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Tourist Wastelands in Auvergne's Mid-Mountain Region, Between Cycle Effect and Territorial Fragility

Michel Lompech and Daniel Ricard

Introduction

- 1 The term “uncultivated land”, which was originally limited to non-productive agricultural lands, has gradually been used to refer to other spaces, too, especially industrial areas that fell victim to the crisis. Recently, it has also been used in the commercial and tourist sphere in connection with the more recent nature of this activity. With regard to tourist wastelands, which are the product of a regressive evolution comprising a failure of stakeholders, a decline in jobs and the abandonment of infrastructure, there are questions relating to its genesis, its management and its future. Here we will investigate the factors that led to this process and put it in the context of Auvergne's mid-mountain and fragile areas, where tourism forms part of a global and productive economy and a changing society.

Fallow land: what fallow land?

- 2 Our topic requires preliminary research into the words used to refer to a tourist wasteland, a term that covers various areas affected by a process unfolding over the medium to long term.

Blank words

- 3 Those authors who have examined this process in which land becomes fallow and the notion of a tourist wasteland single out the initial stage of *dismantling*, which happens when the structure, especially one meant for accommodation, is disqualified because of

competition, localisation, the local context, norms or the absence of recovery. This is often the case in the rural hotel industry, where one often turns to the bar or workers' meals (Loudiyi, 2003) in a form of multi-functionality that reveals, in fact, a wait-and-see process and the critical state of an activity caught in a recessive dynamic signalling abandonment.

- 4 Tourist abandonment is the "partial or complete, more or less definitive abandonment of a particular space by tourist activity without the facilities being demolished or even redeveloped" (Bachimon, 2013). The residentiality is called into question, and sporadic maintenance accelerates the deterioration. This type of disinvestment, which is quite common, often concerns social tourism facilities, mid-mountain winter resorts and several spa hotels whose buildings built at the end of the cycle have proved to be very fragile.
- 5 The term "fallow land" refers to the state of being unoccupied, the deterioration of the building, the dilapidation, even the illegal occupation, a "state of abandonment without any planned or even conceivable recovery" (Bachimon, 2013) with the definitive closing off of the facilities and the removal or even the disappearance of prospects of redeveloping them. Over time, destruction becomes the only way out.
- 6 The last stages of the cycle are deterioration and then traces, irreversible forms that signify the disappearance of former use and consigning it to the history bin. Tourism, certainly because it is quite a recent phenomenon, has produced only a few such ruins. The trace state occurs after the infrastructure has been demolished and produces a ghost site effect. The cycle ends with forgetting, possibly reactivated by a memorial work.
- 7 Thus, the terminological line of inquiry emphasises an evolutionary, linear or cyclical process, with the investigations confirming "situations mixing states and processes, possibly affected by feedback" (Bachimon, 2013). In Auvergne, the neglect is part of a context of economic suffering that leads to a consideration of possible relations with agricultural abandonment. In fact, while the Clermont geographers have shown that demographic decline has rarely been accompanied by increased agricultural wasteland (CERAMAC 2000), the tourist wastelands raise issues of depopulation, fragility, "desertification", the closing of the landscape and economic impoverishment – in short, of the lack of territorial appeal. They also underline that tourism is not the final stage of development but rather part of a transitional phase in which the Auvergne mountain area finds itself.

Scrubland and the uncertainty of sources

- 8 There are many methodological problems resulting from the absence of registration and reliable quantitative data and from fuzzy configurations that often make it difficult to differentiate between declassified and neglected, neglected and fallow, or even fallow and simply dilapidated lands. While the fate of major facilities generates articles in the press or even major works, information on abandoned areas is rare and sometimes hard to come by because of financial and legal entanglements or because of the embarrassment of mentioning about failure. In addition, town halls are not always aware of the infrastructure situation nor even the owners' identity.
- 9 For this reason, fieldwork, which has a largely qualitative purpose, is indispensable as the search for completeness seems like a pipedream. This approach, already adopted by

Besset in 2011, has been expanded here to include Cantal, the Haute-Loire, Montagne Bourbonnaise and Monts du Forez.

Who are the wasteland actors?

