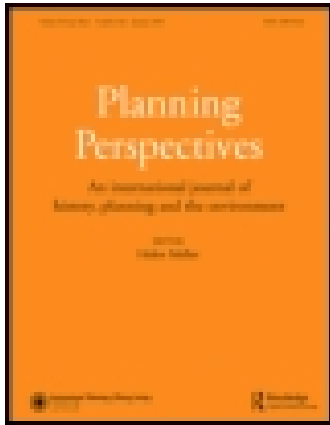


This article was downloaded by: [Nova Southeastern University]

On: 27 December 2014, At: 20:14

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office:
Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Planning Perspectives

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rppe20>

Anti-urban ideologies and planning in France and Switzerland: Jean-François Gravier and Armin Meili

Bernard Marchand ^a & Joëlle Salomon Cavin ^b

^a 15 rue Royer-Collard , Paris, France E-mail:

^b Université de Lausanne , 1015 Lausanne, Switzerland E-mail:

Published online: 18 Feb 2007.

To cite this article: Bernard Marchand & Joëlle Salomon Cavin (2007) Anti-urban ideologies and planning in France and Switzerland: Jean-François Gravier and Armin Meili, *Planning Perspectives*, 22:1, 29-53, DOI: [10.1080/02665430601051965](https://doi.org/10.1080/02665430601051965)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02665430601051965>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

Anti-urban ideologies and planning in France and Switzerland: Jean-François Gravier and Armin Meili

BERNARD MARCHAND*

15 rue Royer-Collard, Paris, France (e-mail: marchand@mail.enpc.fr)

JOËLLE SALOMON CAVIN**

Université de Lausanne, 1015 Lausanne, Switzerland (e-mail: joellesalomon@yahoo.fr)

Jean-François Gravier and Armin Meili were two leading pioneers of planning in France and Switzerland. Gravier was the famous author of *Paris et le désert français*, first published in 1947; Meili was the author of the first national conception of planning in Switzerland and was very active in planning policy in the 1940s. Each has deeply influenced the implementation of planning policy in his country and both have constructed their theories around a criticism of the city: Paris for Gravier; big cities, in general, for Meili.

This paper first describes the recurrent critiques of the city in the thoughts of these authors. From sterility to unhealthiness, they combine moral and physical criticisms. Although they belong to different countries and different political cultures, their thoughts take root in surprisingly common backgrounds based on the strength of ruralism and the political context of fascism. Finally, an analysis of their similar propositions concerning town and country planning policies is offered. The lessons of Gravier and Meili are based on different myths which the article will attempt to analyse.

*Bernard Marchand was Professor at the French Institute of Urban Planning, University of Paris-8 and is presently Principal Professor at the Ecole Nationale des Travaux Publics de l'Etat. He spent several years teaching in foreign universities, in Venezuela (Universidad Central de Venezuela, Caracas), in the USA (Penn State, Northwestern, UCLA), in Canada (University of Toronto) and in Brazil (Universidade Federal de Rio de Janeiro). He has been working for several years in two areas: mathematical modelling and computer applications in planning; and urban history. His publications include *The Evolution of the City of Dream: Los Angeles, 1940–1970* (London: Pion) and *Paris, histoire d'une ville, XIXth–XXth* [Paris : history of a city] (Paris: Le Seuil, 1994). He is currently preparing a new book on the hostility against Paris in France.

**Joëlle Salomon Cavin is lecturer of the Institute of Land Use Policies and Human Environment at the University of Lausanne and associate member of the CNRS research laboratory LADYSS at the University of Paris 10. She has studied geography and Urban Planning in Paris. She used to work as an assistant lecturer at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne where she received her PhD in 2003. In 2004, she was a Visiting Fellow at the Department of City and Regional Planning at Cardiff University, UK. Her research deals with the hostility towards the cities in European thoughts and its influence on Planning. Her study of the Swiss example, *La ville, mal-aimée* [The unloved city] (Lausanne: PPUR), was published in 2005.

Introduction

This paper is concerned with the birth and development of planning in France and Switzerland from the 1940s to the end of the twentieth century, as seen through the work of two major pioneers: Jean-François Gravier (1915–2005) and Armin Meili (1892–1981). Both authors present a very strong bias against big cities.

Gravier, a geographer, is the author of *Paris et le désert français* [Paris and the French desert] first published in 1947 (Fig. 1) [1], when he was an employee at the Ministry of Urban Planning and Reconstruction. It was written during the Vichy regime (1940–4) but later had an immense impact on French planning. The book has known three editions: each different from the others. The first one (1947) is long (457 pp.), relies heavily on census

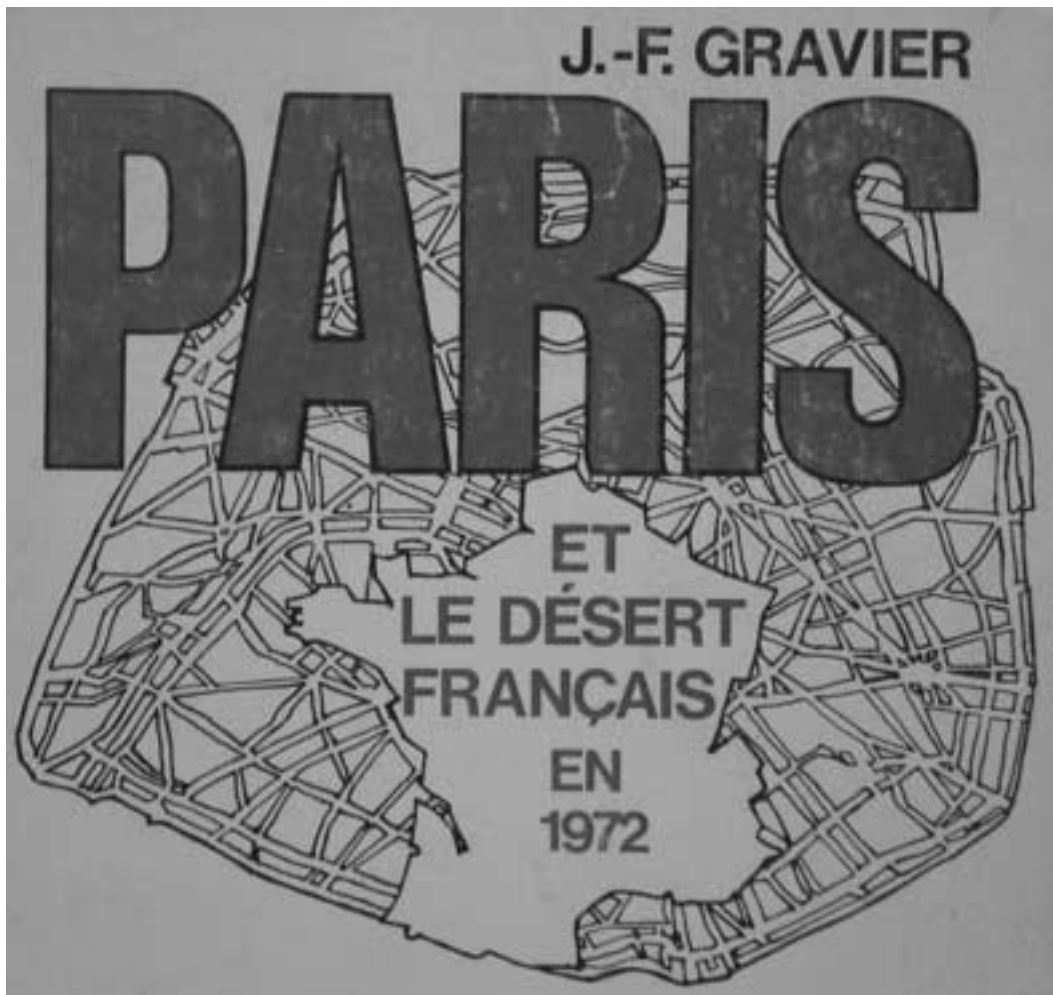


Figure 1. Title page of Gravier's book, *Paris and the French desert* (third edition, 1972).

figures and statistical arguments and at the same time is politically motivated. In it, Gravier, who was very influenced by the Great Depression and wrote during the quasi-fascist regime of Pétain, admired war planning, Soviet five-year plans and suggested drastic policies (destruction of properties, forced transfers of personnel, racist filtering of migrants, etc.). The second edition (1953) is shorter, with fewer figures and more palatable propositions. The last one (1972) is cleansed of most references to the Soviet Union, of racist statements and long statistical tables; it is easier to read but may seem somewhat weaker. Gravier underlined a basic contrast structuring French territory: Paris versus the rest of France, traditionally called *la Province*. He proposed to found all town and country planning policy on one principle: to restore 'equilibrium' of national territory by weakening Paris, dispersing a large part of its population and moving most of its industries to the rest of the country. French planning has relied on this argument for 50 years. Gravier's concepts are still taught in French planning schools and used by agencies. The image of '*Paris and the French desert*' is quoted widely by geographers to describe the French territory, although experience has shown that most of them have not even read Gravier's book. [2]

Armin Meili was a Swiss-German architect, planner and politician. Famous for his architectural works (notably, the Swiss Centre in Milan and the *Kunst-und Kongresshaus* in Lucerne), he is also recognized as the author of the first national concept of planning in Switzerland in an article published in 1933. [3] He went on to play a central role at the beginning of Swiss planning institutions. In 1941, as a Member of Parliament (*Nationalrat*), he tabled a 'motion' for launching a national and a regional planning policy (*Landes- und Regionalplanung*). In 1942, he became Director of the new Commission for National Planning (*Landesplanungskommission*) and, the year after, the first director of the Swiss Association for National Planning (*Schweizerische Vereinigung für Landesplanung*). This association gathered together most of the public communities in Switzerland (*Confédération, Cantons, Communes*) and still exists today. He was also director of *The Swiss National Exhibition* in Zurich in 1939 (Fig. 2). Owing to this position, he was showered with praise and became a national figure.

