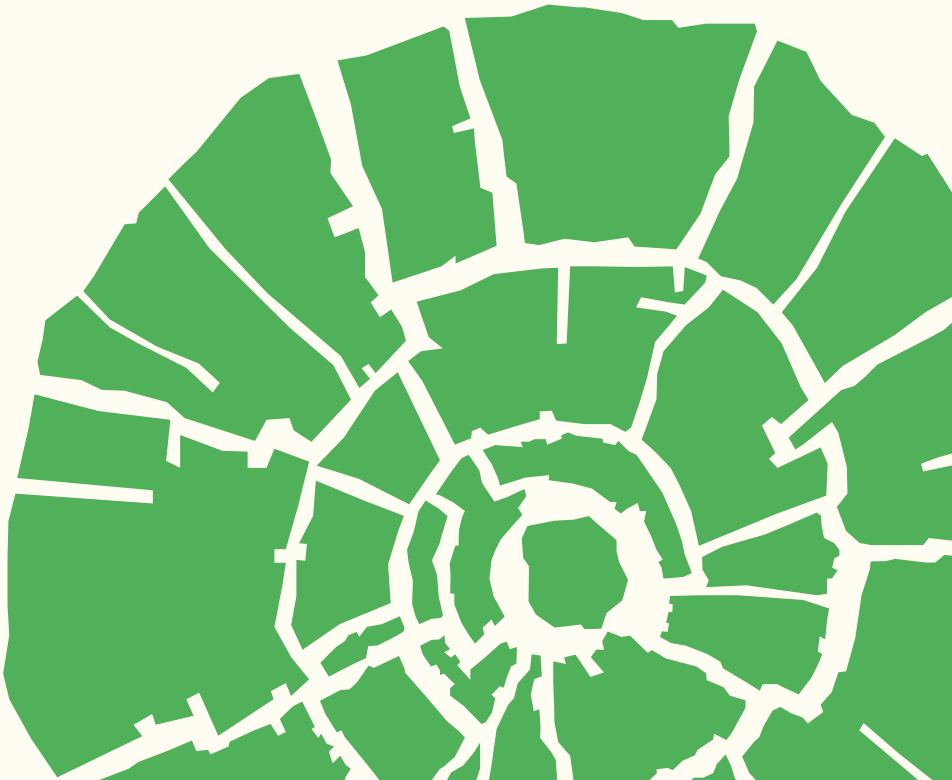
SOCIÉTÉ ÉCOLOGIQUE
DU **POST-URBAIN**

# DESIGN A BIOREGION FROM IS ECOLOGICAL LIVING SPACE

CALL FOR A POST-URBAN ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY



As we know, urbanization and metropolisation have dramatic ecological effects: the artificialization of land and the concretization off soil, the exploitation of all resources and a cascade of pollution. And this is not going to get any better. According to the IMF, by 2100 74% of the world's population, 80% of whom will be urban, will experience more than three weeks of deadly heat each year.

Therefore, unless we allow incomes to sort out those who have the possibility of moving away, thus abandoning all the precarious and downgraded, there is an urgent need to move from urban planning (that of metropolitan concentrations) to ecological planning (that of relocations in the biotic community).

The movement for a post-urban ecological society, which has been underway for two years, wishes to prefigure such an alternative geography to urban excess and metropolitan size: a geography of life. And to this end, after several months of reflexion, we are haunching this Appeal for the creation of post-urban bioregions.

It is aimed at any person or group wishing to think and design their ecological living environment in a sustainable way, simply by getting together with a few friends or allies to imagine what a bioregional space could be. The aim is, through the greatest number of bioregions thus conceived, to show what this other geography would be, radically alternative to metropolisation: that of the deconcentration of people and the relocation of certain activities, of the decentralization of powers and the decrease of all our exploitation and predation.

The following document gives several tips on how to do this concretely: values and commonalities of a post-urban bioregion (e.g., autonomy), what needs to be done and how to do it, practical advice and an example of how to imagine the process (Thau Basin). This document is drawn from a two days seminar that brought together 23 people and 10 organizations in march 2022 as part of the Post-urban week.

We invite you to take note of this practical guide and to join this movement to think about the deurbanization of our lives and the nourishing reempansion of our societies, with sobriety and responsibility. To your imagination and desires! To your pencils and productions! Actually, ten bioregions are already under consideration or even under construction.