- 10 Despite the strong presence of local authorities and NGO stakeholders, tourism relies on many (usually private) players. How, then, are roles divided up during the process leading up to the abandonment and, subsequently, potential management of a site? While the wastelands are managed (or borne) by the private sector, they can sometimes take on a more territorial dimension, thereby challenging the community, especially for large infrastructure projects (leisure parks, housing estates) that tend to deteriorate more quickly and often pose problems with regard to security or even illegal occupation. Through companies whose responsibilities tend to be diluted (bankruptcies, management failures, legal problems), communities also often find themselves alone in unmanageable situations.
- 11 This complexity explains the intervention of many organisations, like the Mission of Engineering and Tourist Planning for Auvergne, the Regional Committee of Tourist Development, the Departmental Tourist Development Agencies, the parks, the Grand Site bodies¹, the Committee of the Massif and the Rural Centres of Excellence. This plurality of public actors does not, however, constitute a reliable database or offer a structured policy.

Wastelands understood over the long term

- 12 The decline that leads to fallow land has breaks and accelerations and unfolds at a very unequal speed. The transition from a neglected area to a fallow land also varies according to the nature of the infrastructure; the thermal hotel is more resistant than the contemporary collective building or the prefabricated Holiday Villages (VVF) structures. Finally, altitude speeds up the process of degradation, especially for contemporary buildings.
- 13 Initially, companies struggle with low profitability because of a decline in the customer base or gaps in professional interest – these phenomena often correlate with a lack of renewal of supplies. The facilities deteriorate, diminishing investment (upgrades, standards etc.) causes further harm, and there is a gradual move towards suspending operations, which has both direct (employment) and indirect (supply, related expenses of tourists...) impacts. This is when we enter the process of an area turning fallow.
- 14 Either the decline continues until there is a state of ruin, as is the case with some very old hotels overgrown with vegetation, or the site is taken back by the private sector or communities for a second lease on life.

A panoramic view of the wastelands

- 15 Describing these processes by using examples from Auvergne means emphasising the importance of individual actors, as well as the development programmes carried out in the 1960s as part of rural renovation (Auvergne and Bourbonnais equipment

companies; SOMIVAL). By compiling multiple trajectories, it will be possible to identify several major types of tourist wastelands.

Abandoning social tourism

- 16 The first type concerns collective accommodation, which is widespread in Auvergne.
- 17 For 30 years in Saint-Anthème, the Pupils of Public Education in the Vienna department had managed a building with 150 beds that was built around 1970 on the road to the resort of Prabouré before it was closed following an administrative decision. After a six-year reprieve linked to its recovery by a private stakeholder, this small resort's neglected dimension affected its image, and the building's banal architecture does not predispose it to easy conversion. There are similar closing processes in Chastreix, Saint-Babel, Saint-Genès-la-Tourette and Pontaumur (Puy-de-Dôme).
- 18 The VVF has also produced neglected areas, and the town hall of La Bourboule has even closed its own, which nonetheless still stands at the entrance to the town. Despite its tourist attractions, Aydat also has its wastelands: a camping site, a farmhouse, a restaurant and a holiday village of the city of Paris.
- 19 Around Lake Saint-Etienne-Cantalès, the Lacapelle-Viescamp leisure complex, which today lies abandoned, used to be part of the rural renovation in Châtaigneraie.

Map 1. Tourist wastelands in Auvergne: location of sites

Losers of the sports competition

- 20 The major increase in the number of ski resorts in the 1960s and 1970s led to a very aggressive selection process in the following decade (Map 1).