Armin Meili published articles only in Swiss professional journals (*Bauzeitung* and *Bulletin technique de la Suisse romande*) and in the daily press (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*). His writings and lectures were devoted to promote the necessity of regional planning among architects and to popularize planning ideas among the Swiss population. He is certainly less known internationally than Gravier, but he is one of the great names in the Swiss history of town and country planning.

These two important theorists share their hostility towards the big city even if Gravier decried one great city (Paris) whilst Meili blamed great cities in general. They also had a very deep and lasting influence on regional planning in their countries.

Gravier declared his hatred of Paris:

In all domains, the Paris agglomeration has behaved since 1850, not as a metropolis giving life to its hinterland, but as a monopolist group devouring the substance of the nation. Its action has multiplied the effects of the first industrial revolution and sterilized most provincial economies by depriving them of their dynamic elements. Decision centres, conception centres, and rare services: Paris has appropriated for itself all these leading activities and has left only subordinate ones to the rest of France. Such absolute dependence is the very characteristic of a colonial rule (p. 60).



Figure 2. Armin Meili during the construction of the Swiss National Exhibition of 1939 in Zürich (source: H. Meili and T. Enzmann, *Armin Meili. Homo universalis helveticus, einer Ausstellung*. Luzern, Zurich: Katalog, 1983, p. 13).

He also noted:

Parisians, however, live in increasingly bad conditions in this megalopolis, which is crumbling under its gigantic weight; other Frenchmen have viewed it with fascination, then with hostility, even with anger; the rest of the world feels less and less attraction to the “City of Lights”. The loss of Paris as a world city is a phenomenon everybody can observe since 1960 (p. 121).

Meili (1943, p. 98) [4] recommended aggressive action by the State against urbanization: ‘There are too many city dwellers ... It is the general health of our people that suffers. Lawmakers must fight, with all means available, against the invasion of land by cities’.

The main common message of both writers is that growth of urbanization, development of big agglomerations and, generally, urbanism (as a way of life) constitute a danger for the health and the morality of the individual, the coherence of the family, the strength and the well-being of a country.

Denouncing the city

Like Janus, the city has always been a divinity with two faces. Throughout Western culture, the growth of cities has been accompanied by anti-urban thoughts, [5] the counterpoint of ideologies which heralded the city as the privileged focus of human culture, progressive life and liberty. In the eighteenth century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau lashed violently against big cities and repeated previous attacks: ‘Cities are the abyss of the human species. After a few generations, races die or degenerate. They need to be refreshed, and it is always the countryside which furnishes replenishment’. [6]

It is not surprising to find old traditional criticisms in the texts of Meili and Gravier. What is rather odd, however, is to find them, along with new arguments, repeating accusations from earlier periods in connection with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, even though most urban conditions had changed drastically by then.

TRADITIONAL APPROACH TO THE CITY

With less talent and no more proof, both Gravier and Meili repeated Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s eighteenth century attacks against the city: that the city’s sterility absorbs and destroys the rural population, that human concentration is harmful to humankind, and that men and women lose all their morality in city life, whilst the urban environment supports humankind in an artificial environment far away from Nature.

Gravier linked French demographic stagnation during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and particularly in the 1930s, to the concentration of population in Paris:

Congestion costs were also a factor of low demographic vitality in this period [between the two world wars] translated in huge human losses inflicted on France by the low birth rate in Paris. “Big cities are the tombstones of the race”, wrote Alfred Sauvy [a French demographer and colleague of Gravier] (p. 59).

The author implied, but without proving it, that concentration caused the low birth rate, whereas this phenomenon was more likely to be explained by the fact that liberated women in big cities were in a better position to control their fertility. Furthermore, Gravier neglected to compare death rates which were much lower in Paris, where good public health facilities existed, with those in the countryside where death rates were worsened by alcoholism. The argument is interesting, however: we find it also in Meili's texts. Gravier, like Meili, used old arguments out of context.

Overcrowding was also strongly criticized by Gravier as a cause for excessive costs: 'Such overcrowding [in Paris] brings on a constant inflation of unitary costs'. The author, however, made no attempt to evaluate these costs and made no mention of economies of scale. He did not even try to compare both costs and savings to suggest a balance.

Unlike Gravier, Meili did not try to give any scientific appearance to his arguments. Rather, he positioned himself at a moral and general level, founding his criticisms on the general argument that nothing good could emerge from urban concentration. When the city reaches a certain level, it becomes harmful to human beings: 'Everywhere where too many people live together, we observe strikes, unemployment, diseases, famine and pauperism. The more a space supports a dense population, the more fragile its economy is' (1942, p. 272).

He believed that, on the contrary, limited human settlements are favourable to individual blossoming. He claimed that most famous men in history, like Dante, Michel-Angelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Bach, Mozart, Schiller, were not native from metropolises but from little towns. In this strange argument, he did not quote, however, great Roman and Greek men who lived in what could be considered very big cities in that time.

Gravier and Meili insisted at length on the sterility of the big city, an argument well developed before, in particular by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Meili declared that in big cities, families disappeared after four generations if no new blood came from the countryside. [7] Interestingly enough, the same worthless argument was used by Nazi geographers. [8]

Gravier wrote:

These percentages show that Paris inflation coincides with a weakening of national demographic energy: during the first period, France gained 3 214 000 inhabitants; during the second, only 1 200 000. Such decline, which goes on until 1945, forms a dangerous contrast with the expansion of neighbouring nations (p. 35).

It is worth noticing that the author indicated only a 'coincidence', but did not, and could hardly, prove a causal relationship between city growth and fertility decline. By juxtaposing the two phenomena, however, Gravier implied strongly that the first is the cause of the second, a dubious causal relationship that one finds more often in political pamphlets than in scientific texts, which Meili also used quite often.

Gravier again underlined the difference of demographic regimes: 'Three years later, World War witnesses a new increase of population in Paris of 362 000 inhabitants while the rest of France lost 2 631 000 persons (1911–21). Never was the contradiction between Parisian inflation and national interest so blatantly obvious'.

Of course, the loss of 1 550 000 French soldiers and civilians killed in the war had a dramatic influence. As for its population increase, the growth of war industries in the capital, at a crucial proximity to the centre of the front line, may be explained easily.

Both authors defended the 'family' as the very basis of a society that they saw endangered by urban promiscuity. Most enemies of big cities have described these as the centre of all vices. Gravier did not indulge deeply in such criticism, but he could not help noticing: 'The closer one comes to the city centre, the more unfit are housing and human environments for a normal family to blossom' (p. 6).

He did not define what a 'normal family' was. In fact, his model was the small (two adults, two or three children) family typical of the European bourgeoisie during the nineteenth century, but very different from large peasant and noble families in earlier centuries. Gravier, wishing a return to the *Ancien Régime* before the French Revolution (see below), lamented the predicament of city women who could not take sufficient care of their own children. He forgot that until the end of eighteenth century, rich and noble families usually did not raise their children themselves: they entrusted them to wet nurses, sent them to religious schools and seminaries, and finally married their girls when they were still adolescent or bought their sons a position in the army.

For Meili, cities were obviously not a very good place to raise children. 'We all know how the children grow up in the courtyards', he claimed in 1942 (p. 272). Morality can only prosper in a small community. Meili believed in the basic primacy of family relations. The village was the ideal place where families live in harmony, where inhabitants knew each other and where everybody was interested in the destiny of their neighbours. Conscientious work by the farmer in the fields or by the craftsman was the best way to draw people away from the immorality of the metropolis. Individual freedom from moral control and traditional prejudices did not seem to interest him. He was notably shocked by his journey to Paris: 'I was repulsed by Paris, as by a wonderful woman whose sinful attraction frightened me. I had already noticed that behind a marvellously unheard-of stage, misery, corruption and vice played fully their role'. [9]

The uprooted nature of city dwellers is a century-old topic: people away from their native land are supposed to be prone to all possible forms of personal despair and social degeneration. Here, again, Gravier fell into anachronism: in the middle of the twentieth century, the majority of Parisian dwellers were born in the Paris agglomeration or in other big cities.