In July and August weekly exchange sessions wil be offered by various EGPU member organizations to accompany each person and each group thus formed in this process of figuration.

On 14-15-16 September in the Vexin, a meeting will be organized to share experiences and progress.

Contacts for more information and to discuss the proposed support:

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## 1/ Commons and values of post-urban bioregions

Large urban areas exert very strong pressures on the entire environment through their own operations and dependencies. The primary ambition of any post-urban bioregion is therefore to alternative these pressures by means of an ecological symbiosis that takes into account all forms of life. To achieve this, it is a question of creating autonomy in micro-societies attached to variously constituted and interrelated places. This autonomy is by no means an independence, and even less an autonomy. There are interdependencies to be rebuilt, aiming at social, cultural, and political harmony with ecosystemic balances, and their limits. This is the post-swimming design of the ecological society defended by the EGPU.

In this register, autonomy is obviously subsistence, whether it be food and water, energy or (light) housing and local travel. Here, material sobriety is the order of the basics (to land in particular, on the scale of the life cells, for food production) or to the possible reception of populations of all origins. Other registers of re-empowerment of and through self-reliance are culture as a social link, education as a situated learning process and intergenerational mutual aid, with some exchanges between bioregions for health and possibly security issues.

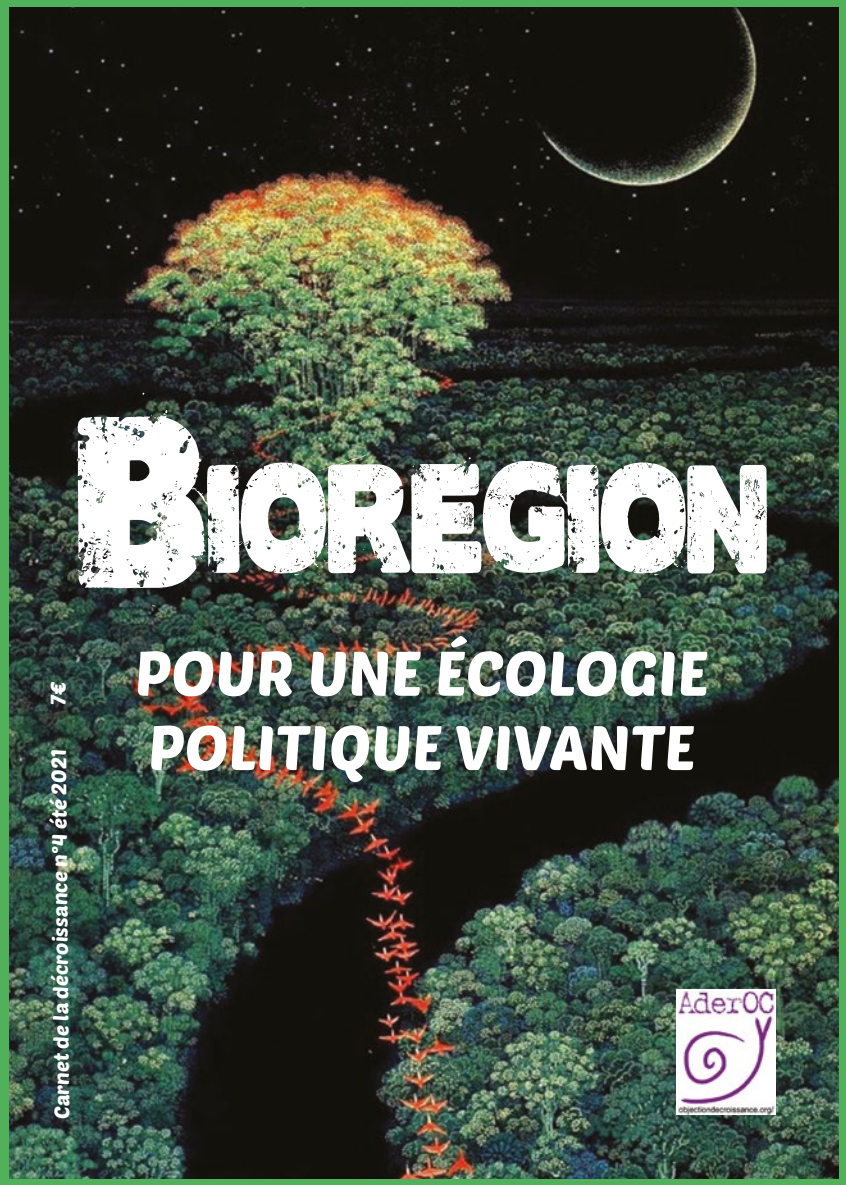
Bioregional autonomy is therefore also based on the principle of self-management.