Map 2: Spread and retreat of ski resorts in the Massif Central

Sources: personal surveys, website <https://stationsfantomes.wordpress.com>

- 21 The village of La Tour d'Auvergne (west of Sancy) had established the cross-country skiing area of Stèle and the Chambourguet resort, which opened in 1971. Attracting clients from the Limousin region, it had a few good years before changes in ownership and a lack of snow led to a decrease in attendance and to further decline. The resort closed in 1998, leaving behind a wasteland where ski tows, a ski lift departure building, parking lots and concrete plinths remained. The city council was reluctant to take back the ski lift because of cost. It considered integrating it into another cross-country skiing area and pursued new partnerships for the resort, but to no avail.
- 22 In Chambon-sur-Lac, at the centre of a real tourist hub (Lake Chambon, Chaudefour Valley), two resorts were created, including Chambon des Neiges, which opened in 1969 with eight lifts and 20 ski slopes. It was an alternative to the over-frequented ski resort of Super-Besse, and its landscape, good slopes in the northeast and a summit lying at 1,760 m are all assets. However, the success was interrupted by several soft winters and snow cannons failing to overcome the handicap of a resort located at an altitude of just 1,150 m, while the attempt to develop Chambon 1400 failed. The resort closed in 2002, and the facilities deteriorated until a dismantling and redevelopment operation (2007) left only a parking lot and paths, a few blocks of concrete and the well-rehabilitated starting building of a ski lift. There were several possibilities: A large nature reserve around the Salt Fountain Corrie? A merger with Mont-Dore and Super-Besse into a Grand Sancy alpine area? Re-opening the top of the ski area and connecting it with Mont-Dore? Debate over the former resort's fate is still ongoing.

Photo 1: Chambon des Neiges, the old ski slopes

The former departure building of the chairlift has been turned into a reception and accommodation area attached to a restaurant located just off to the left.

Photo taken by the authors, 2018.

- 23 Saint-Anthème had developed a small tourist centre joining the summer farm of Jasserie du Coq Noir, a lake and the neighbouring resorts of Prabouré (municipal) and Haute Vallée (private). The latter, lying between 1,150 and 1,350 m above sea level, opened in 1962 with four ski lifts, three slopes and a few shops and received more visitors than its neighbour. However, the balance of power was reversed in the late 1970s, when Prabouré started to become more popular. Relations between the managers and the town hall became tense, and in 1981 operations were suddenly suspended, with the snow groomer left right in the middle of the slopes! This abrupt closure appears to have come as a result of safety issues, the dilapidation of the ski lifts and a lack of profitability. The resort was abandoned, the equipment rusted, the site was overgrown, the pylons disfigured the landscape, and hydrocarbons threatened the river. The department, the municipality and the Livradois-Forez Regional Natural Park were subsequently forced to dismantle it in 2007. However, despite the removal of the huts and scrap metal, obvious traces of wasteland remain, and several blocks of concrete and some pylons have not been taken away. The deteriorating access road leads to an empty car park, and the site's redevelopment projects in this devitalised territory (quality agriculture, soft recreation, yurts...) have failed.

Hotel closed because of wasteland

- 24 Hotel wastelands abound in the Auvergne Mountains², where there used to be many of these establishments. Today, clients are looking for other types of accommodation. These wastelands refer to the world of small private enterprise, where the competence of hoteliers, who are not equally successful in business, as well as their prospects for the future and possible succession, their dynamism or passivity and even accidents of life explain the very varied itineraries. Changes in ownership signal hesitation and

contribute to the decommissioning, with the stage of neglect often corresponding to a period of waiting. The local environment is also a disadvantage for hotels located outside tourist centres, far from major roads or in a banal and weakened countryside. Some structuring elements return over the course of the investigations.

- 25 Regulatory pressure often requires that heavy work be carried out (stairwells, fire doors, safety lighting, handicapped accessibility...), which many cannot afford or do not want to do, thus increasing the risk of closure and, ultimately, the abandonment of the premises. The regulations affect many holiday camps, accelerating the disengagement of the managers and cooling the municipalities for a possible recovery. Some campsites, especially near running water, are also affected, as are ski lifts that are deemed dangerous. The bad insulation of the premises is another element of fragility.
- 26 Spas at the imposing hotel complex are greatly affected by neglect, as is the case at Le Mont Dore (nine hotels closed) and La Bourboule. The decreasing number of visitors and the obvious over-equipment foster this decline, which less affects the urban resorts (Royat) that have been turned into apartments and the rise in the range of hotel offer opportunities difficult to consider in the mountains in decline. Hotel wastelands are part of the decline affecting a municipality as a whole, as in Saint-Nectaire, where the closure of the spas (2003) led to three more establishments shutting their doors, or Chaudes-Aigues, in parallel with the decline of the spa industry.

Mass abandonment: wastelands of real estate projects and amusement parks

- 27 Tourism encourages the implementation of large real estate projects thanks to tax exemption laws. While sources of significant spin-offs for the territory, they are also bear great risk in case the promoters default.

Photo 2: The “Hauts de Cordat” holiday residence in Laprugne

This charmless cluster of buildings from the 1970s is located on a promontory away from the village. The part on the right has almost been completely rehabilitated but is not yet habitable.