Quoting it, but without explaining his views, Gravier used the old organic paradigm already well developed by the Romantics: 'A human community forms an organism of biological nature; it must be considered, basically, as a living body It is necessary to insure the circulation of life over the whole of the national territory' (p. 146).

In his first edition, Gravier relied completely on the organic image: 'France is slowly dying ... France is a living being ... we should look at her with physician's eyes. Health of a living being is not necessarily expressed by his weight' (1947, p. 24). Gravier tried to show that population concentration was dangerous because it would 'clog' national life. The organic paradigm was widely used as a conservative image of society, in opposition to the quite mechanical concept of class struggle. An organism is defined as 'an individual having ... parts that function together as a whole to maintain life and its activities'. [10] In this way, unity of the diverse whole is ensured and each part must work and be satisfied at its own place. Here, again, no justification is given to sustain the very doubtful hypothesis of a nation as a living organism. The paradigm is extremely conservative and nationalistic. The national border is presented as a natural membrane separating nations as distinct living cells.

Often very allusive, Meili made references to the ‘organic necessity of planning’ or the ‘inorganic way’ transportation networks were built (1943, pp. 96–7). For the Swiss architect, cities must have a ‘natural’ shape inspired by Nature. ‘Like a too fat body that suffocates the natural working of the organs, such a construction (the big cities chaos) suffocates the spiritual and corporal development of city dwellers. It is the absurd action of the big city’ (1941, p. 4).

MODERN CRITICISM

Quite naturally, the criticisms of the city borrowed by our authors from nineteenth century literature dealt more with the industrial revolution and its social and political effects.

Cities are socially and politically dangerous. One of the strongest bases for hating the city, since 1850, has been social fear in France, in particular, where so many political and social revolutions developed in Paris during the nineteenth century. For partisans of the old society, big cities have always been considered as hotbeds of revolutionaries, unionists, strikers and other troublemakers.

In Switzerland, there was a general strike in 1918, the only one the country has ever known. Before that, several strikes had taken place in different cities as a consequence of lack of supplies. The social movement of 1918 took place especially in cities such as Zurich, Basel and Bern. The opposition between town and country was stirred up on those occasions as soldiers coming from the countryside were sent against urban workers, in the same way that 35 000 Parisians were massacred by French troops composed of peasants during the Commune of May 1871. For the historian François Walter, those strikes represented a real trauma in Swiss political consciousness: ‘The image of peasants and mountain dwellers ready to defend their country against urban revolutionary workers found strong bases in those incidents’. [11]

For Meili, crime, the proletariat and civil insurrection prosper together, far away from nature in the excessive density and overcrowding of cities. ‘Urban concentration produces proletariat and criminals’ and ‘Too high a concentration of workers is a source of civil commotion’ (1943, p. 96).

Once more, concentration was considered not as an effect but as a powerful cause of social phenomena which could, in this convenient way, be neglected. Meili feared what he called ‘masses’. He read Gustave le Bon and Jose Ortega y Gasset. [12] Those theorists considered that people were altered when grouped in crowds and, eventually, regressed to a primary state of humanity. Subscribing to those theses, Meili condemned big cities as places where masses prosper and where humans lose their freedom.

Gravier contented himself with some allusions: ‘More, however, than this quite normal increase of the tertiary sector, the main phenomenon is the appearance of a true “army” of industry workers among the firms in Paris suburbs’ (p. 45). The word ‘army’ is used here as a frightening image. Although the danger of social upheaval seemed to have been much smaller in Switzerland, Meili was apparently more frightened. He was not the only one. One of the first goals of Swiss federal planning during the Second World War was to purge the city of its ‘dangerous’ populations. [13]

Cities are unhealthy. For Gravier, the Paris environment was unhealthy, even deadly. Surprisingly, however, he did not raise the issue of pollution anywhere in his book, even in the 1972 edition, at a time when ecological ideas began to circulate widely in France. Typically, he seemed interested mainly in moral issues (low fertility of Parisian women) and political criticism (excessive centralization of power).

For Meili, big cities were not a healthy place to live. They created obstacles to the action of the sun and were noisy. Meili was more concerned than Gravier by pollution. His criticisms concerning hygiene in cities went a bit further. It was the general health of the Swiss people that suffered from the development of urban agglomerations. Bad conditions in cities were responsible not only for physical but also for mental diseases: 'Many forms of degeneracy, with nervous troubles and mental damage, are the product of the uproarious life in big cities' (1945, p. 5).

Because life in great cities is not 'natural', under such conditions people must deteriorate physically, mentally and eventually morally. Meili used the word *Entartungskrankheiten* (decadence diseases): an expression which was very common in the National-Socialist propaganda.

Maybe because of their background and certainly because of their belief in authoritarian planning, both authors neglected economic and particularly market mechanisms and sometimes seemed to ignore them completely. Gravier considered the land market only to propose a drastic change in the permitted housing density in the Paris agglomeration and, as a consequence, to overturn the whole land price system. He seemed to believe that salaries depended on the free decision of employers; he ignored economies of scale and minimized the role of transportation costs. He never discussed public finances, nor did he try to see where the resources of the national state came from. Had he done this, he would have had to acknowledge that the six main French agglomerations filled the national Treasury and that the rest of the country was largely subsidized.

Cities devour resources. With great force, Meili criticized capitalism and, of course, 'land speculation' without defining the term clearly. The cost of living is much higher in big cities, particularly with respect to administrative costs and farm products. Meili failed, however, to indicate that the high prices of farm products were due to customs duty and high subsidies on farm products.

He justified his criticism of speculation by patriotism: the soil is the nation and the nation cannot be left in the hands of 'speculators'. Similar criticisms were extremely frequent in Nazi literature. [14] His criticisms recall the violence with which Godfried Feder, a famous architect and planner in Germany, condemned lending at interest as 'usury', a practice he wanted to eradicate with the creation of a popular movement to solve the German housing crisis in the 1920s. [15] Gravier was less outspoken but he also criticized land speculation, particularly in Paris, of course. He proposed to break it down by drastically reducing demographic concentration and land prices, in the hope of ruining the hated Parisian bourgeoisie in this way.

Both writers seemed to pursue a search for a 'third way' based on nationalism, which would not suffer an excess of individualism like Capitalism, or a frightening community rule and atheistic background like Bolshevism. Such a 'third way' was typical of the different

forms of fascism that appeared in Europe with Mussolini, Hitler, Pétain, Franco and Salazar.

THE SAME ART OF SOPHISTRY

Many unsubstantiated statements were introduced by Gravier, particularly in his last edition (1972), with the same words: 'A mindful scrutiny shows that' or 'A careful examination proves that'. Meili did similarly, writing: 'Experience proves that'. Both used connotations of words rather than their precise definition, which allowed them to state without any effort of proof. Both spoke of 'immoderate' urban sizes, of 'excessive' growth, of urban 'cancers' 'devouring' the countryside, of villages at a 'human scale' without defining the excess or justifying their criticisms.

An impressive example of sophism, among many, may be found in Gravier:

Because, in order to recruit the hundreds of thousands of migrants necessary to its expansion [of the Paris agglomeration], the capital city has kept offering relatively high salaries: in 1938, a printer receives 11.90 F an hour in Paris and 6.87 F, on average, in other French towns (p. 57).

Figures are suspect: Sauvy, in his famous *Histoire économique de la France entre les deux guerres*, gave contradictory evidence. [16] But let us accept Gravier's. There are only three explanations to the phenomenon Gravier claimed to observe:

1. productivity was approximately the same in all French cities but Parisian firms paid more probably because they were more constrained by trades unions than in smaller cities where workers were left to themselves;
2. firms could not pay more and Parisian businessmen were philanthropic verging on bankruptcy, a quite unlikely explanation;
3. productivity was much higher in Paris than elsewhere [17] and businessmen could pay higher salaries and obtain simultaneously higher profits. The latter was definitely the answer but it was contrary to everything that Gravier wanted to demonstrate.

In the same way, Meili wrote: 'Urban transformations require the same expenditure as a war' (1943, p. 97), a quite meaningless statement when it is devoid of any precision, but a very impressive one none the less. Not surprisingly, Gravier used the same method. Evaluating in a very crude way the births that did not occur in the Paris agglomeration as a result of a falling birth rate, he compared in a bizarre way the effect of declining natural increase with the number of men and women killed during World War II:

So, some 885 000 young people might be estimated as the price Paris has cost the nation in 15 years. Such a loss is higher than losses due to World War II, since the excess of deaths over births is estimated at 650 000 for the period 1939–1946 (p. 60).