This involves several areas: political organization (direct democracy), which allows for the management of land, the shaping of landscapes and democratic life, but also activity (productive and not productive). Sovereignty over a bioregional space is rethought in particular around the communalization of agricultural surfaces, forest, rivers, lakes, water tables… whose use is recovered at the scale of small living entities. Autonomy is also cooperation and federation in order to regulate politically all the interdependencies made necessary (and in particular those of tasks and specialized knowledge), as well as the burdens that all life imposes on the natural environment despite everything.

This double autonomy, substantive and organizational, is a carrier of values that convey the bio-regional commons.

The first of these values is that of humility in the face of the living, itself carried by two principles embodied by the autonomy: sobriety and re-empowerment. However, another value is also quickly added to this esteem for the living: the care of the living, both ecological and social. Care appears as a real categorical imperative of non-aggression in order to think of ourselves as belonging to the living world. In this pact of non-aggression, solidarity and dignity are asserted as equally primordial principles, from the immediate neighborhood to the scale of the entire bioregion, but also between species and generations.

It is on this basis of anchoring, respect, and care, as well as sobriety and re-purification, solidarity and dignity, that the gaping wounds of capitalist society, the wounds inflicted on ecosystems, will be thought out and healed.




*Bioregion : For a living political ecology*
*Carnet de la décroissance n°4, Ed. Aderoc*

## 2/ Les besoins premiers à satisfaire dans toute biorégion post-urbaine

The different needs identified were divided according to the two above-mentioned meanings of autonomy: autonomy of "it should also be added that these needs stem from a reflection and projection to 2040 or 2050. It should also be added that these needs stem from a reflection and projection to 2040 or 2050 in general and in a perspective of collapse, more or less radical, in any case of a mutation of our ecosystems and our societies that requires a fairly fundamental review of our forms of life.

For the construction of our houses, the needs are to be met in three ways:

- Rehabilitating existing facilities in many places, using capacities that are already there,
- Use wood, stone, clay and raw earth or straw for all new construction,
- Develop light and mobile housing to limit the footprint, facilitate subsistence mobility or change the use of the land.

Whether it is a question of new construction or Eco rehabilitation, participatory work sites should be developed for this purpose.

The need for mechanical power provided by animals was highlighted. However, other sources of energy, such as waterpower, should be considered. The diversification of ecological

sources must make il possible to provide work force and subsistence production, even if for the needs of everyday objects (furniture, crockery, bedding, clothes, paper…) the reuse of existing materials must be systematically encouraged.

For mobility, but also the traction necessary for earthwork or construction, the animal resource seems central for some people. For anti-speciesism reasons and to extend the springs of autonomy, it is also necessary to develop the bicycle, using low-tech solutions, or by basing itself on existing systems and possibly reworking them in view of the locally available resources and know-how. The subject of mobility also raises questions about the maintenance and destination of existing transport infrastructures (road, rail network) and the services available to travelers (relay for mechanical repairs, care of couplings and rest, etc.).

By taking these primary needs into account, other needs quickly follow. They are social but also cultural and political.

This includes solidarity through services to people, whether it be in the care of the elderly, children or the sick, which is a major social need. Some groups have thought of joint structures to care for people, in particular in adapted housing. There are also plans to welcome migrants (either from the metropolises or climate refuges). A bioregional network for the organization of local care services is also envisaged. The question of the end of life appeared to be central in the reflections of one group in particular, for a dignified death that would close a dignified life, thus reintegrating itself into the cycles of life.

At the heart of this reinscription into these cycles of life lies a cultural disposition to live together, which is not limited to festive or artistic activities.

Some groups emphasize the importance of the “home” as a place of proximity, as the first level of politics and relationship to the world. Next comes the need to establish an identity in the sense of an attachment to the environment to be cultivated. This is what a culture of care can work towards. At the same time, the importance of a culture of renunciation in order to achieve the beneficial effects of change is emphasized. The role of the spiritual and the form that worship might take in a bioregional society model are mentioned here. Finally, transmission and learning are mentioned as cultural means of primary importance, without forgetting the logics of welcome, hospitality and openness which make it possible to preserve the solidary essence of bioregional constructions which should not be constitutive of a withdrawal into themselves.

