En Détail

Pers Pectives On

Territories

Population - Living Conditions - Education – Crossborder Employment

2017 Report Summary
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Ensuring territorial cohesion, the mission of a Ministry responsible for this aim since May 2017, means overseeing “assistance to territories in their development and reduction of territorial inequalities” (Decree 2017-1075 of 24 May 2017 bearing on the remit of the Minister of Territorial Cohesion). Although the aim is by no means a new one, it has gained considerably in importance over the last few years, since the cumulative effects of continuous weak growth have been impacting some territories more than others, and, in parallel, talk of “territorial divide” has become ever more prominent in public debate. This context makes detailed knowledge of territorial dynamics and inequalities all the more necessary, as it provides the public authorities with the means to act effectively to ensure that each and every territory has all that it requires in order to develop, and that all citizens, wherever they may live, enjoy living conditions that meet their aspirations. The work carried out by the Territories Observatory is therefore more than ever relevant, as is evidenced by its renewal under Decree no.2017-1763 of 26 December 2017.

The Observatory’s sixth report describes and analyses the diversity of French areas and their trajectories at a variety of levels. It provides the data required to get beyond the often reductive interpretations that are made, relegating such diversity to general and supposedly homogeneous categories (metropolises, periurban areas, medium-sized towns, rurality, and so on). It shows that contrasts exist within these various types of territories and that specific form of evolution are at work. For example, not all metropolises have equally positive dynamics, nor are all areas located on their peripheries in difficulty: other disparities, connected with regional effects, are superimposed on the contrasts observed between types of territories.

Making such observations is a necessary first step, but in no case a culmination. The analyses developed here enable characterisation of the differences between and specificities of areas, but there are still a good many questions to be answered as to the origins of such diversity. Why, for example, are metropolises in the west of France more equal than those in the south?

In order for the Territories Observatory’s work to be genuinely useful to territorial actors, which I very much hope it is, it is important to continue collective thought on the driving forces of spatial dynamics and the explanation of their diversity.

Pierre Mirabaud,
Chairman of the Observatoire des Territoires (Territories Observatory)
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• Eloi Laurent, Senior Economist at Studies Department of the French Observatory of Economic Conditions’ (OFCE – Sciences-Po).
The sixth report of the Observatoire des Territoires (Territories Observatory) was drafted by the General Commission for Territorial Equality’s Bureau de l’Observation des Territoires. It brings together six theme-based studies produced and published over the course of 2017 under the supervision of Matthias Kaldi, and in whose composition members of the Territories Observatory’s Advisory Council participated. We should like to thank all those who lent their assistance.

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The report’s maps and infographics were created by the Bureau de l’Observation des Territoires and CGET’s Cartography Unit (Aurélie Douet, Arnaud Genevrié, Pierrick Hamon, Mélodie Martin and Floriane Picard under the supervision of Karine Hurel). The cover illustration was found by Frédéric Lavictoire (CGET).

THANKS

This publication complies with the principles set out in CGET’s Sub-Directorate for Observation and Statistical Analyses’ Code of Ethics.
The 2017 edition of the Territories Observatory’s Report is composed of six theme-based studies that seek to identify French territories’ assets and vulnerabilities, and highlight major issues with regard to territorial cohesion. The summary preceding them provides an interpretation of spatial disparities and dynamics from a new angle. Together, these analyses paint a portrait of France that reveals the diversity of its territories and their movements towards convergence and divergence, going beyond the idea of “territorial divide”.

The portrait they paint of France depicts two superimposed geographies that enable understanding of reconfigurations of territorial balances.

The first identifies four regional groups that are experiencing very different evolutions. Due to their demographic and economic dynamism, Atlantic and Mediterranean coastal areas, along with the Rhone Valley, stand out from the north-eastern quarter of France affected by deindustrialisation, and from a centre with sluggish demographics due a very noticeable ageing of its population. Île-de-France, which still figures prominently in the French landscape, is nonetheless the least attractive of all regions. Finally, Overseas France suffers from major disparities with Metropolitan France as regards its inhabitants’ standards of living.

A second set of interpretation criteria may be applied to these territorial groups, distinguishing major types of areas (metropolises, medium-sized towns, and periurban and rural areas) with differing dynamics and problems, without, however, making it possible to systematise such trends. Overall, metropolises have benefited more from recent economic changes than medium-sized towns and rural areas, and increasing polarisation of the largest urban areas is to be observed in all territories, resulting in expansion of periurban areas. These categories are by no means homogeneous, however, and the situation of the territories that compose them also depends (among other things) on the dynamism of the regions in which they are located.

Nonetheless, over the course of the last few years, partial interpretation of these geographies has helped shape a binary view of spatial disparities, a “territorial divide” setting “winners” against “losers” and “centres” against “peripheries”. This approach plays down territorial diversity artificially, by assigning territories to simplistic categories within which inhabitants are connected by a common destiny (metropolises, periurban areas, rurality, etc.) Such schematisation of real-life situations above all prevents any clear conception of current challenges to territorial cohesion. For if we cannot trace that famous fault line between “winning” and “losing” areas, it is because local situations are highly differentiated and complex, even within the abovementioned major categories of territories. The Territories Observatory’s 2017 Report therefore aims to contribute to better understanding of the complex reality of territorial dynamics, and lay the groundwork for a new interpretation of territories that makes room for new concepts and opens the way to better shared public policies that are more effective in meeting citizens’ expectations.
Are the challenges of territorial cohesion the same in Europe and France?

