

**RURAL VS URBAN CROSSED APPROACHES:
SCHOOL AND TERRITORY REPRESENTATIONS OF PUPILS AT THE END
OF PRIMARY EDUCATION. CASE STUDY OF DRÔME, FRANCE**

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ABSTRACT

Learning, trajectories and social representations of pupils at the end of primary school (CM2) have often been the object of territorial analysis, both rural and urban. But, so far, few comparative studies have picked up on this subject. This is what began here: after twice characterizing the education of rural students in CM2 (in 2000 and 2012, in the context of longitudinal studies), in 2014 the Ardèche and Drôme researchers of the Observatory of Education and Territories (OET) proceeded to «survey» CM2 students from three schools—one in a «small town» (Privas), a downtown one in a «big city» (Valencia) and one in a «difficult neighbourhood» in a big city (Valencia once again)—in an attempt to explore and map out the future research that started in the spring of 2015. The very first «results» are presented in this article, which focuses on an ongoing experiment in the field of «educational planning» («didactique du territoire»).

KEY WORDS

Language apprenticeship; Learning territory; Social representation;
Rural school; Urban school.



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Rural vs Urban Crossed Approaches: School and Territory Representations of Pupils at the End of Primary Education. Case Study of Drôme, France

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INTRODUCTION: PROBLEMS OF RESEARCH

The Observatory of Rural Schools (OER) was undertaken through a five-year longitudinal follow-up of 2,500 rural and mountaineer students at the end of primary school (CM2), through six high school southern regions (east of France). The students were questioned on four occasions, as well as their parents and teachers, to build the object «rural and mountain school» (Alpe & Fauquet, 2008; Champollion, 2013). The results of this survey in the long term have identified key contextual features of this specific school and its performance in terms of results and school trajectories (Alpe, Champollion, Fromajoux, & Poirey, 2001; Alpe & Poirey, 2003; Alpe, Champollion, & Poirey, 2005, 2006, 2010). An international research project involving Chile, Spain, France, Portugal and Uruguay, led by the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the University of Barcelona (principal investigator Roser Boix) between 2009 and 2013 under the Innovation and Development program, enabled us to approach the essential teaching and learning characteristics (Champollion & Floro, 2013). Since 2009, OERs have become the Observatory of Education and Territories (OET) due to the expansion of their investigations to the projected urban school, having

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launched a second longitudinal follow-CM2 from the same school questions in the same schools: this second investigation, currently under way, is designed to measure any changes at work in the rural and mountain school.

Different researchers, who have tackled the task of characterizing the rural and mountain school in all its dimensions—contextual, organizational, teaching and learning—, now want to go further: they now wonder if the urban students, including those from «sensitive» urban schools, and rural students, especially those who are more isolated, may exhibit similar behaviours, outcomes and sometimes trajectories (Champollion & Floro, 2013) and if, again from the same perspective, organizations and school forms (such as the «multigrade» class) developed in rural and mountain territories in response to the «challenges» of demographic decline and, in extreme cases, of rural desertification are likely (after de-contextualization and re-contextualization, of course) to provide «solutions» to recurrent learning difficulties experienced today by many students in difficult urban areas. Conversely, they also wonder if teachers' teaching practices and instructional strategies, beyond «regularities» found in all practice territories, are not partially «territorialized» and if, in the same order of ideas, teachers' professional identities are not influenced by the territoriality of their practice field (Rothenburger, 2014).

It is in this broader interrogative context that the Drôme OET researchers proceeded, in the spring of 2014, to «survey» the CM2 students from two urban schools in the city of Valencia, one located in the city centre (Jean Fountain school), the other in a «sensitive» neighbourhood and benefiting as such from the city policy of support from the State and involved municipalities (Rigaud school), using the same questionnaires for students and parents which had been previously used in rural surveys. The very first results of this initial comparison are presented below. They are only «exploratory» because of the weakness of the urban workforce investigated (as discussed later in detail)... Further investigations are currently (2015) under way in the regions of Ardèche, Drôme and the Rhône, to try to deepen the first Drôme surveys made in 2014 and, initially, to check that they are «significant», that is to say, that they conceal many systematic variation factors which explain the observed differences.