Finally, all of this, as well as the prior sharing of properties “this means that bioregional rules must be established, and political entities must be created.

The various proposals formulated are oriented towards libertarian municipalism or democratic confederalism with a power as close as possible to the realities of life of the inhabitants. These proposals bring out different types of the distribution and distribution of capacities, by territorial grids (hamlets, villages, towns, cities and neighborhoods, bioregion) and by type of need or activity (with the use of sociocratic or holacra-

tic models). The application of decisions could then be ensured by judicial powers and agents whose functions would be subject to rotation (rhythm to be defined). It also seems necessary to set up joint commissions for conflict resolution or the possibility of creating a council of

In broader considerations, such as the development and management of inter-bioregional rules, the functions and roles of confederate delegates should be created.

### 3/ Minimum living area of any post-urban bioregion

| | BIOREGIONAL PARADIGM | PARADIGM INDUSTRIAL-SCIENTIFIC |
|---|---|---|
| SCALE | Region<br>Community | Nation<br>State/World |
| ECONOMY | Conservation<br>Stability<br>Self sufficiency<br>Cooperation | Exploitation<br>Change/Progress<br>World economy<br>Competition |
| POLITICAL REGIME | Decentralization<br>Complementary<br>Diversity | Centralization<br>Hierarchy Uniformity<br>Polarization |
| SOCIETY | Symbiosis<br>Evolution<br>Division | Growth/violence<br>Monoculture |

Source: Kirkpatrick Sale, 2000, *L'art d'habiter la terre. La vision biorégionale*. Wildproject Publishing, p. 85

In order to meet these common needs and satisfy them with the necessary activities, and thus choose and reduce one's dependencies, the size of the groups and the minimum surface area required as a total area for human settlement and the harmony sought with the living world were examined in greater depth. To this end, some groups have made a distinction between "living environment" which refers to a bio-centric understanding of subsistence, and "living area" which is more anthropo-centric in terms of the social organization of a larger space that meets fewer needs. The size of human groupings will therefore differ in the bio-regional space, the latter being based on already established networks, which should therefore be strengthened.

The input dimension for the demographic and geographical picture was to imagine the area according to three main criteria:

**1.** The first refers to the twelve principles of permaculture, as keys to thinking about another geography: 1. Observe and interact. 2. Capture and store energy. 3. Obtain production. 4. Apply self-regulation and accept feedback. 5. Use and value services and renewable resources. 6. Do not produce waste. 7. Start from the overall structures and work towards the details. 8. Integrate rather than separate. 9. Use slow and local solutions. 10. Use and value diversity. 11. Use the interfaces and value the margin. 12. Be inventive in the face of change.

**2.** 2. The second is the more directly figurative one of possible decarbonized travel in a daily timeframe.

The scales of organization of the bioregional space can be defined by the distances that can be travelled by bicycle or horse to access basic needs or, more exceptionally, to exercise the political functions mentioned above, or to have access to rarer resources, particularly for cultivation.

**3.** Finally, within these distances and by these means of travel, a whole range of places must be connected, from manufacturing/repair and low-tech supply sites to assembly sites, via markets and energy production and raw material transport sites (locks and paddle mills), to schools (whose pedagogies must be revisited), cultural sites (whole offer must be reconnected with local societies) health establishments (whole practices must be reconsidered) …

Once the coordinates of the network have been established, in order to definite not the size but the density, it is necessary to take into account the surface area necessary for autonomy (at least 75%). For example, in the case of construction, it is accepted that a stone quarry or building land of one hectare is sufficient for the construction of an entire town of 10 000 inhabitants, without systematically using stone. In the same way, one hectare is necessary for the life of a horse.

Finally, on a per capita basis, and initially in groups of 2 or 3 tens of people gathered in hamlets, about 4 300m2 are needed per person:

– 3 200m2 of (forest) wood per person:

=> For heating (65% between 10 and 30m3 per year
=> For timber and collective uses (20%)
=> For tool making (15% of which 100m2 per person per year for steel or 5kg of charcoal for recycling)

– 400 to 600m2 of cultivated gardens (including a cereal area)

– 500m2 on average for a horse to be used and a few sheep for the fiber needed for insulation and clothing

– 50m2 for a henhouse

– 25m2 of living space per person (house of 4 to 100m2 interior).