Photo taken by the authors, 2018.

- 28 The “Hauts de Cordat” in Laprugne (Monts de la Madeleine) is an example of a polymorphic wasteland born out an attempt by the working-class city to reconvert an old uranium mine. The three blocks of buildings (covering more than 10,000 m²) were sold in 2002 to a promoter wishing to make use of a tax exemption programme entitled Tourist Residence in a Rural Development Zone. He was looking for customers from outside the area seeking to enjoy the green tourism and, when they are not there, let their properties, and he offered many services (restaurant, swimming pool, rooms...) to overcome the weakness of the local business fabric. However, while the sale to plans of 166 lots was successful, work stalled, and the project has not advanced since 2011. The local authorities were careful not to intervene in this private matter, particularly since the project, at the edge of town, would not have disfigured it, but eventually, the problem was that the buildings started to deteriorate.
- 29 In Chalmazel, SOMIVAL played a role in the construction of a VVF to support the budding resort. This large facility (5,000 m², 60 apartments and 350 beds) opened in 1972 and was open to school groups for 10 months a year. In 1995, SOMIVAL required compliance of the premises in order to renew the lease. The municipality was scared off by the magnitude of the task, so a Clermont-Ferrand investor took over the site. However, disaster struck when the new manager defaulted. The winter frost burst the pipes, and the infrastructure quickly deteriorated and was gradually looted and vandalised: a real wasteland whose stake went beyond the scope of the intervention that was the private action. Town Hall and inter-municipal authorities are exploring solutions to demolish and redevelop the site or even just to make it suitable to receive people again.

Photo 3: A real wasteland: Chalmazel

In Chalmazel, the impressive real estate project has been completely abandoned. This semi-ruined development damages the reputation of the ski resort.

Photo taken by the authors, 2018.

- 30 In Valette (upper Cantal), the intercommunality had begun constructing Io Park, which centred around the theme of domesticating animals. Opened in 2006, it lasted only three seasons and left behind 1,450,000 euros in debt taken on by the communities and 35 hectares of pastures that in 2013 was rented out to a breeder who made people visit his “motley herd”, as well as a wooden reception area that was deteriorating. The Scénoparc fell victim to a confluence of negative factors: an astonishingly optimistic research bureau (out of the 70,000 visitors who were expected, only 11,000 showed up in 2008!), a theme that was poorly targeted and too elitist, bad local integration and a disadvantageous location in an environment that was difficult to access.

Tourist wastelands in the spatial context of the Auvergne Mountains

- 31 Neglect, abandonment and transitioning to wasteland all describe the overall dynamics of the Auvergne Mountains, their positioning for tourism and the importance of strategic choices that have been taken since the 1960s.

Tourism in Auvergne and its contemporary development

- 32 In 1992, Vitte, describing the positioning of this tourism, underlined its structural weaknesses, based on a heritage of hydrotherapy and well-known climatism. Auvergne is also marked by the importance of social tourism, which dates back to the 1930s, as well as the opening of campsites that were quickly followed by organised stays (summer camps, snow or green classes). Some 7,000 beds were put in place under the Fifth Plan (1965–1970), four villages were inaugurated every year between 1965 and

1975, and Cantal, Haute-Loire and Puy-de-Dôme had 424 colonies, summer camps and youth hostels in 1976 (Frélastre, 1977)! This mostly rural tourism welcomed a popular and rather captive clientele in search of cheap holidays.