After decades of progressive convergence of the per capita GDP among Europe’s regions, the 2008/2009 economic crisis interrupted the process and increased disparities. The wealthiest regions have recorded a higher growth rate than the others, and although that of the poorer regions is converging towards the European average, this is mainly due to a rise in productivity at the expense of employment. The need for territorial cohesion, not only between countries but also between regions within countries, is all the greater.

Major variances between Western and Eastern European regions and Metropolitan French regions that stand out for their levels of wealth

Average net disposable income of households in 2013
In purchasing power standard (PPS), by NUTS 2
The Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) is a European territorial subdivision corresponding, in France, to former regional perimeters

| Income Level (PPS) | 4,900 | 10,600 | 13,700 | 15,600 | 17,300 | 19,700 | 37,900
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Sources: Eurostat, 2013 • Production: CGET, 2017

Shifting dividing lines in Europe, which, paradoxically, may strengthen cohesion

Differences in income levels between EU countries calculated in purchasing power standard (PPS) make it clear enough that contrasts exist between a wealthier Western and Northern Europe and a poorer Southern and Eastern Europe. Median disposable income in France, expressed in PPS, is one of the highest in the European Union, behind Luxembourg, Austria and Sweden, positioning France in the group of countries comprising Finland, Denmark, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. French citizens’ income is twice as high as that of Polish citizens, almost three times higher than Bulgarians’ and over four times higher than Romanians.

However, such observations at national level may mask various regional specificities: French Guiana, for example, records a median income equivalent (in PPS) to that of Greece, while Mayotte records the lowest PPS median income in the EU.

In addition to an approach focusing on monetary wealth, demographic dynamism, an undoubted asset in an ageing Europe, reveals similar contrasts. The countries of Northern and Western Europe record population growth rates that are overall higher than those in the East and South of the continent. Among the most highly populated countries, France has the highest growth after the United Kingdom, mainly due to its natural dynamism. With annual growth rates of 0.53% and 0.78% respectively, as against a European average of 0.27%, these two countries made a 60% contribution to increases in the Union’s population between 2007 and 2017! A number of countries, however, are exceptions to Europe’s north/west vs south/east divide.

Notes
2. The purchasing power standard (PPS) is an artificial monetary unit that eliminates differences in price levels between countries. Hence, a PPS enables purchase of the same volume of goods and services in any country. It enables significant comparison in volume of economic indicators between countries.
3. Median income has been selected here for making comparisons between countries. At regional level, however, Eurostat only disseminates average disposable income, so it is this data which is provided on the map opposite.
4. Accounting for 13.1% of Europe’s population, France is the second most highly populated country in the EU, after Germany.
5. The driving forces behind demographic growth are nonetheless somewhat different in the two countries: in France it is essentially a matter of natural rate, while in the United Kingdom, there is a combination of roughly equivalent natural and migratory contributions.
French regions that contribute significantly to European demographic growth

Such is the case with Germany, whose population has only increased by 500,000 over the last ten years, compared with 250,000 a year in France. Its sluggish demographics, due to a highly negative natural rate only just compensated for by major inward migration, brings its profile closer to Eastern European countries, several of which are even seeing their populations decreasing.

And finally, the population’s educational level is also a major structuring aspect of the European area. Beyond the differences that exist between regions (there are more higher education graduates in Metropolitan regions), there is a clear contrast between Western and Northern Europe (Scandinavian and Baltic countries, Benelux and the United Kingdom), where the proportion of university graduates among 30-34 y/o is systematically above 45%, and Eastern (Bulgaria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Croatia and Romania) and Southern (Italy and Portugal) European countries, where the proportion is under 35%. Nonetheless, several countries are exceptions to this general division. France is one of them: with 43.6% of university graduates in the 30-34 y/o age bracket, it is in an intermediate situation, behind Poland and...
Slovenia but well ahead of Germany (33.2%), where there is greater focus on apprenticeship. Such national differences are partly the result of each country’s education system, as well as mobility among Europe’s graduates: some countries, such as Luxembourg for example, have a labour market that attracts highly qualified workers trained in other countries.

Such marked contrasts in terms of wealth, demographic dynamism and educational levels pose a challenge for the European Union’s cohesion. Paradoxically, though, from a European point of view, their existence is a powerful factor in such cohesion: complementarities between countries cause every more numerous flows (of goods, workers, students, etc.), which often contribute to European countries’ integration, even though such flows may also generate other forms of inequality. In 2014-2015, for example, more than 291,400 students benefited from international mobility in the context of the Erasmus programme, a number that is rapidly on the increase. 40,000 of these students were French (the largest contingent alongside the Germans), and 30,000 more were hosted in France (the programme’s fourth host country behind Spain, Germany and the United Kingdom). Over the same period, some 2 million European Union residents (22% of them French) worked at least once a week in another Union country, a number that has more than tripled since 1999. At local level, crossborder exchanges are developing rapidly and are a key factor in increasing the wealth of a number of territories, sometimes at odds with the rest of the country. Such is the case, for example, with the Saint-Louis, French Genevois and Morteau employment zones, which have a median declared income of over €28,000 a year per consumption unit, close to the Swiss standard of living and standing out sharply from that in the Grand Est, Bourgogne-Franche-Comté (€20,000) and Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes (€21,000) regions. More specifically, not all of these areas’ inhabitants benefit from their border location: There are often major income disparities between those who work abroad and those who do not.

Apart from the DOMs (Overseas Départements), territorial income disparities are not as great as they are in neighbouring countries.