PRESENTATION OF SOCIOLOGICAL AND TERRITORIAL CONTEXTS OF BOTH URBAN SCHOOLS SURVEYED

JEAN DE LA FONTAINE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
(VALENCIA / 1 LEVEL / 1 CLASS / 22 PUPILS)

The completion of the questionnaire took place in late March 2014 in a class of CM1-CM2 with 26 students including 22 CM2 (only queried) distributed as follows: 19 normal age students, a student one year ahead and a student one year late. The La Fontaine elementary state school consists of four classes, including three double level ones, with a total of one hundred students. «School of Application» ESPE [École supérieure du professorat et de l'éducation] antenna Drôme, it hosts throughout the year teacher-student interns as an institution of vocational training (from the late 19th century and the beginning of the public education actually). This is one of the oldest schools of the region. It has long been regarded as a «pilot» school because of its special status and, as such, welcomed, besides the students of the district, children of the social elites of the region. Indeed, up to the late 1980s it could hold every student of the district of Drôme. This is no longer the case, and its recruitment sector is now limited to the neighbourhood.

Its catchment area, situated in the city centre, is still very popular because of its location and relatively bourgeois habitat which comprises over 50% of detached houses with gardens, many green areas, and all shops needed for everyday life. The district retains the old reputation of being a neighbourhood in which to live. It should be noted that a recent local social diversity policy from the 1990s, has seen a proliferation of rent-controlled social housing hosting more and more families from disadvantaged backgrounds, including a significant proportion of single-parent families on welfare or unemployment benefits. In recent years, this demographic situation has generated profound sociological changes in state schools. Formerly mostly for the privileged classes, the trend has gradually reversed. Indeed it is clear that the most privileged families have gradually abandoned the state schools in favour of private schools which are well established in the industry and who welcome a majority of wealthy families.

When considering the sociological profiles of the 22 students surveyed, we find the characteristics mentioned above. Only five students belong to a select occupational category, most others being in the most disadvantaged groups. There are also five students living in single-parent families with several children. This profile is shared by all of the institution. Other indicators show a



constant socio-economic evolution «downward»: a constant increase in the number of teaching staff, a slow but steady increase in the number of early school difficulties at the various institutional evaluations, multiple partnerships between schools and socio educational workers.

Paradoxically, we can say that this school, though located in a middle-class neighbourhood, has had an evolution in the last fifteen years which nothing seems to stop. The characteristics of the public it accommodates brings it closer to those located in neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the city, without benefiting from being labelled as an «educational priority» which would allow it to benefit from additional resources.

PIERRE RIGAUD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
(VALENCIA / 1 LEVEL / 2 CLASSES / 38 PUPILS)

Two classes «CM2» (grade 5) of Pierre Rigaud elementary school were also surveyed. Located in the district of Fontbarlettes, in the peripheral urban area of Valencia, this school gathers 216 students spread over eleven «single-grade» classes and twelve pupils included in a Special Education class called CLIS 1.

The Fontbarlettes district is classified as a «priority intervention zone» by Valencia's policy, which has two purposes: reducing social and economic inequities, and decreasing development discrepancies existing within one single territory. Several problematic issues coexist: low income (median 8,009 euros/year), migrant and low graduate population (67.2% without degrees), high unemployment rate (41.3%), degraded low rent social housing, reduced state services (two elementary schools, three pre-elementary schools, a social housing administration office, a post office, a public library). Major urban improvements have nevertheless been carried out in recent years: apartment blocks were destroyed and rebuilt, and green areas have been expanded.

The Fontbarlettes area has benefitted from a set of State and local collectivity actions targeting social and economic aspects, including health, employment and education. Pierre Rigaud elementary school has therefore been labelled as of Priority Education which prevents classes from exceeding twenty-five students each and allows it to benefit from a supernumerary teacher, in charge of helping colleagues in their teaching duties within the school.

The two surveyed classes are made up of 18 and 20 pupils, ten of which are one year behind in their scholar courses. Twenty-two of them have Maghreb origins, ten are Turkish, three are African and three are French. They all

belong to lower social classes; 18 households have an active working member (19 fathers, 7 mothers).

FIRST CROSS URBAN SCHOOLS ANALYSIS LA FONTAINE – RIGAUD

DIFFERENCES OBSERVED

La Fontaine school students carry a slightly more favourable assessment (59.1%) of school than their peers in Rigaud school (52.9%). Students' perspective regarding their academic performance is also more optimistic in La Fontaine school: only 4.5% consider themselves to be in trouble, 59.1% considering themselves average, against 8.8% respectively and 50% of the students in Rigaud school. However, more positive success projections are observed (no difficulties reported) regarding the following school year with students of the Rigaud school (58.8%) than those of the La Fontaine school (45.5%). The perception of parents about the academic performance of their children differs greatly among the two schools: parents of Rigaud school students seem to be a true reflection of their children's perception, while the parents of La Fontaine school students perceive more good students among their children (68.2% versus 36.4%) and understate the number of average students (18.2% versus 59.1%).

