is primarily the result of the existing economic model. To preserve it, a more sustainable local economic model—one that is adapted to the territory—must be developed.*

However, the real vector of change is economic. The primary expectation regarding the natural park is to support the marketing of productions under the most favorable possible conditions. Selling at a good price implies adding value by transforming raw materials. Thus, the objective of the future natural park is clear: to support sectors linked to a different economy, one that cares for inhabitants, ecosystems, and landscapes.

For example, following our discussions with the company Planète Chanvre, the park supported a funding application for acquiring more efficient harvesting tools. The goal of this initiative is to increase the cultivation area of hemp from 900 hectares to 2,400 hectares.

This objective fully aligns with the natural park's goal of reducing the environmental footprint of agriculture. The development of hemp allows for longer rotations by introducing a rustic crop that requires no chemicals, little fertilizer, no irrigation, and naturally cleans the soil without herbicides.

Moreover, the market for hemp-derived products is dynamic. Transforming the raw material generates high added value, which better remunerates farmers. The economic and social benefits are the best arguments for supporting the conversion of the agricultural model.

This example is not an isolated case, as the park currently collaborates with a group of seventy farmers driven by the common will to gradually develop a sustainable agricultural model—one that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations and integrates the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of activities.

The natural park project aims to promote a local economic model based on the concept of terroir. Terroir is the combination of natural resources—particularly the soil—and traditional know-how. The goal is to enhance the quality of products to increase their added value and, in doing so, make sustainable development more attractive.

To further the reflection, the natural park, in partnership with the Seine-et-Marne Chamber of Commerce and Industry (an institution in charge of the economy), has identified an initial panel of thirteen companies that meet the definition of sustainable development. Each of these companies constitutes a link in a supply chain mainly related to the transformation of agricultural products. The notion of «terroir,» i.e., the combination of soil and know-how in the service of product quality, is essential.

The selection of the panel is based on four criteria: the economic criterion, which presents the company in a few figures; the social criterion, which presents the company's values; the environmental criterion, which presents positive interactions; and the territorial criterion, which presents the link between the company and the territory.

An example of sustainable local economic and social development: Les Moulins Bourgeois.

The case of Moulins Bourgeois is emblematic of the sought-after profiles. This company produces organic flour. Economically, it is a high-end company targeting artisanal bakeries. Its investment capacity is considerable, with over ten million euros recently invested, and it is in constant development in the French market.

Socially, the company has 180 locally recruited employees. It develops an internal training school for bakers and offers attractive remuneration to farmers to encourage them to engage in high-quality organic production.

Environmentally, the company prioritizes 100% French/local supplies (maximum radius of 200 km). It uses untreated cereals from sustainable farming. The fleet of OLEO 100 trucks (green fuels) reduces emissions by 60%, and 6 tons of cardboard are recycled annually.

Territorially, Moulins Bourgeois is a family business established for four generations in the park's most rural sector. It is linked by multi-year partnerships with local wheat producers and supports the local associative network.

Beyond developing this profile, the company and the natural park have identified a major converging interest: encouraging conventional farmers to produce high-quality organic products. To this end, the natural park can contribute to creating a local label, «Baguette de Brie et des Deux Morin,» to better position the company with environmentally conscious consumers.

These examples illustrate the importance of dialogue between actors, which is the project's primary driving force. This postulate conditions the local conduct of landscape policy. While the general objective must be the same for all, the means to achieve it must remain entirely open and adapted to the diversity of actors. They can even be contradictory, allowing the evaluation of engaged actions to identify effective strategies. Thus, there is an obligation of result but not of means.

In the case of the Brie et Deux Morin Natural Park project, the stakeholder workshops organized following the diagnoses determined three objectives. The first objective is to preserve the quality of life in a rural territory, encompassing urbanization, landscape quality, and biodiversity preservation. The second objective is the safety of goods and people in response to floods. Water circulation is a common thread linking diverse fields such as agriculture, urban planning, and the restoration of ecological continuities. The third objective is supporting agriculture and innovation, encompassing various agricultural types (conventional, organic, sustainable, etc.) and a wide diversity of sectors. Innovation relies on constant dialogue between scientific research, particularly in agronomy, and practitioners.