However, observations at national level mask countries’ internal territorial disparities, which sometimes prove to be considerable. Economic and social disparities take many forms; and although they by no means fully account for the inequalities in standards of living described below, this indicator nonetheless helps provide an overall view of the territorial balances specific to each country.

In France, as in most other European countries, the capital region stands out due to a median standard of living among its inhabitants (€22,500 per annum) a great deal higher than that recorded in other regions, especially Hauts-de-France (€18,800 €), Corsica (€18,900) and Occitania (€19,400), which record the lowest disposable income per consumption unit in Metropolitan France. Nonetheless, compared with such other countries as Spain and Italy, differences in standards of living between the regions of Metropolitan France are relatively small. The average disposable income in the wealthiest region is 1.4 times higher than in the poorest in Metropolitan France and Germany alike, as against 1.8 in Spain and Italy. However, taking all French territories into account, the variance between Overseas and Metropolitan regions makes us one of the countries in most urgent need.

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*As there is no data for 2000, data for Croatia is from 2002 and data for Austria from 1999.

Source: Eurostat 2000 - 2016 • Production: CGET, 2018
of convergence. The average income in Mayotte and French Guiana is one of the lowest in the EU. Besides the variances observed at regional level, inhabitants of dense urban areas in most European regions enjoy overall higher standards of living than those living in intermediate-density and thinly populated areas. In some countries, however, quite the opposite holds true: in Austria, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands, the best-off among the population tend to live in intermediate-density and thinly populated areas. In France, such differences in income between urban centres and thinly populated areas are relatively contained (under 20%), unlike certain Eastern and Southern European countries, where medium income between densely and thinly populated areas can vary by as much as 100%.

As regards its European neighbours, France is therefore characterised by more-or-less contained inequalities in standards of living between its territories, excluding the special case of its Overseas regions, with which major variances are to be observed.

### The risk of an “emptying” France as opposed to a “saturated” France?

Along with employment, the French population is increasingly concentrated in large agglomerations, alongside the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts and in the southeast of the country: as a result, these areas are faced with often serious problems of congestion and tension. In contrast, various thinly populated areas, most of them located between the Ardennes and the Central Massif, have been experiencing repeated population and employment losses for several decades now: a hundred or so living zones are now in demographic decline. But these major variances in overall dynamism mask such areas’ local heterogeneity, letting it be thought that there is nothing inevitable about such trends continuing.

#### Notes


7. Average income is expressed here in purchasing power standard (PPS) in order to be able to make comparisons between European regions. As data on median incomes at regional level is not disseminated by Eurostat, it is average income that is shown here.

8. Calculation of this ratio is based on average income and former regional borders, in order to enable comparison with other European countries (source: Eurostat 2013). If the ratio is calculated based on Metropolitan France’s new regions and median income (source: Filosofi 2014), variances are smaller (1.2), but the regional hierarchy remains the same.

9. Disseminated by Eurostat, the Degree of Urbanisation (DEGURBA) classifies Local Administrative Units level 2 (LAU2 or municipalities) into three types of areas based on the percentage of local populations living in urban clusters and urban centres: cities (densely populated areas) / towns and suburbs (intermediate density areas) / rural areas ( thinly populated areas).

10. “Living zones” are defined as the smallest territories on which residents have access to facilities and everyday services. There are just under 1,700 of them in France.
An attractive…and repulsive capital region

Seventy years after the publication of Paris et le Désert Français, a work symbolic of rejection of a France out of balance, seen as crushed beneath the weight of its capital, French geography has changed considerably. So-called “balancing metropolises” have helped strengthen an urban framework offsetting Parisian hypercentralisation both economically and demographically. But the capital region continues to play a key role in the balancing of France’s territories. Île-de-France concentrates over 21% of the country’s jobs and 18% of its population. It is also the region where population and employment have increased most since 1999, despite a highly negative migration rate.

Over the course of the past few decades, the capital region’s area of influence (i.e. the area in which most workers depending on employment in Île de France live) has extended to increasingly distant territories, spreading into neighbouring regions, Hauts-de-France and Centre-Val de Loire in particular.

The variance with other regions is gradually decreasing, however. Growth of employment (0.1% a year between 2009 and 2014) and population (0.51% a year) in Île-de-France is now lower than in any of the country’s western and southern regions, with the exception of Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur. In absolute
value too, the capital region has been overtaken by Occitania, which gained 30,000 jobs more than Île-de-France between 2009 and 2014, as well as by Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, which outpaced its growth to the tune of 17,000 jobs and 3,600 inhabitants, without such progress being connected with the extension of regional borders. Since the 1990s, the capital region has recorded the most negative migration rate anywhere in Metropolitan France (-0.43% a year between 2009 and 2014).

Nonetheless, due to its status, the economic opportunities that it provides and its high density of higher education institutions, Île-de-France is still highly attractive to certain categories of the population. In some ways, the capital agglomeration functions as a suction/pressure pump: It attracts students (there are some 536,000 students in Greater Paris, accounting for 8% of its population) and young adults, while at the same time repelling all other age groups due to a quality of life many deem inadequate (tensions over housing, overburdened transport systems, pollution, etc.). For example, the median real-estate price in the Greater Paris Metropolis stands at €6,100/m² (and up to €12,200/m² in Paris’ 6th Arrondissement) compared with €2000/m² at national level. It has been estimated that a three-person household needs 30 years to become the owner of a 65-m² apartment. The situation is no better for households that can only afford accommodation in the social sector, despite a housing stock more developed than in many other agglomerations. There is an average of 9 applications for each available social housing unit in the Greater Paris Metropolis, compared with 3.9 at national level.