The reader may wonder why World War II is supposed to go from 1939 to 1946, when it was actually over in May 1945 and the French territory was liberated at the end of 1944. The reason is simple: 1946 was the year of the peak of the baby-boom, when many more births were registered than many other years in the twentieth century, thereby converging a much higher and more impressive result to Gravier's computation.

Gravier's and Meili's ideas: the contexts

It is not known if Gravier and Meili met each other or even read each other's publications. Quite surprisingly, however, both authors developed similar ideas in quite different environments.

VERY DIFFERENT CONTEXTS ...

Meili and Gravier belonged to two different countries with different territories, cultures, histories, economic developments, governments, etc. In the 1940s, when Meili wrote his papers and Gravier published the first edition of *Paris et le désert français*, three main characteristics, apart from size, distinguished France from Switzerland.

First, France was a very centralized state, following absolute traditions laid down by kings and emperors. On the contrary, Switzerland was a federal state where different entities (*cantons*) had most of the power. Except for the duration of World War II, when the federal government concentrated exceptional power in its own hands. The Confederation used those circumstances to set up the first elements of town and country planning policy. Secondly, whilst France relied on representative government, direct democracy, as emphasized by Meili was a typical feature of the political Swiss system. Thirdly, France suffered intense destruction during the five years' war: 635 000 persons were killed and 20% of all buildings, 80% of harbours and 50% of railway lines were destroyed. Some cities (Brest, Royan, Saint-Malo) practically disappeared from the map. The country needed everything: steel, coal, gas, electricity and food; ration tickets were still in use in 1947 and the winter of 1945 had been the worst of the whole period. The need for planning was so obvious that a country where the state did not play much of an economic role before 1939 became an example of national planning. In 1946, the *Plan Monnet* (named after Jean Monnet) created a national planning organization in charge of centralizing information, defining priorities and organizing collaboration between administrations, businessmen, specialists and unions. This was a completely new concept. Unlike France, Switzerland suffered no destruction: reconstruction was not an issue on Swiss territory. Swiss society, however, had to face some consequences of the war: supply problems, social tension and housing shortage. [18] The food supply problem was a central topic in Meili's negative vision of cities: they were, of course, not self-sufficient.

Just before the war, the relationship between industrialization and urbanization had distinctive and almost contrasting features in France and Switzerland (Table 1). Switzerland had a strong industrial sector but no big urban concentration, whilst agriculture remained the dominant feature in France. In 1941, only 30% of the population in Switzerland lived in a city of more than 10 000 inhabitants. [19] The supposed 'horrors' of big cities were very much theoretical in Switzerland when Meili wrote his texts. Urban growth in Switzerland during that period was nothing like urbanization in France or England. In 1930, London had 8.2 million inhabitants (rising to 10.3 million in 1950), and Paris 5.6 million inhabitants (rising to 6.0 million in 1950): Zurich, the biggest city in Switzerland at that time, had only 390 000 inhabitants in 1934. [20]

Meili advocated direct and local democracy, while Gravier praised the *Ancien Régime*, a supposedly balanced system of powers and privileges that existed in France before 1789.

Table 1. Industry and urbanization c. 1930

Countries	Industry as % of total employment	Population in towns of less than 10 000 inhabitants (%)	Population in towns of more than 50 000 inhabitants (%)
France	35.1	60.4	26.1
Switzerland	44.9	67.1	21.5
Great Britain	48.1	27.3	52.8
Germany	40.6	50.8	35.4

Source: C. Brüscheiler, *Industrialisierung und Verstarterung in der Schweiz. Die Schweiz als Kleinstaat in der Weltwirtschaft*. St. Gall: Fehr, 1945, pp. 328, 333 (quoted in A. Rossi, *La decentralisation urbaine en Suisse*. Lausanne: PPUR, 1983, p. 29).

This desire to restore a monarchical system became the basic thesis of the far-right nationalist movement *Action Franaise*. Surprisingly enough, in spite of such deep differences, Meili's and Gravier's theses converge strongly.

... BUT SURPRISINGLY COMMON IDEAS

Two main political and cultural trends seemed to have influenced their ideas and orientated them in the same direction.

The strength of ruralism. Gravier's and Meili's ideas on cities were inseparable from a political and cultural context of rural life idealization and city discrediting. The movement was very old but it took its main course as more and more men were leaving the country life. It really began in the eighteenth century, with Romanticism and reached its peak at the beginning of the twentieth century.

As shown by Anne-Marie Thiesse, [21] rural life idealization was a constant trend in all European nations since they built a national identity. It took its place among the great myths that cemented nations. Meili and Gravier used ideas touching on a subject close to a nation's heart.

Swiss national identity was developed outside the cities, using ideal representations of nature and villages in the Alps. This Alps myth was mainly constructed by writers of the eighteenth century, such as Albrecht de Haller or Rousseau. They described an ideal life in Swiss mountains, inhabited by 'Bons sauvages', contrasting with the malign mutation of life in big cities.

One great moment of expression of national identity was the National Swiss Exhibition. In 1896, in Geneva, a Swiss Village was created to represent the nation. It was built with examples of rural architecture chosen from all over the country and took place in an artificial countryside landscape with mountains, torrents, real cows, real farmers and craftsmen. This kind of Village was again reproduced in 1914 in Bern and in 1939 in Zurich as well as in other international exhibitions (Paris 1900, Glasgow 1903). For generations, the Swiss Village represented the central figure of national imagery. [22] In 1939, under the influence of Armin Meili, director of the exhibition, the Village became the symbol of 'National

Defence' in the threat of the war period. People should find in this rural place the expression of the Swiss resistance.

In Switzerland, as in France, the period between the two world wars was characterized by an idealization of rural life in literature, politics and the economy. [23] Meili and Gravier belonged to a trend running from the eighteenth century until the early twentieth century that despised industry and suggested that national strength was rooted in agriculture. The *Physiocrats* [24] in the eighteenth century divided society into three parts: the **productive class**, i.e. the peasants who produce all of society's wealth; the **landed class** whose members help them by investing in land; and the rest of the nation, grouped in a **sterile class** of 'parasites' and including all city dwellers. During the Second World War, Pétain claimed that peasants and craftsmen constituted the cement of the new social and economic order; [25] he promoted a 'back to the land' policy.

In Switzerland, agriculture has been a very protected activity since the end of the nineteenth century. During the two world wars, its place was consolidated. [26] Agriculture allowed the country to survive and contributed to national defence. In the meantime, the city appeared like an interior enemy. Ernst Laur, creator and president of the powerful Swiss Farmers' Union, claimed in 1940: 'Two dangers threaten the country, first the war, and second, the growth of urbanisation and industrialisation. Both irreparably lead the Swiss people to quantitative and qualitative weakening'. [27]

People's relationship to rurality was a central topic in Meili's theory against the city. First, because distance between people and land, caused by concentration and urban sprawl, makes it difficult to maintain supplies chains. Secondly, and above all, this distance turns people away from the 'mother country'. In big cities, the ancestral community disappears into anonymity, collective disinterest and bad morality. In that context, Meili simply forgot or ignored the socio-economic functions of a city. For instance, in 1943 he suggested building cities away from main roads, in quieter places, [28] a most surprising concept that he did not justify.

This is where Gravier seemed quite at odds with Meili, since he spent more time criticizing Paris than advocating ruralism, farmers' privileges or agricultural subsidies. But, enthused by the ideology of the Vichy regime, he wrote:

Shapeless and inhuman agglomerations born too quickly from industrial concentration, faceless and joyless cities where streets are all the same ... proletarian cities, i.e. without any heritage, are as many losses of national substance ... Our cities want to consume the surrounding ring of land ... We will awaken the country by rebuilding France's human, social, economical equilibrium. Tens, hundreds of cantons wait to be colonized ... Then there would not be any more isolated, exhausted communes that do not know each other and look with boredom and envy to Paris ...'. [29]

Gravier's attachment to rural France was clear, even if his main goal was to destroy Paris. More anti-urban than pro-rural, he seems particularly interested in defending middle-sized cities from the attraction of the 'monster' of Paris. In her very interesting doctoral work, Isabelle Provost even defended the thesis that developing regional cities at the expense of Paris was behind Gravier's policy. [30] She believed that it was also at the expense of rural areas, for which the DATAR (*Délégation à l'Aménagement du Territoire et à l'Action Régionale*) [31] seemed to have had little concern. This is to forget, however, that over the

last 40 years, the French Ministry of Agriculture has been in the hands of the main farmers' union, the FNSEA (*Fédération Nationale des Syndicats d'Exploitants Agricoles*), [32] sometimes with the president of that union as Minister. The regular annual flow of public subsidies to agriculture has been estimated to be some 30 billion euros, [33] hardly proof of neglect. Most of the money came from taxes levied in big cities, which deprived the capital city of resources and its suburbs of facilities and thereby indirectly made Gravier's dream come true. The extraordinary success of Gravier's book can be explained only by the strength, even the passion of such ruralist feelings in an ageing France and particularly in the 'Province'.