Projections of study duration differ in the two groups studied. Students of Rigaud school plan a shorter study duration: 20.6% of Rigaud's students believe they will study until they are twenty years old, while 9.1% of the students in the Fontaine school think they will study until they are 26, 13.6% up to 25, and 9.1% up to 24 years of age. These are in line with the duration of studies planned by their parents (54% are considering long-type higher education for their children), whereas the parents of the Rigaud school consider longer studies (44.1%) than their children do. However, parents of La Fontaine school students are more likely to consider long higher education (54.5%) and only 4.5% of them are considering a general degree against 26.5% of parents of the students in Rigaud school. It may be appropriate to mention here that 11.8% of fathers of students and 5.9% of mothers of students of the Rigaud school hold a baccalaureate level degree +2, compared with 59% of fathers and 45.5% of mothers of students in the La Fontaine school.

It is also very interesting to note the existing disparities under consideration—which are all territorial representations—as to possible future



workplaces in the two samples studied: there is a strong preference of Rigaud school students for a «big city» type of environment (73.5% against 31.8% for La Fontaine school), supported by a strong correlative disinterest in the «rural» milieu: 58.8% say they would not like to work in rural areas against only 31.8% of students in the La Fontaine school.

If relatively few differences were observed in terms of projected mobility, disparities do exist for effective mobility: Rigaud school students travel more within their region (58.8% versus 36.4%) while those of the La Fontaine school prefer travelling in another area (68.2% versus 29.4%). When travelling abroad, the country of origin of the parents is a more popular destination for students from the Rigaud school (67.6% against 31.8%), while more students in the La Fontaine school travel to other foreign countries (40.9% against 20.6%). The social composition of the respective families of the two schools probably explains this.

Finally, and more anecdotal, a «school effect» seems to emerge from the professions mentioned by the students of the Rigaud school. Indeed, they have mentioned a significant amount of book related professions: authors (10), illustrators (9), writers (5), editors (6), whereas writer was only quoted twice by the students in the La Fontaine school. The annual participation of the Rigaud school in the «Book Fair» of Valencia, with meetings with authors / illustrators, can perhaps explain this disparity, knowing that the visits to cultural places generally happen more through the school than through the family for these students.

Places	Family	School
Cinema	47.1%	58.8%
Theatre	11.8%	23.5%
Concert	8.8%	2.9%
Library	26.5%	32.4%
Museum	8.8%	26.5%

TABLE I – DISTRIBUTION OF THE MODE OF ATTENDANCE
OF SO-CALLED «CULTURAL» PLACES

CONVERGENCES OBSERVED

They are not as pronounced or common as the differences, but they are no less significant. Here are the main ones:



- Whichever the school concerned, the parents feel that their child will easily attend college (middle school?) in roughly equivalent proportions (63.6% for La Fontaine school and 61.8% for Rigaud school).
- In terms of mobility, low attraction for the «small town» brings together students from both schools: 27.3% of La Fontaine students and 29.4% of Rigaud students reported that they wouldn't like to work in that type of area.
- Among the most mentioned professions, there are also similarities: police officer, doctor, fireman, teacher / schoolmaster:
 - When asked about the desired and planned professions, no student mentions those of their parents.
 - Among the desired professions, high media exposure ones are mentioned first in both schools (singer in La Fontaine school, football player in Rigaud school), followed by scientific professions for La Fontaine and medical professions for Rigaud.
 - Reluctance concerning mobility to «rural areas», more strongly observed among Rigaud students, has led us to question their knowledge of «rural professions» which are mentioned in similar proportions by the students of both schools and none of them are carried out by students' parents.

But what happens if, for exploratory purposes, we compare these early trends—still to be confirmed—observed in urban Valencia with what was found in the rural areas of the two neighbouring regions of Valencia?