Yet there is no lack of poor households in the capital region, despite it having the country’s highest median disposable income (over €22,500 in Île-de-France, as

Notes

12. Île-de-France gained 1.1 million inhabitants and almost 640,000 jobs between 1999 and 2014, as against 880,000 inhabitants and 440,000 jobs in Occitania, and 870,000 inhabitants and 400,000 jobs in Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes. Île-de-France’s population gains are entirely due to the region’s highly positive natural rate, which compensates for a longstanding negative migration rate (since the 1970s).
13. Source: lawyers’ data, transactions involving “old housing stock” (properties more than 5 years old) recorded between January and March 2017, taking houses and apartments together.
14. This is the theoretical number of years required for a three-person household (2 adults and 1 child under 14 y/o, making a total of 1.8 consumption units) to acquire a 65m² 3-room housing unit. This estimation was calculated by the Territories Observatory by dividing the estimated selling price of a 3-room unit (source: lawyers’ data - 2017, price per m² multiplied by surface area) by a third of households’ median disposable income (source: INSEE, Filosofi – 2013). This calculation does not take account of any contribution on the part of the household, lawyer’s fees or the influence of the borrowing rate.
against a national median of €20,400). Île-de-France is therefore the most unequal region in Metropolitan France: The incomes of its wealthiest 10% are 4.5 times higher than its poorest 10%, compared with 3.5 at national level.16

Large agglomerations concentrate a major proportion of growth, at the risk of increased imbalances with the rest of the territory and within themselves

Besides the special case of the capital, large agglomerations (taken here to mean urban areas with over 200,000 inhabitants, apart from Paris) dominate the French landscape, and their importance continues to increase. They accommodate 38% of the country’s population and 39% of its jobs, and have concentrated a still greater part of its demographic and economic growth over recent years (44% of population gains and 53% of job gains between 1999 and 2014). Taken together, large agglomerations show higher growth levels than other categories of territories, and even Paris: 0.7% annual population growth between 2009 and 2014 (as against 0.5% at national level and in the Paris urban area) and 0.3% annual employment growth (as against 0% at national level, and 0.1% in the Paris urban area). Among these large agglomerations, it is those in the west and south (Nantes, Bordeaux, Toulouse, Montpellier and, to a lesser extent, Rennes and Lyon) that recorded the most growth between 2009 and 2014.

In contrast, apart from Lille and Strasbourg, the large agglomerations in the east and north record growth levels lower than the national average, although still higher than the pace of growth in their respective regions. Hence, large agglomerations are overall more dynamic than the surrounding territories, but there growth levels above all reflect those of the regions in which they are located.

At local level, progressive concentration of jobs in large urban areas is a source of imbalances, in particular because it does not coincide with equal concentration of households, which, in contrast, tend to live increasingly further from employment centres, in periurban areas, so making their daily journeys to work longer. Increasing functional dissociation between workplace and domicile is a major challenge for territorial cohesion and ecological transition alike.

Another sign of the increasing attractiveness of large agglomerations: the number of students in higher education has increased by 20% in urban units with over 200,000 inhabitants (excluding Paris) since 2001. Such growth in student numbers is particularly high in certain large agglomerations: 37% in Lyon, 32% in Rouen and 21% in Bordeaux, as against only 17% in Paris. And this phenomenon is not only affecting agglomerations in the west and south of France: Lille, which has the country’s third largest concentration of students, records growth...
(25%) on a par with Montpellier (24%) and considerably higher than Toulouse (17%). Overall, smaller-sized urban units recorded lower growth levels, except in areas where demographic growth was particularly high (Serris in Seine-et-Marne, Mamoudzou in Mayotte, etc.).

Large agglomerations’ attractiveness increases saturation phenomena within them. Due to high demand, access to housing is more difficult and takes longer than elsewhere, although not on the same scale as in Paris. Large agglomerations have the highest real-estate prices in the country. However, there is a marked difference between metropolises in the south and, to a lesser extent in the west, which are more expensive, and those in the centre, north and east, which are more accessible. Waiting periods for obtaining of a social housing unit are also longer in large agglomerations, particularly those on the Mediterranean coast, where the social housing stock is less developed than elsewhere. There are often 7 or 8 applications for every housing unit allocated. Finally, as in Paris, social segregation processes are at their height in large agglomerations, which include numerous City Policy priority districts.

These attractive metropolises are also extremely unequal areas: the ratio between the incomes of the wealthiest 10% and the poorest 10% varies from 3.9 to 4.1 in most metropolises, as against 3.5 for Metropolitan France as a whole. They therefore face particularly significant social and territorial cohesion issues.

Note
16. If Overseas France is also taken into account, French Guiana is the region with the highest income disparities, with an interdecile ratio of 4.8.
17. Métropole Nice Côte d’Azur: €3,600/m²; Bordeaux Métropole: €2,800/m²; Tours Métropole Val de Loire: €2,000/m²; Métropole Européenne de Lille: €2,100/m²; Metz Métropole: €1,600/m². Source: lawyers’ data, transactions involving “old housing stock” (houses and apartments over 5 years old) recorded between January and March 2017.

Increasing dissociation between places of residence and workplaces

Evolution of the relationship between numbers of jobs and numbers of employed workers, 1975-1999-2012

More employed workers than jobs

More jobs than employed workers

175 150 125 115 115 125 150 175

Data not available

FOR CLEARER UNDERSTANDING

In dark red areas, there are over 175 resident employed workers for every 100 jobs, while in dark blue areas, there are over 175 jobs for every 100 resident active workers.