- 33 When the tourism revolution took place (Plan Neige, Mission Racine etc.), Auvergne also created third-generation resorts (Super-Lioran, Super-Besse³), multiplied the village installations and developed nautical activities on dams (Saint-Etienne Cantalès) and lakes (Aydat, Chambon) and even created artificial ponds (Vernet-la-Varenne, Saint-Gervais d'Auvergne, Saint-Rémy-sur-Durolle...). The region is part of a quantitative development, but with the conditions of the mid-mountain; the modernist dynamics remain relative, especially since they suffer from having too weak a reputation and because its positioning is too old – even old-fashioned and rustic – and sustained by a rather elderly and family clientele (Vitte, 1992).
- 34 The mountain suffers from this initial positioning towards rural tourism, a declining segment of the market, as the clientele rather seeks out alpine skiing and the sea. Vitte also points out the lack of adaptation, the inertia of a hotel trade where the services, adapted to the low-demand clientele of 1960, no longer meet the new demand. This delay is reflected in the importance of unclassified hotels (Loudiyi, 2003), poorly furnished and sketchy campsites (Tissandier, 1999), and the low capacity blocks them from being able to welcome coach operators. These structures are not well adapted to short stays, to customers before and after the season or group stays, which reflects the actors' individualism and conservatism, as well as their limited ability to invest. Finally, while Auvergne has welcomed innovative initiatives (under the label "Logis de France"), it has struggled to renew itself, for example in Clavières, where little will be developed beyond the camp's basic campsite from the 1960s.
- 35 The connection to abandonment by tourists, without being direct, is nonetheless real: Reception structures and facilities were never really up to the task and weakened territories in a highly competitive sector. Therefore, tourism in Auvergne appears to be more of a follower than a driver, and its relatively low profitability weakens companies, makes recovery uncertain and ultimately fosters closure and abandonment. Thus, at least in part, the gradual construction of the regional supply bore the seeds of the risks of abandonment.

The geographical context of the mountains in Auvergne

- 36 Another reason for the neglect by tourists is the mountain area's economic, social and demographic context, which involves the very functioning of these highlands that, in many respects, touch on their diversity, between volcanic and granite mountains, mid-mountain and "high" mountain, tourist centres and little-visited areas.
- 37 The correlation between the decline in tourism and the demographic crisis is quite clear: North Cantal, Cézallier, Haut-Livradois, Margeride, the Ance Valley... The depopulation that has resulted in losses greater than 40% since 1962 reveals the same local contexts of exhaustion as in many other villages that used to anchor tourist practices in years gone by (Ruynes, Condat, Allanche, Ardes-sur-Couze, Viverols ...) but today face a decline in their tertiary (service) supply. In these settings that are in a structural demographic crisis, neglect is part of the gradual and global erasure of the locality and its functional demotion, as in Saint-Sauveur-la-Sagne⁴ and Saint-Germain-l'Herm, where shuttered hotels mark the end of a climatic vocation. In Sembadel-Gare,

the closure of two large hotels mirrors this village frozen in place when the rail traffic stopped.

- 38 The demographic crisis is often accompanied by a lack of attractiveness, especially to new inhabitants who might be able to provide fresh momentum. It fuels an unfavourable context for tourism, reduces the local clientele, adversely affects the recruitment of staff and limits the overall dynamics. The withdrawal becomes permanent as the reduction of the offer, the modest nature of the summer entertainment and the closing of businesses and services create an unfavourable context for tourism. These places then accumulate abandoned hotels, restaurants and holiday camps.
- 39 The connection is also quite clear given the strong influence of the suckling cattle systems that maintain the landscapes (Cézallier, Haut Cantal, Aubrac) but require so little manpower that they foster the demographic decline and, in so doing, the withdrawal of tertiary sector. These large spaces then become part of a negative spiral that is detrimental to the development of tourism, and the wasteland starts to include multiple closed hotels, including in the town centres (Marcenat, Allanche), not to mention Io.
- 40 Coniferisation, which leads to a (ubiquitous and dark) forest full of conifers, also appears to have a detrimental effect on the place's attractiveness. Livradois, Plateaux de la Chaise-Dieu, Monts du Forez and Bois Noirs are the archetypes of these environments where the landscape closure contributes to a decline in tourism, the abandonment of certain infrastructures and, ultimately, the emergence of wasteland.
- 41 The lack of collective dynamics is another weakness of these anaemic environments. We then rely on individual, isolated and sporadic initiatives sometimes resulting from the action of local communities with modest means struggling to engender true territorial development. We then move away from the more positive trajectory of Aubrac (Laguiole) and the lakes of Lévézou, located in comparable mountain areas but benefitting from a certain Aveyron dynamic, where tourism seems to be part of more of a global system (Dehoorne, 1998).
- 42 This general environment leads to a rethinking of mid-mountain tourism, long built within a logic of reproducing the alpine model that is reaching its limits today, partly under the pressure of climate change (PLM, 2013). The wastelands and the ways in which they are managed have to be placed within the broader context of an (at least partial) re-orientation of the offer and the tourist appeal of the Massif Central. As such, the strategy of the Auvergne region and the Cantal department was to promote large spaces rather than winter sports.