COUNTRY COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS (RURAL OER 2000 / OET 2012 ARDÈCHE AND DRÔME)— URBAN (OET VALENCIA 2012)

This brief comparative review—merely «exploratory», because of the low numbers of the two urban «surveys» conducted this year in the La Fontaine and Rigaud schools—is based, in addition to the two surveys conducted in urban schools of Valencia briefly described above, on the two previous studies by the Observatory of Rural Schools (OER) and the Observatory Education and Territories (OET), shown on the next page:



- OET longitudinal follow-up of 1,208 2011-2016 CM2 students from the predominantly rural areas (Champsaur, 1998) of three regions of the south-east of France (AHP, Ardèche and Drôme / balanced distribution between isolated rural, rural under low urban influence and rural poles / same schools as in 2000).
- OER longitudinal follow-up of 2,394 1999-2005 CM2 students from predominantly rural areas (Champsaur, 1998) of six regions of the southeast of France (AHP, Ain, Ardèche, Drôme, Haute-Loire, Haute-Saône / balanced distribution between isolated rural, rural under low urban influence and rural centres).

FIRST TRENDS

The first results of the comparisons—which (let us bear in mind) can only be «exploratory» at this stage of the investigation—of the opinions of CM2 students and their urban and rural parents regarding their liking for school, current and future projected grade level, their projected orientation, their potential mobility, their cultural activities at home and in school, and so on, show that in terms of their liking for school, grade level and school ambition, the rural specificity seems to fade somewhat. By the guide of the rural / urban comparison, the reduction found by the OET researchers at CM2 in 2012 between the two longitudinal studies of OER 1999-2005 (follow-up over) and OET 2011-2016 (follow-up in progress) indeed seems to be confirmed in the partial «results» observed in both urban schools of Valencia. The trend toward homogenization is even more strongly expressed by the parents...

As examples, here is what happened with the investigation regarding students' liking for the school place in the different territories surveyed:

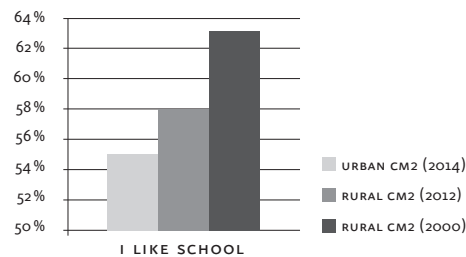


FIGURE I – STUDENTS' ENJOYMENT OF SCHOOL

The way students predict how the next school year will run...

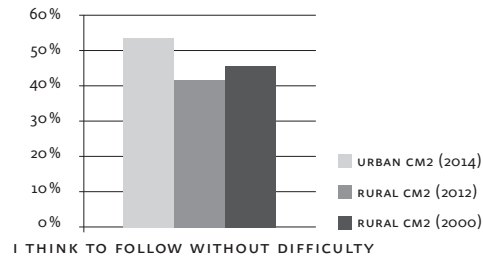


FIGURE 2 – STUDENTS’ ASSESSMENT OF THE NEXT SCHOOL YEAR

The way parents predict how the next school year for their children will run...

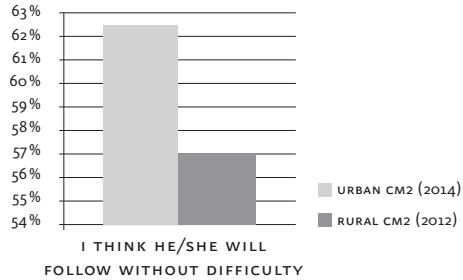


FIGURE 3 – PARENTS’ ASSESSMENT OF THE NEXT SCHOOL YEAR

The same—a tendency towards homogenization—applies as regards graduation age expected by students...

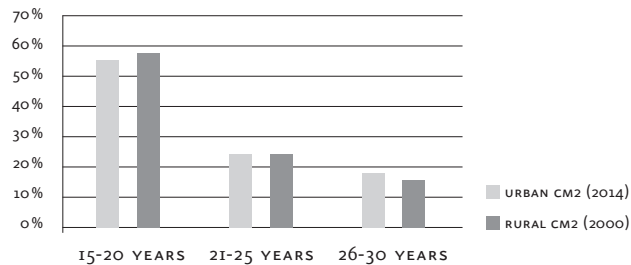


FIGURE 4 – AGE OF COMPLETION OF STUDIES EXPECTED BY STUDENTS



Like the parents' point of view concerning the same question...