Sources: INSEE, 1975-2012 Population Census - Municipal map smoothed over 10 km for Metropolitan France, non-smoothed municipal map for Overseas regions - 1975 data unavailable for Overseas regions - Processed by the Bureau de l'Observation des Territoires - Production: CGET, 2016
From Rennes to Lyon, the high attractiveness of the western and southern arc poses a challenge to lasting development

The most attractive areas are located along an arc running from Rennes to Lyon, taking in the Atlantic and Mediterranean coastlines and the Rhone Valley. In these areas, it is not just large agglomerations that are experiencing growth, but all coastal and Rhone Valley areas, sometimes with negative effects on quality of life. Major housing construction is underway in them: in many intermunicipalities alongside the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts, almost 10 new housing units per 1,000 inhabitants are built every year, as against a national average of 6, and fewer than 4 in the country’s least attractive areas. Such high levels of construction accelerate land artificialisation and urban sprawl, without, however, managing to reduce tensions connected with high attractiveness. In fact, access to property is often a long and costly process, and obtainment of a social housing unit extremely difficult, especially on the Côte d’Azur. Intermunicipalities located along the west coast seem better able to adapt their housing stock to the high demand they are faced with.

The high demographic growth recorded in areas located along the arc is largely, sometimes even totally due to inward migration. Apart from Pays de la Loire, the former Rhône-Alpes Region and large agglomerations, where the population is younger overall and the natural rate significantly high, these areas are ageing and show sluggish, even negative dynamics. For example, 11.4% of New Aquitaine’s population is now 75 y/o or above (compared with a national average of 9.1%) and the low excess of births over deaths only added 700 inhabitants to the region’s population between 2009 and 2014, whereas inward migration added over 33,400 inhabitants. These territories’ development would therefore seem to depend largely on the attraction they hold for retirees and families. In a context of the general ageing of France’s population, such spatial dissociation of driving forces of demographic growth is a challenge. According to INSEE’s demographic projections up to 2050, the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts should continue to be very attractive but would see their growth limited by a natural rate whose contributions would be increasingly smaller and would eventually become negative overall.

These areas, which combine residential attractiveness with dynamic employment growth, record the highest
A particularly high construction index on coasts, in Corsica and in the Alps

Number of housing units started a year per 1,000 inhabitants between 2006 and 2015
By Public Intermunicipal Cooperation Establishment (EPCI) (perimeters at 1 January 2017)

- 8.3 to 34.9
- 6.6 to 8.3
- 5.2 to 6.6 ★ AVERAGE FOR FRANCE: 6.6
- 4.0 to 5.2
- 1.4 to 4.0

Sources: Sit@del2, 2006 - 2015; INSEE, 2008 and 2013 Population Census - processed by the Bureau de l’Observation des Territoires
Production: CGET, 2017

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Economic growth in the country. Between 2009 and 2014, while there was no employment growth at all at national level, the great majority of intermunicipalities located on the west and south coasts and, more generally, in the southeast of the country and Corsica, even in thinly populated areas, experienced very positive growth, often in excess of 1% per annum. However, not everybody living in these attractive territories benefited from their economic dynamism.

On the Mediterranean coast, for example, despite sustained economic growth, unemployment rates are the highest in Metropolitan France (often around 15% of the active population19, equivalent to levels recorded in employment zones experiencing difficulties in the north) and inhabitants’ standards of living among the lowest (disposable income per consumption unit stands at around €17,000 a year in many intermunicipalities in the former Languedoc-Roussillon region).

Hence, inward migration and strong economic growth do not always go hand-in-hand with favourable living conditions for all the resident population. Such areas are often marked by major income disparities, particularly in Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur and Corsica (income variances from 3.5 to 4 between the wealthiest 10% and the poorest 10%, as against 3.5 for Metropolitan France as a whole). In western regions, however, economic development seems rather more

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Notes

18. “By 2050, the population will have increased in all Metropolitan France’s regions”, Insee Première no.1652, June 2017.

inclusive: unemployment rates are low (around 7% in employment zones near Rennes, Nantes and Poitiers), standards of living close to the median for Metropolitan France (disposable income per CU of €20,400 a year) and local variances in wealth much smaller (income variances of around 2.5 to 3 between the wealthiest 10% and the poorest 10%).

Hence, there is a marked contrast between regions of longstanding attraction (Île-de-France and the Mediterranean coast), which are suffering the negative effects of their attractiveness (tensions over housing, overburdening of transport systems, major inequalities in standards of living to do with socio-spatial segregation phenomena, etc.), and regions of more recent attractiveness like the west of France, where such effects seem better controlled.

There is certainly greater diversity in local territories, however, than this schematised contrast might suggest. Nonetheless, it raises questions on the future of France’s western regions: will they eventually suffer the same negative effects as Île-de-France and the Mediterranean regions, or does their development constitute a more lasting model with regard to territorial cohesion?

Faced with such loss of dynamism in the northeast and the “diagonal void”, a new development model is required

Unlike the highly dynamic Atlantic and Mediterranean arc, regions located north of the Cherbourg-Besançon line and those along the strip running from the Ardennes to south of the Central Massif are faced with a lack of attractiveness largely due to their economic problems. More than any of the others, they have been affected by the decline in agricultural and industrial employment over the last few decades. They were also particularly strongly impacted by the effects of the 2008-2009 recession, owing to their major specialisation in productive activities.