Conclusion

Through the lens of landscape, all components of the territory are summoned and questioned: the natural foundation, the inhabitants, the

economy, social structures, lifestyles, and more. It is also all the energies that are mobilized.

The research conducted as part of the creation of the Brie and Deux Morin Natural Park reveals that territorial planning has been carried out empirically for centuries. Observation, a fine understanding of context, and reasoned experimentation formed the basis of the know-how developed by local actors in all fields—agriculture, urban planning, and beyond.

In France, and more broadly in Europe, since the 1950s, public policies have relied on the duplication of large operational models implemented without considering the context in which they are applied. The connection to the territory has been broken.

In this context, marked by the loss of memory and knowledge, the European Landscape Convention, in its definition of landscape, overvalues the notion of perception. This risks leading to misjudgments in diagnostics and actions undertaken. Knowledge management and public education should be the starting point for any territorial project.

Moreover, the notion of perception by inhabitants positions them as mere observers. This stance obscures the responsibility that populations bear in the evolution of the landscape, which results from their ways of living, consuming, and producing. To become a true project tool, the European Convention should better emphasize individual and collective responsibility and approach the landscape as the result of our ways of life.

As a result, the concept of landscape policy, as defined by the European Convention, remains too abstract to serve as a genuine project tool. It is desirable for its implementation to be based on a stronger local foundation and to become a fully-fledged political object that enables debate and the construction of the future.

In the context of the municipal elections to be held in France in March 2026, the Brie and Deux Morin Natural Park project is already the central element of the upcoming electoral campaign, even though the issue of landscape was previously absent from public debate.

Gilles de Beaulieu, landscape architect.

Director of the prefiguration union for the Brie et Deux Morin Regional Natural Park

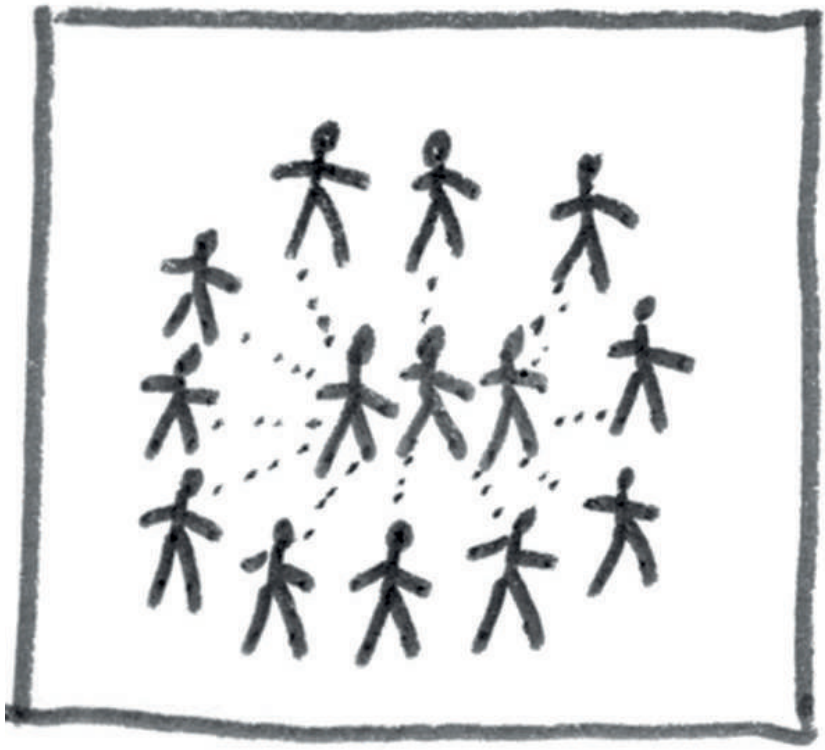


Figure 14. All Together for the Landscape. Sketch by Armelle Lagadec.