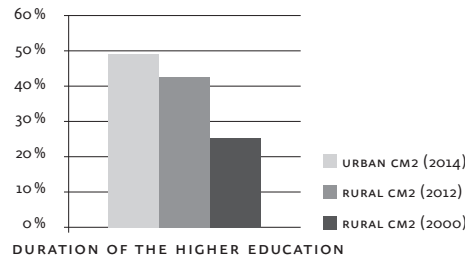
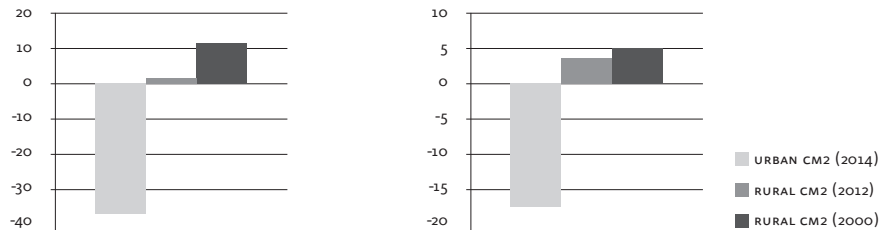


FIGURE 5 – AGE OF COMPLETION OF STUDIES EXPECTED BY PARENTS FOR THEIR CHILDREN

It therefore seems that the assessments made by the students—and by some of their parents—regarding their liking for school, how the next school year will run and the potential duration of future studies goes in the direction of a certain progressive harmonization... So is there a general trend towards the progressive standardization of representations and behaviours, a trend that would cross all types of territory? Will it ultimately be necessary to «deconstruct» the rural school, besides the current massive dissemination of its most emblematic «form», the «multigrade class», in urban areas, especially in priority education? Current in-depth investigations in progress, both in rural and urban areas, are expected to confirm—or not—these early trends.

Though much less clearly, the same applies to the respective representations of the city regarding the rural, and of the countryside regarding the urban—while still significantly differentiated, they are not as pronounced as previously. This is also indicated, or illustrated, given the statistical equity already issued, by the measures of the two following figures (DS means «significant difference», to be verified like the others in the larger sample being set up)...



FIGURES 6 & 7 – ATTRACTIVE/UNATTRACTIVE PLACES FOR STUDENTS: «COUNTRYSIDE» (LEFT) «SMALLTOWN» (RIGHT)

DEBATES AND «PENDING» REMAINING ISSUES

Many questions remain as we have seen today without scientifically attested answers, although trends, which are all avenues of research that could become research hypotheses, have ensued from the first results. Here are the main ones:

- What will happen, beyond the currently observed representations, to the reality of school behaviour and career choices in the future? This issue should be decided after the analysis of the result of the OET longitudinal follow-up (questions coming 3rd and 2nd)...
- Is rural territoriality, which was so difficult to identify, already being «diluted» progressively in a territorial ensemble homogenizing towards being predominantly urban?
- What about mountain territoriality, whose specificity is much more strongly attested? Is it also in «decline», at least partially? The OET longitudinal follow-up under way is expected to respond to this...
- Do subsequent urban analyses—whose development is necessary in view of these first «findings»—confirm the first urban «survey» done in 2013-2014? Investigations are ongoing in 2014-2015 in all the other «large» cities of the two regions of Ardèche and Drôme (Montelimar, Privas and Romans) to try to answer this... Some CM2 classes of the periphery of Greater Lyon (Saint-Priest, Villeurbanne) could add to it this year.

Beyond these previous questions, to which ongoing and future investigations will attempt to provide answers, a PhD research project was submitted in the autumn of 2014 to ascertain whether, in a difficult urban territory, the Valencia Network of priority education (REP), the educational use of the surrounding territory of the school may facilitate language learning in the final year of nursery school (students aged 5 to 6).

EXTENSION TOWARDS LANGUAGE LEARNING INVESTIGATIONS ALREADY UNDERTAKEN

In line with investigations of educational science conducted by the University of Barcelona and discussed above, which planned to identify teaching



practices and innovative teaching strategies developed in the rural school, particularly those undertaken in Catalonia as part of the territorialized educational policy of the «Rural education zones» (Boix, 2004), or in the pedagogical continuity of Italian experiments relating to «educational planning» («didactique du territoire» / Pesiri, 1998), this doctoral research has been initiated to see whether—and how—the educational use of the territory surrounding schools can facilitate language learning.