In Hauts-de-France and parts of the Grand Est region, such lack of attractiveness is partly compensated by a positive natural rate, largely connected with the relative youthfulness of their inhabitants (under 20 y/o account for over 26% in the Nord and Oise départements, compared with a national average of 24.5%). Hence, robust natural dynamics maintain population growth, although admittedly at a moderate pace (0.24% per annum in Nord between 2009 and 2014, around 0.30% in Aube and the Rhine...
départements, and 0.42% in Oise, compared with a national average of 0.50%). It is by no means certain, however, that these mechanisms will last: negative migratory dynamics are contributing to a progressive transformation of territories’ demographic structures (ageing connected with the departure of 20-39 y/o), which may eventually lead to a natural deficit that will result in further degrowth21. In addition, in most départements located between the Ardennes and Corrèze, as well as in Orne, populations are decreasing (by up to -0.53% a year in Indre and -0.61% in Nièvre) and there is a still greater decrease in numbers of jobs. Decreases in population and jobs go hand in hand, as the first blocks the automatic knock-on effect that demographic dynamism has on the presential economy. Hence, the problem of degrowth is particularly felt in such areas, where small and medium-sized towns are affected by the cumulative effects of decline: fewer inhabitants and jobs, vacant accommodation, and closing of services and shops. These territories’ lack of economic and demographic dynamism is a major challenge to the country’s territorial cohesion. There is much room for improvement of local living environments to the benefit of “those who stay behind”, in particular as regards locally available services. In addition, towns undergoing degrowth clearly suffer from inadequate territorial integration 22 although they may be well connected to their urban proximity systems, they are less well connected to more distant systems. Connection to flows from Metropolitan areas therefore creates opportunities for these areas whose specialisation in productive activities (industry, transport, logistics, agriculture, etc.), provided they are promoted and supported, may become a function essential to service-based metropolitan systems.

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Geographical peripheries, forgotten areas?

The economic and demographic dynamism displayed by large agglomerations has nurtured the idea of a territorial divide between metropolises, bastions of the elite that bear up well, and forgotten peripheral areas that have been downgraded and largely abandoned23. This view is obviously too schematic: it is quite simply impossible to group all territories classified as “metropolises” (see above), “periurban” or “isolated rural” into the same categories, as there is far too much variation in their development trajectories and in their inhabitants’ profiles. In addition, associating individuals’ pasts and futures with the categories of territories in which they live is to ignore the growing impact of mobility: in order to access workplaces, services, consumption and recreational activities, daily distances travelled grow ever longer, mixing populations and blurring distinctions between categories of territories.

Particularly dynamic periurban areas

These days, the country’s most dynamic areas are not its large urban centres but their peripheries. In this category of municipalities, which accommodate the great majority (63%) of the population living in periurban areas24, the number of inhabitants increased by 1.24% a year between 1999 and 2013, twice as much as the national average. They have also recorded the country’s highest employment growth since 2000. Further away from large centres, the communities referred to as “multipolar municipalities in large urban areas” (i.e. under the influence of several large urban areas) are also highly dynamic: due to lower land and housing prices, such areas enjoy a combination of residential, service and productive functions. Overall, periurban areas are also the most homogeneous in the country: they have fewer very poor as well as fewer very rich inhabitants than may be found in other areas, and their interdecile income ratio (ratio between the incomes of the wealthiest 10% and the poorest 10%)

Notes
20. Despite a highly negative migratory balance overall, Île-de-France is still very attractive for certain categories of the population (see above).
24. Here, the term “periurban area” is taken to mean all peripheries of urban centres along with multipolar municipalities (i.e. those under the influence of several urban areas).
is systematically lower than in the urban centres they depend on. And finally, their inhabitants’ median disposable income is higher than in the centres themselves; in fact, the peripheries of large urban centres record the highest median income in the country (€1,780 / month).

Hence, periurban areas “under the influence” owe much of their dynamism to their synergies with large urban centres – dynamism that goes well beyond residential development alone. New polarities develop in them, enabling access to employment and services that is increasingly independent of centres. Nonetheless, such centres and their peripheries stay connected via many and various exchanges, due to which these so-called “under the influence” territories actually form integral parts of large agglomerations and their functioning. The view of a France divided between urban centres and their peripheries, which gives too much importance to the “density” variable and not enough to “flow” variables, must therefore evolve. However, the question of “periphery” still arises with regard to areas that are not connected with urban centres.

Isolated, thinly populated areas: major diversity of situations and assets for the future
In a context of polarisation of growth by large urban areas, transition from an agricultural and industrial economy to an economy largely focused on the tertiary sector, and the growing scarcity of many public and medical services, the inhabitants of thinly populated areas located beyond large cities’ zones of influence are becoming increasingly vulnerable, and often feel they have been abandoned, left to their own devices.

However, here again, in the thinly populated areas sometimes referred to as “isolated rural” a wide range of trajectories is to be observed, sometimes with marked contrasts been neighbouring living zones. Taken together, isolated municipalities located beyond the influence of urban centres have a median disposable income (€1,530 / month) below that of any other category of territory. It is nonetheless the case that, due to their low density, there are considerably fewer poor households living in these areas than in urban centres.
However, a number of areas falling into this category (winegrowing regions, certain border areas, resort areas, etc.) record median disposable incomes well above the national average (€1,680 / month). Similarly, a number of these territories suffer from ageing housing stock, untenanted housing units and household fuel poverty, while others – in particular in mountainous and coastal areas – are seeing an explosion in second home construction. In fact, although many thinly populated municipalities in the former Champagne-Ardenne, Limousin and Bourgogne regions record losses in terms of inhabitants and jobs (see above), this is not the case for all of them. Taken together, “isolated” municipalities have seen their populations increase, although not by much (+0.27% a year between 1999 and 2013, making almost 110,000 new inhabitants). After several decades of decline, numbers of jobs also started to increase again in most areas in the 2000s, a sign of economic and demographic revival. The 2008-2009 crisis interrupted this fresh growth, however, and the challenge now is to make sure that they too feel the benefit of the economic recovery.