But also, 20m3 (i.e., 200m2) of housing materials (if no rehabilitation is possible), 80 litters of water per person per day including domestic water and food, 2 or 3 solar panels for electrical needs…

On this double basis (mesh size and minimum surface area), a bioregion has an average surface area of 30 to 50km in diameter (i.e., the average of the living areas as defined by INSEE according to criteria of access to facilities and services), for a population of between 15 and 25-30 000 inhabitants.

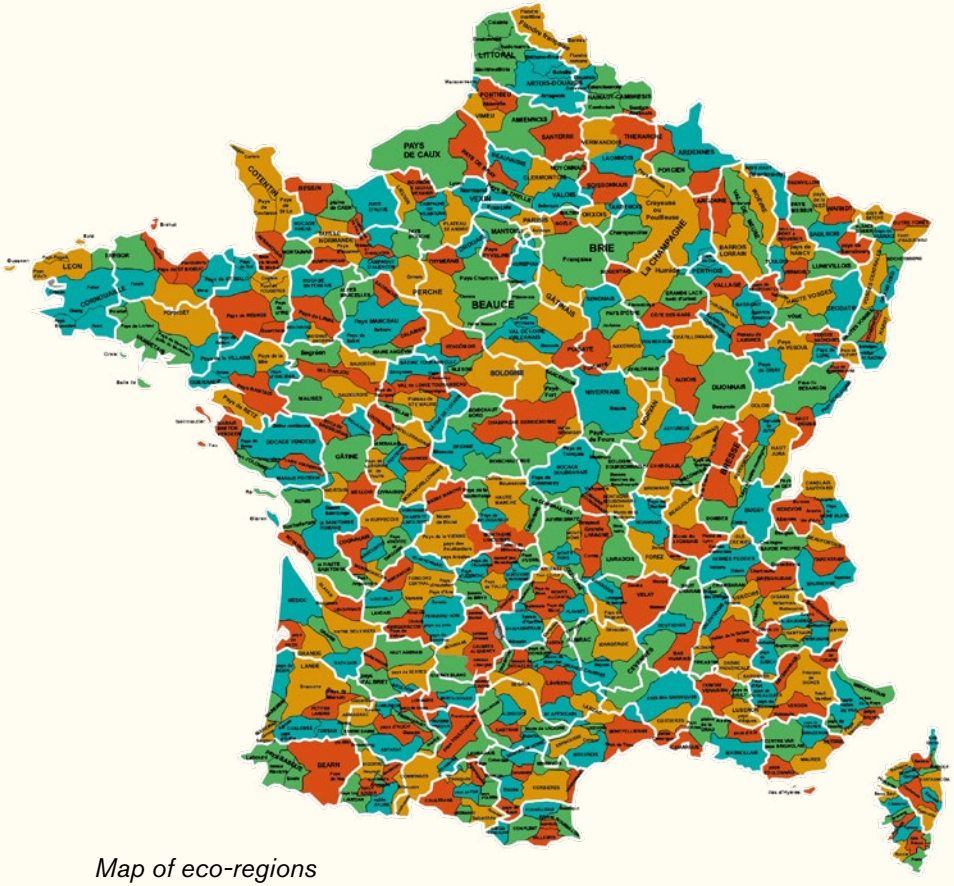
Of course, the needs of the ecological reference environment or the old human settlements, which originally structured the territory and with which it must deal, must also be taken into account. The framework is based on at east:

– A small town or city center that can be reached in less than an hour (10 km away), with up to 10 000 inhabitants,

– Two to three market towns with between 400 and 2000 inhabitants, i.e., potentially between 100 and 500 households

– About ten villages with 40 to 100 inhabitants

– And more or less populated hamlets with up to two or three dozen people.




*Map of eco-regions*

## 4/ bioregional legend

From the communalities, needs and sizes, a list of information to be included in any bioregional map to be made is derived. This list is temporally structured by 4 dimensions, which form an input frame:

### A – Pre-existing physical facilities

- Existing infrastructures and facilities or those that polarize the territory. It is necessary to map all activities (small factories, health facilities, craft industry, know-how resources, etc.) or those that could be transformed for this purpose (motorway network, rail infrastructures, logistics zones, large industries, hospital complexes, etc.).

