
Discovering the places beyond the scenery of the valley slopes surrounding the city

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Valley slopes at the edge of cities were a barrier to communication and urbanization and, depending on the orientation, were used for agricultural purposes or colonized by woodlands. After being neglected by modern cities, these geochores regained interest due to the rediscovering of the multiple services they provide to the urban metabolism. The research investigates how the local population perceives and utilizes valley slopes in an urban context. Two case studies were selected within the urban agglomeration of Liège in Belgium: ‘La Chartreuse’ and ‘La Lande de Mehagne’. These places were examined using a qualitative methodology involving a door-to-door survey of 294 residents. The slopes serve as the primary witnesses to the past and present evolution of the urbanized valley and plateau: ‘La Chartreuse’, marked by its religious and military past, is now a park subject to residential pressure; ‘La Lande de Mehagne’, exposed to heavy metal deposits from former industries located in the valley, has become a natural area dominated by calamine vegetation. Today, these green spaces, remnants of urban development, encompass various intertwined traces of landscape evolution. The study highlights a dichotomous representation of valley slopes by residents. While they are considered barriers challenging to cross and where insecurity reigns, once these obstacles have been overcome, perceptions of these places change. Beyond being considered as ‘city backgrounds’ or only for their hydrological and geomorphological conditions, river slopes offer diverse representations and uses. They provide an opportunity to maintain and (re)discover nature in the city, are places of recreation and resourcing for residents, and can also serve as a refuge for marginalized populations or be coveted by wealthy people to construct their modern palaces.

Keywords : Valley slopes ; Green spaces ; Land uses ; Representations ; Liège

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