This investigation will study learning from the construction of a common reference—the territory immediately surrounding the school, in this case the «suburbs» in all its dimensions—distinct from both the culture of country of origin of the students and the institutional culture conveyed by the school. Indeed, in order to learn, every individual must be confronted with 80% known matter and 20% unknown matter in order to establish points of reference which allow acquisition (Lentin, 1998). The teacher must, therefore, make sure he is in the zone of proximal development of his students (Vygotsky, 1985) and design goals within reach of their available capacities at the time of his teaching. Insofar as the most striking element in the distinction between oral language proficiency levels is the syntactic configuration of statements, there is a need to work first and foremost on the syntax complexity (Lentin, 1998; Boisseau, 2005). However, as children learn to share verbally by training in situations that directly concern and relate to their life experience, the use of verbal language occurs within a field of meaning, implying the acquisition—of a corresponding lexicon, besides that of a syntactic system. Building syntax in a known lexical field—which should of course grow—and common to all students, from life experiences related to the environment outside school, thus appears to be less unequal than building a language school context impregnated with a socially distant culture from that of the families of the students involved. But the educational use of the territory surrounding the school as a starting point for language learning is currently not yet implemented or even contemplated by the Valencia REP teachers: validation of this initial finding is in progress via questionnaires and interviews with teachers since September 2014. The assumption is that the educational use of the territory surrounding school enables us to enter faster in the complexity of the syntax used in evocative situations founded on the common lexical capital built by all students, and is currently being tested with six classes of six different schools, each with an average of twenty-five students. The quantitative data are collected through pre- and post-experimentation evalu-

ations of transcripts of verbal productions of the students followed, comparative assessments of REP tested students with the results of students out of REP, to compare the progression «in REP / out of REP» and with the results of students who used digital tablets as learning support. As main indicators in pre-and post-test assessments, the quantification of simple sentences and multiple simple sentences (juxtaposed or coordinated) will be measured, as well as the quantification of the presence of complex sentences (with juxtaposed or embedded subordination) in the data gathered, and the quantification of the ratio simple sentences / complex sentences. Possible changes in student vocabulary will be excluded from assessments, researchers agreeing to point out the lack of scientific reliability of the existing vocabulary assessments (Lentin, 1998; Boisseau & Raffestin 1986).

These data will be complemented by qualitative data collection, on the one hand, through interviews with CP teachers to compare student performance from previous years with that of those benefiting from the scheme, as well as with teachers of the levels concerned (MS – GS) to measure the gaps between achievements before and after experimentation, and with parents of the students monitored as part of the experiment; and, on the other hand, through participant observation. The research hypotheses will be validated if the qualitative and quantitative data indicate that syntactic structures used in students' oral enunciation productions have become significantly more complex.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the various elements of comparison—projections and performance—collected between the two Valencia schools of La Fontaine and Rigaud apparently reflect the existing social difference between the populations of the two schools involved, especially on a global level. Instead, comparisons between the two OER and OET longitudinal studies attest a gradual approximation between the rural and urban cultures of the students, which obviously remains to be confirmed. Finally, a comparison between rural surveys in connection with the two longitudinal studies and urban exploratory surveys undertaken clearly indicates, beyond its initial trends which suggest the above-mentioned mild progressive homogenization of behaviours and performances, the question was worth asking, and is especially worth exploring further in the context of a statistically validated and well-equipped comparison.



In terms of future lines of research opened by this preliminary work, the following three investigations should obviously extend and / or improve the original investigations:

- Data collected in late spring of 2015 once additional urban surveys are processed by factorial correspondence analysis (AFC) to understand whether or not, as already established in the French «mountain zone» (Champollion, 2013) performance and potential trajectories of students of urban and sensitive urban territories (which should be both specifically characterized) are also the subject of a specific «territory» effect (which will also be characterized precisely after identifying).
- Beyond this first research question, and since the level of investigation (CM2) is identical, the «student» and «parent» questionnaires are similar (rural questionnaires having been used in urban areas) and therefore the information is comparable in volume, it is necessary to carry out territorially differentiated comparisons (hitherto scarcely studied) between statistically validated rural and urban schools, which should be quite enlightening...
- Finally, even though it is ultimately validated, the research hypothesis of the thesis presented in part 4 should demonstrate that besides influencing the school form, students' trajectories and teacher identity, territory is also likely to have a positive impact on student learning when it is effectively used pedagogically. In other words, this doctoral research would then lead to an example of «educational planning»...

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