– Heritage sities are also important insofar as they allow the bioregional space to be supported by the territorial thickness of its organization. These are all places that are conductive to the cultures of belonging, but that also structure the spaces of animation, social life and even politics of the bioregions.

### B- facilities and human settlements

– Unoccupied dwelling should be identified with a view to bioregional (re)settlement, as should the location of little used or unused public buildings, with community or physical locations for political gatherings.

– Cultivated areas and types of activities to be developed (e.g., mixed farming), forest areas, wetlands, etc., without forgetting the “wild areas left free”.

### C – geographical morphology, ecological mutations, and official delimitations

– Catchment areas and various rivers, valleys, and hillsides … which cross the territories concerned

– Natural, technological, or industrial risks listed with a focus on particular events, rising water levels, temperature levels…

– Official breakdowns of ecosystems to be preserved (natural parks, ZNIEFF, biotopes…)

D – Alternatives already established and their thematic orientations

– Collectives (eco-places, communities, partipatory housing, light housing, etc.)

– Services (shared land management, social farms, village centers, recycling centers, low-tech workshops…)

– Resistance (to GPII, to agricultural practices, to urbanization areas…).

## 5/ Example of a post-urban bioregion

During the first Villarceaux seminar, four bioregional projections were proposed by working groups. Here we briefly present the case of the work that was done on the Etang de Thau bioregion.

This group decided to work on a context, by the year 2040, in which the waters are rising, transforming the Thau Bassin into a lagoon (5 to 7km of coastline submerged). Thus, Sète has become a peninsula and is therefore experiencing a certain ecological collapse due to the significant modification of the geographical characteristics of the area.

The area considered is a group of coastal towns or towns overlooking the lake, made up of Frontignan, Sète, Marseillan, Mèze, Balaruc les Bains and Bouzigues, to which must be added the towns or villages of Bessan, Florensac, Pomerols, Pinet, Gigean, Montgnac, Vic la Gardiole and a few others located between these two groups. That is approximately 100km2 for 120 000 inhabitants today, and 87 000 existing dwellings.

It has been observed that it will be impossible to provide food in 2022, since economic activity in this area is essentially focused on tourism, the residential economy, and the monoculture of vines. The environment is therefore overstretched by activities with high added value, but which do not make it possible to respond to the post-urban problems of tolerance and care through autonomy.

To respond to this, the first step proposed is to diversity agricultural production from a monoculture (vine) to a polyculture (tables grapes, cereals, hemp, fruit trees, etc.), with the need to manage water resources in relation to the Mediterranean climate and the soil.

(by the land is largely sandy). Diversification can also be founding mixed farming, whether it be shellfish farming, fish farming, seaweed farming, cattle, and sheep farming (but also horse farming for traction).

At the same time, the development of the economy linked to the ports and the naval activity could allow a concentration of craftsmanship in the direction of maritime activities, whether it be transport by cabotage or canning and wood craftsmanship. The large number of unoccupied dwelling (residential homes, i. e. more than 20 000 dwellings, and hotels, i.e. 6 500 camping sites and 4 800 additional tourist beds) must also be taken into account. Finally, it should be noted that some know-how can have an influence beyond the bioregional area. This is the case, for example, of the thermals in Balaruc-les-Bains.

Spaces other than the immediate periphery of the Thau Basin are then thought of as a continuity of ecological settlement from south to north. In a post-urban perspective of ecological upheaval, a large part of the inhabitants could be led settle in the hinterland. The waterways should then facilitate exchanges, which would also make it possible to recreate links with different and complementary natural environments. This is also the case for the Canal du Midi. In this perspective turned towards the land (North/South axis), and not only the sea, but large infrastructures could also be converted for e better territorial capillarity (e.g. A0 motorway).

This is an example of figuration (but by no means an unique graphic model!).

## The General Assembly for a Post-Urban Ecological Society (EGPU)

The EGPU collective brings together some thirty organizations of the social and ecological alternative, united by a triple ambition:

**mettre en débat To debate the links between urbanization of territories, metropolisation of the world and current ecological and social upheavals,**

**Consider the modalities of relocating activities and ecologically sustainable settlement of populations in the various regions that are still predominantly rural**

**To share experience of ecological alternatives and social initiatives that are becoming more and more widespread in France.**

*Cultivating life outside the big cities*

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