Thinly populated areas possess advantages due to their distance from urban centres. Land and housing prices, and to a certain extent the living environment, are attractive. In addition, local labour markets retain a measure of autonomy compared with urban centres (there are an estimated 90 jobs for every 100 employed workers in isolated municipalities, as against fewer than 60 in the peripheries of urban centres) and daily home-work journeys are shorter than in agglomerations. The balance between workers and jobs at local level tends to diminish, however, as the influence of large centres extends across the territory as a whole, and increasing numbers of such areas’ inhabitants have to work in urban areas. Nonetheless, maintaining local labour markets’ relative autonomy may add to their residential attractiveness, and even constitute a development model alternative to that of large urban areas, less dependent on increasingly longer journeys to and from work. The growing importance given to quality of life, the imperative need for energy transition and the development of short food supply chains are all development opportunities for thinly populated areas.

Other peripheries?
The term “peripheral” territory is often employed to designate abandoned periurban and rural areas, in contrast to metropolitan areas. But what about those geographical peripheries, the border areas on the very edges of the national territory? And again, what about the territories that the European Commission refers to as “ultra-peripheral regions”, France’s Overseas départements? Finally, how can we forget that the processes of decline and impoverishment are above all at work in the midst of certain of our cities?

- Devitalised city centres, or “peripheries” in the heart of urban centres

Impoverishment of inhabitants, closing of businesses and high housing vacancy rates are affecting increasing numbers of small and medium-sized towns’ urban centres. The recent reform of priority geographical zones has highlighted how widespread poverty is in many such territories, whereas previously the focus was more on the suburbs of large agglomerations. Small and medium-sized urban centres record median disposable incomes well below the national median (€1,560 and €1,540/month respectively as against €1,680). It is also small urban centres that record the country’s highest housing vacancy rate (10.2% as against 7.9% at national level[27]). Such devitalisation is the result of an overall lack of attractiveness and dynamism on the part of certain small urban areas, which have suffered from increasing job losses since the 2008 crisis along with progressive periurbanisation of the population, which abandons town centres to live in neighbouring municipalities (see above). In addition, many such households no longer work in these small urban areas: more and more of them must travel ever greater distances to get to jobs concentrated in larger urban areas. Hence, 44% of the inhabitants of small urban centres work in

Notes
26. Here, the term “isolated rural areas” is taken to mean isolated municipalities located outside the influence of centres, as specified in INSEE’s 2010 zoning in urban areas (for more details, consult the methodological annex appended to the document). There are nonetheless many other ways of defining rural areas, depending on the problems under study.
another, often larger urban area, (a percentage that rose by 16 points between 1990 and 2012), as against 35% of the inhabitants of medium-sized centres (a 13-point rise). Another well-known phenomenon is that consumers tend to prefer shopping malls in peripheral areas over their city-centre counterparts. All these evolutions contribute to “peripherisation” of territories that previously constituted centralities. The progressive transfer of urban centres’ economic and demographic growth to their peripheries and the devitalisation of small urban centres that follows are both major territorial challenges, made all the greater by the impoverishment and ageing of the people who stay behind.

• Border areas: edges of the national territory sometimes at the heart of transnational metropolitan systems
At another level, border areas would seem, from a geographical viewpoint at least, to be the national territory’s most “peripheral” areas of all. Their development is highly disparate, however, mainly depending on the situations of the territories on the other side of the border. Some of these areas might well be referred to as “extremities”, the far edges of the national territories: Hautes-Pyrénées and Ariège, for example, are faced with situations of isolation, ageing populations, precarity and job losses. In addition to the mountainous relief, which hinders cross-border flows, it is above all Spain’s generally weak economic situation in comparison with France that makes these areas edges rather than crossing points (although there is considerable cross-border circulation alongside the Basque region). In contrast, in Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Grand Est and Bourgogne-Franche-Comté, border employment zones are attractive and incomes high due to better paid jobs available in Luxembourg, Switzerland and Germany. Two of the intermunicipalities with France’s highest standard of living are located on the Swiss border: the communities of municipalities of Genevois (median disposable income of €34,320 as against €20,400 at national level) in Haute-Savoie, and Porte du Sundgau in Haut-Rhin (€34,280). Such areas are more integrated into urban systems located abroad (Geneva and Basel in the two preceding cases) than in the rest of their regions (which are less affluent overall), and belong to local pockets of wealth. Within such territories, which are among the most unequal in France, borderlines distinguish crossborder workers from the rest: The ratio between the incomes of the wealthiest 10% and the poorest 10% is to the tune of 7.2 in the Pays de Gex community of municipalities on the shores of Lake Geneva, as against 3.5 at national level.