Planning to solve crises in a reactionary environment. Between the two world wars, Europe bore the harsh legacy of the First World War. Exhausted by resulting misery and destruction, it experienced disastrous inflation (particularly in Germany, in order to cancel the enormous debts incurred during the conflict at the expense of a largely destroyed middle-class) and, finally, a huge depression originating in the USA in 1930–1. Two frightening political currents swept over Europe: fascism in Italy, then Germany and finally Spain, Portugal and partly in Poland; and Bolshevism in Russia. Neither France nor Switzerland had a fascist government. Meili's and Gravier's ideas, however, were inseparable from such ideological trends.

As a politician, Meili was a member of the traditional right wing (*der Freisinnigen Partei Zürichs*) but his intellectual background was very close to fascist ideologies. This was the thesis developed in 1997 by Charles Linsmayer, an editor at the Bern daily, 'Der Bund'. [34] Linsmayer produced many quotations showing convincingly that Meili's ideas coincided with the 'blood and soil' pathos of German National Socialism and Italian Fascism. In his 1954 autobiography, Meili branded communists, socialists and all left-wing attitudes as unpatriotic and enemies. Foreigners, non-Aryans, Jews and even artists were always suspect to him, while real Swiss people were considered as a pure race. Meili was himself convinced that he came from pure 'Aryan blood'. His picture of women was also reactionary. Any woman who was defiled and lacked a silky blond body, could be described by the director of the National Swiss exhibition as 'carrion', 'vampire' or 'unattractive old maid'. His autobiography shows also that Meili, a non-commissioned officer, had great admiration for the military, especially the German army. [35] Clean, orderly and ideologically uniform, that is how Armin Meili saw his ideal Switzerland.

Like Meili, Gravier had many contacts with fascist ideologies. In *Paris and le désert français*, he quoted frequently and with admiration Pierre Gaxotte who was a historian and leader of 'Action Française', a very right-wing and monarchical movement, and editor of the anti-Semitic journals 'Je suis Partout' and 'La Gerbe'. [36] Gaxotte supported the collaboration of Pétain with the Nazis.

A first source for Gravier was 'planisme'. Between the wars, this quite powerful movement was developed among the French elites: it was anti-democratic, considering elected officials at the best incompetent, at the worst corrupt. This opinion was reinforced by a few big scandals (notably the Prince Stavisky affair which brought down the government in 1934) used by the extreme-right against the Parliament. A small but powerful group, 'X-Crise', was constituted by engineers of the famous 'Ecole Polytechnique'. Under the leadership of Albert, they prepared a quite comprehensive set of plans [37] to change French

economy and society radically. 'Planisme' found strong arguments from the Great Depression and in the examples of Roosevelt, Hitler and Stalin.

The second source of Gravier's doctrine was to be found in the writings of Charles Maurras who created '*l'Action Française*' (1898–9). Maurras developed three main ideas. (1) The family is all-important, not the individual; a child is nothing at his birth but inherits centuries of culture and owes everything to his family and his nation, which is nothing but 'a family of families'. (2) The village, the small town, the region are the only efficient environments for education and life. (3) Tradition is everything; man's duty is to receive traditions with respect and to transmit them to his children in order to preserve nation's 'land and blood'. Migrants, foreigners, footloose people and particularly Jews, are all decadent beings and enemies. Large cities are thus the cause and example of everything evil: 'Like a fish rotting from its head, France is perverted and weakened by the excessive power of Paris'. [38]

Both Meili and Gravier share in common a great admiration for the work of Alexis Carrel. Meili quoted him at the very moment (1942, p. 272) when Gravier was working in Carrel's organization in France. This common admiration is very telling: Alexis Carrel received the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1932. His main book [39] achieved an enormous success on both sides of the Atlantic. He created a foundation (1936) in the USA in order to advance the 'bettering of human race'. A great admirer of French fascists such as La Roque and Doriot, and a member of the pro-Nazi Doriot's party, Carrel brought his foundation to occupied France [40] with the help of Pétain's government. Gravier worked in this foundation as Director of the Centre for Regional Synthesis. Carrel hated cities as much as Meili and Gravier: 'Modern society ... is making the same mistake as all civilisations in Antiquity: it is creating life conditions where the survival of the individual and of its race become impossible' (Preface to *Man, the Unknown*). For Carrel, the individual depends heavily on the environment, which explains an idealization of rural life or contact with Nature that is found in the texts of Gravier's and, to a greater extent, of Meili.

This coincidence of anti-urbanism and fascist thought is not surprising. Reactionary governments in the 1930–40s, in Fascist Italy, National-Socialist Germany and Vichy France were built on an anti-urban ideology. [41] Quite evidently, Meili and Gravier were impressed by theories developed by the Nazi regime: the national-socialist programme prepared by Gottfried Feder [42] in 1932 advocated the 'de-urbanization' of Germany (*Die Verstädterung Deutschlands*). In those regimes, racism and anti-Semitism were juxtaposed with anti-urbanism; the 'blood and soil' pathos coincided with idealization of the countryside. As places of cosmopolitanism, free expression and individual emancipation, big cities could not suit reactionary regimes based upon national identity, authoritarian decision-making and collective actions.

Similar propositions

In spite of having such different backgrounds, Gravier and Meili shared the same beliefs, the same hates and the same myths. Meili's and Gravier's arguments are based on four main myths.

THE MYTH OF ‘REGIONAL EQUILIBRIUM’

Both advocated ‘regional balance’: it was their main goal, repeated over and over again. Meili’s ideal representation of urbanization was a balanced distribution of small cities all over the territory (‘urban decentralization’). He proposed the creation of a large decentralized metropolis in Switzerland (*weit dezentralisierte Grossstadt Schweiz*) between Lake Constance and Lake Geneva (Lac Léman) (1942, p. 273).

This option of territorial development, first developed in Switzerland by Meili, has influenced and still influences Swiss planning policy. In 1973, the first national Town and Country Planning schedule [43] presented a model of urbanization where the growth of the five big centres of Switzerland (Geneva, Lausanne, Basel, Bern and Zurich) would be halted to the benefit of eight smaller centres (Bienne-Neuchâtel, Aarau-Olten, Lucerne, Saint-Gall, Fribourg, Sion-Sierre, Belinzona-Lugano, Coire) and other medium and smaller cities. The main principle was ‘concentrated decentralization’ of the economy and urban growth based on a well-delimited network of cities. This national plan has not been confirmed in law; none the less many cantons have used the principle for their own regional development in the 1970s and 1980s. [44]

Geographer Jean-Luc Piveteau [45] noticed that the ‘concentrated decentralization’ principle, even if inefficient as a global planning strategy, had the immense advantage of being widely and easily accepted because it fitted particularly well with the Swiss political system: a federation of autonomous cantons. ‘Regional equilibrium’, whatever that may mean, sounds attractive because it makes regional development coincide with the Swiss system, based on a fair distribution of power between confederation, cantons and communes. In practice, however, this model has had no influence. As Piveteau noted sarcastically, ‘it was up against strong opponents: globalisation of the economy and the new international division of labour, trends manifestly breaking with the Christaller vision of a city network’ [46] which was the very basis of Meili’s model.

‘Regional balance’ does not have the same meaning in very centralized France where the DATAR has been the principal instrument for implementing Gravier’s objectives. By a decree dated 14 February 1963, the government created this *délégation*, the main institution in charge of territorial planning in France, answering directly to the Prime Minister. [47] Its goal is to co-ordinate spatially (or horizontally) the actions of Ministries that are accustomed to deal with economic sectors (vertically). The main goal is ‘To re-establish the equilibrium of national territory’, but the equilibrium of what: production, population, wealth, equipment? In fact, the main, if not only goal, taken from Gravier’s book, is to weaken Paris: ‘The goal was to counterbalance the attraction of the Paris agglomeration and to foster a faster growth of several regional capital cities’. [48]

Neither Meili nor Gravier, however, describe precisely what they mean by this eye-catching expression: ‘regional balance’. Does it represent a more even income distribution for all, similar public investments in different regions or equal distribution of population over the national territory? Such different conceptions are obviously contradictory. Both authors fail to offer any justification or even any discussion of these fuzzy concepts which they convert into national goals. Isabelle Provost asks:

But why should there be a regional balance? Why could we not imagine rationally 55 million people concentrated in Paris and the rest of France given back to Nature? Such a statement is

not absurd. The only arguments against it would be ecological (pollution due to an excessive concentration) or economic (excessive cost of big agglomerations). Such arguments, anyway, could be easily opposed. [49]

One really wonders if the myth of 'equal balance' is not a way to designate a return to earlier forms of economy, when France and Switzerland were almost exclusively agricultural countries, with similar densities of population all over the land.