Points and hubs, places and lines of the tourist wasteland

- 43 The process of areas becoming tourist wastelands has become spatially rather widespread (albeit diffuse and multiform) and is uneven in how it marks the landscape. The most relevant typological approach seems to be of a functional nature, although there are also differentiation factors of a purely spatial nature, notably via the geographical inscription of the process, depending on whether it is dispersed or more concentrated.

The (almost) random dispersion of the points of hotel wasteland

- 44 There are many wastelands in the low-density environments that have been neglected by tourists, but they are also very scattered and have a rather limited visual impact. They offer all the stages of withdrawal (closure, resumption in the main residence, abandonment, degradation, real wasteland...), but each time, the weakening, a strong demographic decline and a shift in demand explain the closure of buildings that are rarely up to standard. Falgoux, Ségur-les-Villas, Fay and Saint-Germain l'Herm are good examples of this, with Brion representing an extreme case. This village in Cézallier had developed its offer in connection with the holding of livestock fairs; when they started to decline, it also signalled the demise of a weak "hotel industry".
- 45 These buildings are often converted into the main residence by owners who then expose themselves to heavy land charges. The situation can become problematic, as in Lanau (Neuvéglise), where the separate property of the business and walls prevents a renowned hotel-restaurant, which was shuttered in 2013, from re-opening. In Ségur-les-Villas, the recovery of the hotel is burdened by bank debt that Crédit Agricole failed to recover after auctioning off only 46,000 euros in 2015⁵. These large buildings, sometimes of architectural quality, offer opportunities for conversion (housing, public facilities, EPHAD, shops ...), but the territories' fragility makes recovery examples rare.

Photos 4: different stages of the hotel wasteland

Above, one of the old hotels in Saint-Sauveur la Sagne offers a good example of abandonment of hotel activity with maintenance of a marginal function of dwelling, but without hope of a return to previous activity. Not far away, the former Auberge du Procureur (Mayres) has become a real wasteland. The infrastructure (roofing) is starting to deteriorate and will soon be ruined.

Photos taken by the authors.

- 46 The scattering of dilapidated hotels is not completely random, however, and the minor tourist centres (Santoire Valley, the Saint-Flour/Rodez route) or the small spas in decline (Chaudes-Aigues, Châteauneuf-les-Bains, Saint-Nectaire, Vic-sur-Cère) offer fixing points. The structural problems of the spa and small resorts, neither of which is very lively and are, in fact, often isolated, increase the difficulties of managing the baths and the hotel industry in configurations that often involve private and public actors. This one-time and very local phenomenon then adds to a feeling of downgrading reinforced by memories of attendance in years gone by, synonymous with activity and jobs. Communities often seek to revive activity. In Chaudes-Aigues, the Valette Hotel, which used to be the economic heart of the village, was converted into a casino in 1988, and the municipality has worked to develop a thermo-fun centre and open a top restaurant.

Abandoned places and distribution hubs of abandonment

- 47 We are dealing here with the abandonment of large infrastructures (ski resorts, leisure parks) that are in small spaces but strongly mark the local economy, the landscapes and the image of the places.
- 48 The abandonment of ski resorts often involves light infrastructures that are easy to dismantle (about 50 cross-country ski infrastructures or small alpine facilities have closed⁶ with little environmental impact. However, the wastelands can still have an impact on these places dappled as they are by remnants of lifts and abandoned buildings (Anzat-le-Luguet, La Tour d'Auvergne...) and lead elected officials or associations to intervene.
- 49 The leisure parks wastelands (Io, Mirabel in Riom, Iloa in Thiers), which are even more concentrated in space, have a major impact on the landscape: remodelling of the grounds, abandoned buildings that are difficult to take back, infrastructures with striking colours in wood, metal or plastic, fences, abandoned car parks etc.. The issue of landscape deterioration adds to the economic impact, especially in a depressed countryside like in Io. Often, public authorities must intervene, as in Iloa: It was recently taken over by the Thiers Community, which wants to develop a swimming pool there.
- 50 Tourist hubs produce a large number of such wastelands, like Monts Dore, where the abandoned areas result from the accumulation of heritage (hydrotherapy, social tourism, sports facilities...). Tourist dynamism is evident, and attendance is high, but the hub effect increases competition between the establishments and, therefore, produces neglect. Thus, a decline in thermal activity led to the closure of Saint-Nectaire and weakened Mont-Dore and La Bourboule; the abandonment of Chambon des Neiges also had repercussions on the local level. All of this draws the heritage sites and nearby resorts such as Murol or Orcival into a recessive spiral. On the other hand, the overall dynamics increase the possibilities of recovering and reconvertng the abandoned areas. Thus, the hubs offer contradictory processes with respect to the tourist wasteland.