• The Overseas départements, an “ultra-periphery” with major disparities
France is the only European Union country with such distant “ultra-peripheral” regions: five of its regions are located in very different geographical and economic contexts. This specificity explains the major variances existing between them and Metropolitan France – as well as with their regional environment – with regard to fertility, income, unemployment, educational levels, etc. These areas are by no means homogeneous, however. The populations of Mayotte and French Guiana have significantly lower incomes than those in other Overseas départements (DOMs) and Metropolitan France. In addition, Mayotte, French Guiana and, to a lesser extent, Reunion Island, record some of the country’s highest demographic growth rates (2.66%, 2.37% and 0.64% a year respectively between 2009 and 2014, as against a national average of 0.50%). The three regions also have much younger populations than in Metropolitan France. Martinique and Guadeloupe, however, are experiencing degrowth (-0.64% and -0.07% a year) and their populations are older.
These two départements have a highly negative migratory balance with Metropolitan France, above all for young people (the annual net migration rate to Metropolitan France, for example, is -39‰ for Guadeloupian 20-24 y/o). In contrast, French Guiana and Mayotte record significant arrivals of foreign immigrants. Situations are therefore highly diverse and needs with regard to development of services and infrastructures consequently very different.

The main challenge, however, one common to all five regions, is how to reduce their multiform precarity. Young people come top of the list, as it is essential that their overall education be improved: in 2014, 38.9% of 15-24 y/o were school dropouts in the Overseas Départements, except in Mayotte (as against 24.1% in Metropolitan France), and 57.2% were unemployed (as against 29.0% in Metropolitan France). Financial precarity among retirees is also a matter for concern, given a context of very rapidly ageing populations in all Overseas Départements: over 20% of their retirees receive the Allocation Solidarité aux Personnes Âgéées (ASPA –Solidarity Allowance for the Elderly [the former Minimum Vieillesse / Minimum Old-Age Pension]), compared with only 4% of Metropolitan France’s retirees. And finally, the question of housing, which affects all age-groups, is of key importance: Access to the social housing stock is no easy matter in the Overseas Départements (there are over 9 applications for each social housing unit allocated in most Overseas intermunicipalities, as against 3.9 at national level). Development of social housing is all the more necessary because these territories accommodate some of France’s poorest households.

Notes

28. The European Union recognises 9 ultra-peripheral regions: the Canary Islands (Spain), the Azores and Madeira (Portugal), Reunion Island, Mayotte, French Guiana, Martinique, Guadeloupe and Saint Martin (France).

29. The measurement here is of the percentage of young people from 15 to 24 y/o with no qualifications (apart from the Diplôme National du Brevet [DNB – Lower Secondary School Certificate]) among those who have dropped out of the school system. The unemployment rate is measured on the active population of 15-24 y/o (Population Census).
Conclusion

These few observations show that the wide diversity in the situations and trajectories of French areas, often within one and the same category of territories, contradicts the simplistic notion of “winners” vs “losers”. The reality of territorial dynamics is a great deal more complex. In addition, some of the more attractive areas are now suffering from ailments that may hinder their sustained development, while many thinly populated areas have assets that are proving invaluable in the era of ecological transition.

Nonetheless, confirmation of such diversity of local situations and trajectories, beyond simplistic approaches, must not mask the existence of structuring disparities that also pose challenges for territorial cohesion. Although there are a number of convergences at work (a decrease in Île-de-France’s relative weight, and the stated goal of reducing variances with Overseas France), there is increasing divergence between the very attractive Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts and the northeast quarter and the centre. At local level too, disparities are also increasing between areas integrated into the dynamism of large urban areas and the rest; between the centres of many small and medium-sized towns whose vitality is waning and the ever-expanding peri-urban areas where daily journeys to and from work get longer day by day; and sometimes, within certain territories (areas bordering Switzerland and Luxembourg, and metropolitan city centres), between individuals themselves.

In order to better understand the driving forces behind territorial dynamics that sometimes vary greatly from one area to another, the Territories Observatory is devoting the next edition of its Report (2018) to the study of territorial mobilities and residential attractiveness.

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SUMMARY

2017 report by the Observatoire des territoires (Territories Observatory)
Set up in 2004 and run by the General Commission for Territorial Equality (CGET), the Observatoire des Territoires (Territories Observatory) publishes studies on territorial dynamics, runs a website on which it makes a wide range of statistical data available, and networks public bodies that participate in territorial analysis in order to better share knowledge in this field.

The Territories Observatory’s sixth report brings together six theme-based studies carried out over the course of 2017. They provide an overview of some of the more prominent contrasts and dynamics that affect and are reconfiguring France’s territories: demographic evolutions, ageing of the population, inequalities of income, tensions over housing stock, access to schooling and higher education, and finally, the issues involved in crossborder employment. These studies are preceded by a summary describing French territories’ major fault lines in terms of work carried out, all of which are challenges to cohesion.

Each study is prefaced with an introduction putting its theme into an international context enabling France’s regions to be compared with their European neighbours, and France as a whole to be situated in comparison with other countries. Analyses are then organised according to scales of observation and are subjected to a range of criteria in order to reveal the full richness of and many shades of difference inherent in territorial dynamics, and to guide public actors in their drafting of territorial diagnoses.

The General Commission for Territorial Equality (CGET) is a State Service under the authority of the Minister of Territorial Cohesion. It assists the Government in countering territorial inequalities and in supporting territorial dynamics, by designing and facilitating urban and spatial planning policies in collaboration with local actors and citizens. Its focus areas are interministerial: they include access to employment, healthcare and public services, social cohesion, digital inclusion, aid to mobility, economic attractiveness, ecological and digital transitions, and redynamisation of fragile territories and abandoned city centres.