THE OPTIMAL SIZE OF THE CITY

To support their thesis on the necessity of regional equilibrium, both Gravier and Meili tried to define an optimal size for a city, an endeavour which has long fascinated geographers but without any success since they would have to define criteria for their judgement (optimal for whom?). Also, optimal size would change with the view-point (economic, fiscal, social, cultural), the people involved (optimal for the population or the enterprises?) and the period in history. Such difficulties, however, did not stop our two authors from making quite peremptory statements: 'A careful examination allows us to estimate that the optimal size of an agglomeration is always (sic) under two million people, whatever the value of its site' (Gravier, p. 157).

Meili could not imagine the economic benefit of urban concentration because his theory was based on his belief about the social and economic benefits of traditional life in a village. As soon as a city reaches more than 30 000 inhabitants, he considers that it loses all the economic benefits of village life:

We cannot do without village forces, deriving from nature and from human exchange between neighbours. Maintaining good relationships in the vicinity, knowing one's neighbours develops economic forces, too often disregarded. Such forces disappear as soon as a city has more than 30 000 inhabitants (1942, p. 273).

Without quoting it, Meili gave almost the same evaluation as Ebenezer Howard whose Garden City should not exceed 32 000 inhabitants. [50] When a Garden City has grown to this size, it should then develop by fostering another Garden City beyond its own hinterland until a cluster of Garden Cities comes into existence. Meili made the same proposal for the growth of Swiss towns but used the term 'satellite towns' instead of 'Garden Cities' (1943, p. 98).

HINTERLAND VERSUS CITIES, AREAS VERSUS NETWORKS: THE CHRISTALLER MYTH

Gravier conceived each city as the centre of a region where inhabitants bought and sold products and services. It might have industries, but only small ones, thanks to the ubiquity of electrical energy. Each city has a hinterland corresponding to its size. Organized into a pyramid, these cells form a nation. Nowhere in the first two editions of his book did Gravier quote Christaller's work but he used it in the third edition (1972) with obvious pleasure, to justify his views. He did not take into account huge industrial and tertiary functions, typical of big cities, which work not so much with the surrounding countryside but in networks that extend beyond national borders. He did not hesitate to state a 'law' for the 'right' size of cities:

Cantons, counties, departments and regions will continue to be directed by an urban hierarchy, i.e. by a network of “central places”, according to the words of the German geographer Christaller. One would like to establish a “law” whereby the critical mass of the central nucleus would change from 20% of the total population in small administrative areas to 10% in the big ones (p. 153).

He felt compelled to add ‘But such a rule is not mathematical’ and further on :

Experience shows that the influence of a metropolis or of a polycentric nervous system has an impact up to 200 km at most, which corresponds to a two-hour trip by car, i.e. to the possibility of driving to the centre and back during the day (p. 206).

The fact that transportation technology and average speed achieved on a network can change much faster than an urban network did not seem to have attracted his attention.

In Meili’s vision of national territory, big urban concentrations have a negative impact on the economy because they are over-dependent for their food supply on their agricultural hinterland. Meili was certainly impressed by the social tensions and strikes linked with the lack of food supplies during the First World War. For Meili, the international economic importance of Swiss cities did not matter. He only emphasized their weaknesses because his theory was built on the wartime principles of self-sufficiency in food supply. This is why he deplored the existence of cities: ‘Life, even in partial self-sufficiency, is impossible in a city’ (1942, p. 272).

Christaller’s model, which is very famous nowadays in geography teaching, was not much known in France before the 1960s. In Switzerland, it was probably used for the first time by geographers in the late 1940s. [51] Meili might have known about this model but never quoted it. The views of planning held by Meili and Gravier were, however, very close to the model, for quite obvious reasons. Christaller built his scheme in the 1920s, in the most rural part of Bavaria, at a time when cities were being intensely criticized all over Europe. He envisaged cities as small capitals of rural territories where farmers came to sell and buy. The economic basis of this system was an embedding of areas where cities depended ultimately on agricultural production. Christaller himself was interested only in small towns (less than 20 000 inhabitants). [52] Areas of increasing size were piled up in an ‘urban pyramid’. In sufficiently large regions, populations at different levels follow quite regularly the so-called ‘rank-size rule’: the population ratio from one level to another was constant. The capital city at the summit should then have a population corresponding to the upper part of the pyramid. From this viewpoint, Paris seemed too big for France, but Christaller and Gravier failed to consider the importance of international activities. Big cities do not function simply as centres in the middle of an agricultural area but as nodes within a network. The functions and population of Paris depend much more on activities in London, Frankfurt, New York or Tokyo than on the output of the agricultural land that surrounds the capital or on the activity of small French towns.

To oppose ‘area models’ with ‘network models’ is to contrast traditional economies based on agriculture with modern economies built on world-wide businesses, to oppose a narrow national view of the functions of cities with that of international activities, and simply to oppose land and city. Quite typically, Gravier and Meili, in spite of important differences in the history and economies of France and Switzerland, were defending similar theses. Such viewpoints were extremely nationalistic: the urban pyramid with its rural base is necessarily

limited to the national territory. Nowhere did Gravier or Meili discuss the role and the importance of international transactions. From the 1960s to the 1990s, the DATAR, largely inspired by Gravier's ideas, mapped France's population and activities with a blank left for Paris, which usually was not represented at all, and limited these activities to French national borders, even though the Common Market, subsequently the European Union, was in existence and played a significant role. It is still more surprising to observe the over-importance accorded to the Swiss countryside by Swiss planning authorities and their neglect of big cities when the major part of the Swiss economy is based on banking and insurance activities located in these very cities (Zurich, Geneva, Basel) that planners do not want to consider.

PLANNING AS A POWER DREAM

Meili advocated a very strong intervention of public authorities: 'The lawmaker must fight by any means against the invasion of land by cities' (1943, p. 98). World War II gave him the chance to dream about a very interventionist form of national planning (*Landesplanung*). Exceptional circumstances were an opportunity for the Swiss government to seize full power. [53] However, the end of the war marked the end of this policy; both federalism and the interest of private property acted as strong barriers to any national planning ambition. [54] The first federal town and country planning law was voted only in 1979. Eventually, each canton would set up its own legislation and practice concerning planning. Meili praised highly the determination of authoritarian governments in the eighteenth century: the enlightened despotism of Frederick II of Prussia was his model. He also admired the planned morphology of cities, like Bern or Fribourg, made by authoritative governments in Switzerland at the same time (1943, p. 97).

In a similar way, the Vichy regime represented the triumph of technocrats over representatives of the people. The government gave power to high-level technocrats who enjoyed being liberated from parliamentary control and political fuss. Planning, not elaborating laws, could now become the main task. [55]

Regional planning was very popular in Europe before and after World War II. From the right-wing point of view, the horrors of the Great Depression convinced many people of the need for some rational control over economic phenomena; from the left wing, the example of the Soviet Union had a powerful impact. Destruction and misery in 1940s France were compounded in 1945 by bombing from the air and battles on French soil. The scarcity of everything and the need to produce at all cost imposed planning as the only solution.

Both authors defended a corporatist state and adopted a typically technocratic attitude: Gravier saw the geographer as a 'man of synthesis' whose role was to co-ordinate the works of specialists like economists, sociologists and geologists in order to produce the synthesis, the 'Plan'. Such a belief explains the quite incredible arrogance of Gravier's detailed planning of the future organization of France without any consultation of population, unions, businessmen, politicians or others.

Policies advocated by Gravier were strangely contradictory, to the point of being bizarre. On one hand, Gravier wanted to demote Paris, which he considered too powerful and centralized. On the other, he advocated a firm, even brutal, decentralization process that

only the central State could perform. Isabelle Provost points out the paradox of French planning which, following Gravier, aims at developing the periphery and controlling Paris but from a very centralized policy position. [56]

According to Gravier, the only means of accomplishing such decentralization was, through the naked authority of the central State. By devolving more power and means to local authorities, he believed that this would weaken Paris. However, he did not realize that such a policy would also be welcomed by a capital city which could then use its own wealth rather than subsidizing the rest of France. Gravier was confusing the Paris agglomeration with the central French government which is located in the city but whose policies and interests have almost always been opposed to those of the city. Paris would likely benefit from such weakening of the national state.

While advocating local autonomy, Gravier proposed an extremely authoritarian organization of the country, where land use, city size, functions and equipment would be centrally planned and decided. Even a brutal and powerful regime like the Soviet government would have hesitated to adopt such holistic and detailed planning. Gravier believed that Paris must be, if not destroyed, then at least reduced in such a way that it would become just 'one eighty-third of France' (the country then contained 83 *départements*). The policy should be very brutal:

The first decision would be a radical modification of the building code which, let us recall, allows the construction of 30 000 m², even 35 000 m² on 1 hectare, against 13 200 m² in the suburbs and 10 000 m² in big German cities. Such premium to over-saturation should be immediately cancelled and the COS (*Coefficient d'Occupation des Sols*) [57] reduced to the level of the suburban COS (p. 210).