Wasteland lines

- 51 The last type refers to a more territorial approach associated with the presence of axes favouring the creation of accommodation infrastructures (classical tourism, commercial agents, etc.). At the time, stations and road junctions, even modest ones (e.g. Basbory de Blesle), contributed to the development of these entities that are now struggling: withdrawal of secondary lines of traffic, less appetite for the hotel business, decreasing number of sales representatives, all in the lacklustre context of the mountain area in Auvergne. Bachimon speaks of a “highway producing a cluster of abandonment” (2013) for these places now engaged in a post-tourism phase of their history that they had not prepared for.
- 52 Other situations of abandonment are associated with the phenomena of diverting roads/motorways, but in that case, a truly fallow process is rare given the recent nature of these developments. In any case, the process operates with great selectivity between villages and towns that adapt (Aumont-Aubrac) and those that struggle to rethink their business model.
- 53 The abandonment of railway service favours a specific case, long enough for the decline to have produced a real fallow. The phenomenon often affects fragile environments where, again, the closure of the line is only part of the process of withdrawal. It generates many closed tourist infrastructures, sometimes still desperately up for sale, often abandoned, such as between Arlanc and Darsac, on a lane closed between 1971 and 1992. On the Lapeyrouse/Volvic line, which was closed in 2007, the viewpoint looking out over the Fades viaduct is home to four abandoned tourist establishments!

Conclusion

- 54 In the construction of places in Auvergne's mid-mountain areas, the process of abandonment and fallow land is the evident outcome of a failure to manage particularly difficult legacies and a rural revitalisation that is too centred in its time on tourism alone and on promoting the countryside as a tourist destination. At least in part, the difficulties these properties face, whether it is a spa, a hotel or a collective, reflect the dead end in which the old tourist choices and practices that have since been marginalised (hydrotherapy, social tourism) find themselves. The many neglected forms of social tourism illustrate the failure not only of these choices but also of this architecture. Over time, the abandonment progresses and the fallow lands take hold, especially in rural and mountain areas fragile. These problems are found in many French medium-altitude mountains (Vosges, Jura, southern Vercors, Ariège), where the “alpine” tourist model has always been incomplete, producing spaces and infrastructures that are vulnerable to changes happening today (climate change, evolution of demand, competition between destinations).
- 55 The tourist wasteland happens over the long term and materialises a time of waiting, a slow transformation that commemorates a time when one of fighting back against the rural exodus by selling the countryside like a flourishing destination. But we have gradually moved on to other tourism needs and other rural development policies that focus more on welcoming new populations.

- 56 There remains the trace, the memory of the wasteland. Apart from hydrotherapy, which introduced a certain urbanity and left an important architectural legacy, the wasteland remains generally discrete. At the resorts, it keeps the memory of a misplaced vocation, referring to a time when the average mountain “took itself for a big one” and dreamt of quantitative development. The wasteland can also give way to nothingness, a *vacuum* that some see as the contemporary charm of the landscapes of Artense or Cézallier...

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NOTES

1. Puy Mary, Puy de Dome.
2. In 2011, F. Besset listed 10 municipalities in Puy-de-Dôme with at least two hotel wastelands, primarily in Sancy (La Bourboule, Chastreix, Chambon-sur-Lac, Saint-Diéry).
3. Opened in 1967 and 1961, respectively.
4. This municipality of 100 inhabitants, which is an important forest station, had three hotels (total capacity of 420 beds) in connection with a certain reputation for the climate.
5. The Hotel de la Santoire, on three habitable levels, with a surface area of 620 m².

6. For more on this subject, see the already old synthesis of P. Gauchon (1997) and the website <https://stationsfantomes.wordpress.com>.

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