Gravier seemed to be conscious of the enormous economic, fiscal and social consequences of such a measure, but he believed that planners should not hesitate and should act firmly. At no moment did he discuss the political and social opposition to his propositions and how they might be overcome. He seemed to imply that a brutal, almost dictatorial regime, could apply such policy and he regretted that such a regime did not exist in the past. But for the future, he hoped that geographers would be able to plan everything and enjoy overwhelming authority to do so (pp. 213 and 241).

Gravier advocated a fundamentally spatial vision of planning: a direct, mechanical and univocal relationship between built-up space and social life. Meili exhibited the same beliefs: 'I hope that I have demonstrated that the Swiss man, like any man, is moulded by the society he is living in; he is shaped by his local environment' (1942, p. 274).

As a consequence, planning is supposed to be able to modify, not only people's equipment, but also their way of life. For Meili, planning has a noble task: to ensure people's happiness by avoiding urbanization. Both authors illustrate this 'haughty and totalitarian dream tending to transform society through external forms' [58] which is so typical of twentieth century urban theories, such as Howard's Garden Cities, Le Corbusier's propositions or CIAM functionalism. Most of these theories have condemned the evolution of modern cities and suggested radical ways to change them and make them better.

Gravier's book, became the Bible of French spatial planning. Paul Delouvrier, one of the strongest personalities in French planning, believed initially in Gravier's thesis: 'We were all fans of Gravier, that is, more or less convinced that Paris, particularly during the nineteenth

century, had devoured the rest of France'. [59] Although drafted during the Vichy regime the book had a fantastic impact later. In 1950, Eugène Claudius-Petit, Minister for Reconstruction, created the first division of national planning; a national fund for planning was constituted the same year. The first National Committee for Planning, co-ordinating the works of different ministries, was held in 1960.

After Gravier, planning in France has become a strange activity based on ideological principles contrary to most observable facts. Gravier's thesis was based on the belief that Paris was devouring the resources of the rest of France but, curiously, no study of money flows between French regions – which could have substantiated such a thesis – was made for forty years. One had to wait until 1995 to obtain data on inter-regional flows of public money. An invaluable document, [60] produced by the French Ministry of Finances, but available only in Brussels because the European Commission requested it, gave evidence of flows of public money cross-tabulating taxes paid by each French region to the national budget, and the salaries and subsidies paid from the budget to each region. The sum is nil: the State redistributes all contributions. In 1995, 19 out of 22 regions received more money than they paid to the State. Three regions paid for all the others: Alsace (Strasbourg) paid 300 million euros more than it received, Rhône-Alpes (Lyon, the second city) paid 650 million more than it received, and the Ile-de-France (the Paris region) contributed 18 billion euros more than it received from the national budget (1600 euros per capita each year, including babies and retired people). There is no reason to believe that such flows were not so important in the past. If the flow of wealth from Paris to the rest of the country is so significant, how is it possible that most French people believe, and the media repeat, that 'Paris is subsidized by the rest of the country'? Of course, important political interests are at play, but such obfuscation of reality, with enormous social and economic consequences covering half a century, is the main effect of Gravier's ideas.

Meili may not have played such an important role in Switzerland. The influence of his ideas rests on the continuity of the concept of 'concentrated decentralization'. Thanks to the relative weakness of national or regional planning power in Switzerland, no active policy against city growth has ever been imposed. The anti-urban climate eventually had an impact on planning, but curiously contrary to Meili's expectations. For decades after the war, the role and importance of cities in Switzerland was completely ignored by town and country planning. The city simply disappeared from the planning system. In the triumphant 'planning paradigm' of the 1960s, the big city became a locality like any others, which only size and functions could differentiate. [61]

One of the best illustrations of this doctrine is the first federal planning law voted in 1979 that did not even contain the word 'city'. This law emphasizes the protection of natural and rural areas and the importance of regional balance, giving no place to the leading role of cities in the economy. Urbanization is considered only through its negative impacts on the hypothetical 'national equilibrium' and on the environment. The most important change with regard to Meili's ideology has occurred only in recent decades with cities and urbanization no longer being considered as an interior enemy but as an economic force. It was only in the 1990s, that the Swiss federal government officially recognized the fundamental importance of cities in the Swiss economy and, in particular, the role of Zurich as a national and international economic and financial hub. [62]

Conclusions

Although Meili and Gravier lived and worked in different countries, different traditions and different environments, their works presented impressive similarities. Their arguments against the big city, the extreme character of their statements (usually unsubstantiated), their goals, their efforts to turn planning and public opinion away from the city, their success in advocating economic policies that fight the city to subsidize the countryside are based on a common ideology. Beyond the obvious interplay of private interests and political schemes, one can guess the effect of long-standing condemnations of the city that have a deep religious, moral and philosophical basis. Both writers concurred in describing life in big cities as pure hell and moral perdition. Meili and Gravier agreed on subjects as anachronistic as urban hygiene, mortality and birth rates. Both used out-of-date arguments to cement their planning theory against the big city. They underlined the horrors of loneliness but never showed the other side of the coin: great individual freedom. Since their judgements were mostly moralistic, they did not try to substantiate them with arguments and evidence, but only by blunt statements and, quite often, with bad faith.

Both men called for improved democracy and strong decentralization, but both advocated planning methods that required authoritarian and centralized government: quite an impressive contradiction. Both pretended to modernize their country but advocated a return to the countryside and a struggle against cities. Both, maybe because of their background, ignored economic phenomena and did not discuss the effect of the policies they advocated. For instance, neither seemed aware of the inflation in the cost of living that farm subsidies and price control of agricultural products entails for city dwellers. Neither discussed the fairness and the sociological consequences of such measures. Beyond opportunistic arguments, one can detect deep ideologies with very long time wavelengths lurking behind the passionate statements. This is probably why the texts of Meili and especially Gravier, which are not much more than political pamphlets, attracted so many followers at a time when authoritarian ideologies were so powerful, but even more because they represented expressions of fright and hate in the face of change, freedom and progress in big cities.

Acknowledgement

The authors wish to thank Igor Reinhart for his help in translating the works of Armin Meili, and Nga Scott for correcting the text so carefully. Grateful thanks also go to the anonymous referees for their valuable comments.

Notes and references

1. J-F. Gravier, *Paris et le désert français*. Paris: Le Portulan, 1947; second edition 1953, under the same title, with much larger success; then 1972. All quotations are taken from the 1972 edition unless otherwise indicated.

2. Surprisingly enough, Gravier's book seems never to have been reviewed in a French geographical journal, although *Les Annales de Géographie*, the most famous one, acknowledged its publication in 1953.
3. Allgemeines über Landesplanung. *Die Autostrasse* 2 (1933) 1. In this article Meili draws the first zoning plan of Switzerland.
4. Meili's ideas are extracted from four main articles: A. Meili, Landesplanung in der Schweiz. *Separatabdruck aus der Neuen Zürcher Zeitung*, Zeichnungen vom Verfasser (1941) ; A. Meili, Bases sociales et éthiques de l'aménagement du territoire national. *BTSR* (1942) 271–4 ; A. Meili, Le plan d'aménagement national. *BTSR* (1943) 95–9; A. Meili, Zürich, Heute und Morgen. Wille oder Zufall in der baulichen Gestaltung. Separat druck aus *der Neuen Zürcher Zeitung* (10–15 Dezember 1944) Buchdruckerei Neue Zürcher Zeitung (1945).
5. See the special issue on Deurbanization and villagization. *The International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 4 (1980); see also: A. Lees, *Cities perceived, Urban Sociology in European and American thought 1820–1940*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985. On history of anti-urban thoughts in Switzerland see J. Salomon Cavin, *La ville, mal-aimée*. Lausanne: PPUR, 2005.
6. J.-J. Rousseau (1765) *L'Emile ou de l'Education*. Electronic edition, Gallica, p. 30.
7. Séance du Conseil national, 4 juin 1941, AFB, E27, 23460, Bd1. Quoted by F. Walter, Fédéralisme et propriété privée. *DISP* (1985) 21–7.
8. H. F. K. Günther, *Die Verstädterung* (1936); *Das Bauerntum* (1939). He laments the death in cities of families whose names have disappeared. This old argument was probably taken from G. Hansen (1889) *Die drei Bevölkerungstufen*. It has little value because the authors forget that women lose their family name when they marry, and also many families disappear, not because they died out, but because they migrated to other cities. The sophism was exhibited by Pr Dr E. Keyser (1953) *Grundfragen städtischer Bevölkerungsgeschichte*, who recalls also that during the Middle Ages, when one of the many epidemics happened, farmers took refuge in cities while wealthy city-dwellers escaped to other cities.
9. A. Meili, *Meine Saga. Erinnerungen*, Teil 2, Verona: Mondadori, 1954, pp. 196–7.
10. Webster, second edition, p. 1002.
11. F. Walter, Les conséquences des guerres sur la gestion urbaine et territoriale en Suisse, in R. Hudemann and F. Walter (eds) *Villes et guerres mondiales en Europe au XX^e siècle*. Paris: L'harmattan, 1997, pp. 217–33.
12. G. le Bon, *Psychologie des foules*. Paris: F. Alcan, 1895 (1906); J. Ortega y Gasset, *La révolte des masses*. Paris: Delamain et Boutilleau, 1929.
13. F. Walter, *op.cit.* [7].
14. For example, G. Feder, *Das Program der NSDAP*. München: Vlg F Eher, 1933, p. 10.
15. G. Feder, an architect, created in November 1919 a Movement to eliminate Interest Lending (*Kampfbund zur Brechung der Zinsknechtschaft*). He was later charged by Hitler with writing the programme of the Nazi party.
16. A. Sauvy, *Histoire économique de la France entre les deux guerres*. Paris: Fayard, vol. 1, 1965, p. 505.
17. Actually, productivity in Paris is 35% higher than the French average; see M-P Rousseau, *La productivité des grandes villes*. Paris: Anthropos, 1998.
18. See F. Walter, *op. cit.* [7].
19. H. Siegenthaler (dir), *Statistique historique de la Suisse*. Zurich: Chronos, 1996.
20. Sources: Paul Bairoch, *De Jéricho à Mexico. Villes et économie dans l'histoire*. Paris: Gallimard, 1985, p. 399 and *ibid.*
21. A.-M. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales*. Paris: Seuil, 2001.
22. See Jacques Gubler, *Nationalisme et internationalisme dans l'architecture moderne de la Suisse*. Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1975; and J. Salomon, Les Suisses et la ville, un rapport ambigu illustré par les expositions nationales. *Acta Geographica* 114 (1998) 33–48.

23. Cf. novels by C.-F. Ramuz in Switzerland, by M. Pagnol, J. Giono or H. Pourrat in France.
24. Quesnay, *Tableau économique*. Versailles, 1778; Marquis de Mirabeau, *Economie rurale*. 1781; Du Pont de Nemours, *Physiocratie*. Leyde, 1768.
25. Philippe Pétain, (22.08.1940) *Déclaration à la presse américaine*: 'France to-morrow will be at the same time very new and very old. It will become again something it should never have ceased to be, a nation mainly agricultural. Like the giant, it finds back its forces when it comes back in touch with the land'. Philippe Pétain, Appel du 25 juin 1940. in P. Pétain, *La France nouvelle*. Paris: Fasquelle, 1940: 'I hate all the lies which have hurt you so much. Land, itself, does not lie'.
26. F. Walter, *La Suisse urbaine*. Genève: Zoé, 1994, p. 422.
27. E. Laur, *Le Paysan suisse*. 1940 (quoted in F. Walter, *ibid.*, pp. 433–4).
28. 'Il s'agirait de placer les agglomérations aux endroits les plus habitables, sans pour autant nuire à l'agriculture. Il faudrait distribuer, non plus le long des routes principales mais dans des lieux plus tranquilles'.
29. J-F. Gravier, *Régions et nations*. 1942 (quoted in Isabelle Couzon, La place des villes dans le discours des aménageurs des années 1920 à la fin des années 1960. *Cybergeo* 37 (1997)).
30. I. Provost, *Paris et le désert français, histoire d'un mythe*. Thèse: Université d'Evry, 1999, p. 216.
31. Main territorial planning body in France, reporting to the Prime Minister. It was created in 1963, to oversee territorial planning in France.
32. The main French farmers' union built in the 1940s on the 'corporatist' principle (farm workers and rich landlords are mixed in the same union) in contrast with the class struggle principle of Marxist unions, opposing workers and landlords.
33. Rapport de la Cour des Comptes, 1995.
34. Charles Linsmayer, Wie die Landi zum 'Nationalen Heiligtum' wurde. *Der Bund* 273 (1997).
35. Armin Meili, *Erinerungen*. Verona: Mondadori, 1954, vol. 2, p. 273.
36. J.-F. Gravier, *op.cit.* [1], ed. 1972, p. 28, for instance.
37. Comité du Plan, *Une nouvelle France, ses principes et ses institutions*. Paris: Fasquelle, 1936: 'it has been clearly, distinctly and convincingly proved that the so-called liberal economy, nowadays, is unable to satisfy, even partially, the material needs of the nation', p. 13.
38. Ch. Maurras, *Mes idées politiques*. Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 2002, p. 134. The words forebode the famous Nazi motto: 'Blut und Boden'.
39. A. Carrel, *L'homme, cet inconnu*. Paris: Plon, 1935. Carrel wrote: 'We will get rid of madness and crime only by a better knowledge of man, by eugenics ... Managing less dangerous criminals with the whip would probably suffice to insure order. As for the others, who have murdered, killed children ..., an institution for euthanasia provided with adequate gases would dispose of them in a human and economical way' (p. 435).
40. A. Drouard, *Une inconnue des sciences sociales: la fondation Alexis Carrel, 1941–45*. Paris: Ed MSH, 1992.
41. See, for Italy: Anna Treves, Fascisme et urbanisation en Italie. *L'Espace géographique* 2 (1981) 115–24 and, for Germany: D. Schubert, Grossstadtfeindschaft und Stadtplanung. Neue Anmerkungen zu einer alten Diskussion. *Die alte Stadt* 1 (1986) 22–41. For Germany and France: Bernard Marchand, Nationalismus und Grossstadtfeindschaft. *Die Alte Stadt* 1 (1999) 39–50.
42. D. Schubert, Gottfried Feder und sein Beitrag zur Stadtplanungstheorie. *Die alte Stadt* 3 (1986) 192–211.
43. M. Rotach, *Aménagement national suisse, Conception directrice de l'aménagement du territoire, CK73/Landesplanerische Leitbild CK73*. Bern: erarbeitet von der Chefbeamtkonferenz des Bundes, 1973.
44. See the example of the Vaud Canton in J. Salomon Cavin, *op. cit.* [5], part 5.
45. J.-L. Piveteau, L'aménagement du territoire en Suisse : repli frileux ou frémissement de reprise? *L'Espace géographique* 4 (1989) 313–17.

46. J.-L. Piveteau, *Temps du territoire*. Genève: Zoé, 1995, pp. 115–43.
47. Although it has been, at times, under the responsibility of other ministries.
48. DATAR, *40 ans d'aménagement du territoire*. Paris: La Documentation Française, 2003, p. 8.
49. I. Provost, *op. cit.* [30], p. 18. It is remarkable, however, that such discussion is proposed by a sociologist but has never been even attempted or considered possible by geographers.
50. E. Howard, *To-morrow a peaceful path to real reform*. London: Swann Sonnenschein, 1898, p. 131.
51. It appears in the book of H. Carol and M. Werner, *Städte wie wir sie wünschen*. Zurich, 1949.
52. At the same time, Gottfried Feder described the perfect city which would be established all over the Nazi empire: a 20 000-inhabitant centre in the middle of a rural area (G. Feder *Die neue Stadt*. Berlin, 1939).
53. F. Walter, *op.cit.* [7].
54. *Ibid.*
55. R. O. Paxton, *La France de Vichy, 1940–44*. Paris: Le Seuil, 1973, p. 249: '[In France] antagonism between technocrats and members of the Parliament increases between the two wars. For the experts, elected deputies are at best, dabblers, and at worst ignorant morons. Public service is a "realistic" activity consisted of "doing", not a "political" process which tries only to "make an impression"'].
56. I. Provost, *op. cit.* [30], pp. 83, 89.
57. The ratio of built area to land area; a basic planning tool.
58. M. Roncayollo, *Histoire de la France urbaine*. Paris: Seuil, 1985, conclusion part V.
59. Quoted in I. Provost, *op. cit.* [30]; declaration to the newspaper *Le Monde*, 19 February 1997.
60. Economic and social cohesion in the European Union: the impact of member states own policies. *Regional Development Studies* 29 (1998).
61. See P.-G. Gerosa, M. Bassand and J.-B. Racine, L'urbain et l'idéologie, in M. Bassand, D. Joye and M. Schuler (eds) *Les enjeux de l'urbanisation en Suisse/Agglomerationsprobleme in der Schweiz*. Bern: OEPR, Peter Lang, 1988, pp. 115–33.
62. Conseil fédéral, *Rapport sur les grandes lignes de l'organisation du territoire*. Berne, 22 may 1996, pp. 31, 44. See J. Salomon Cavin, *op. cit.* [5], part 6.