

Hélène DUCROS, Research Associate
University of Leicester, United Kingdom
Department of Geography
helenede3@numericable.fr

Proposal for Geolab conference (Limoges, 18-21 November 2015):
Capital environnemental: représentations, pratiques, dominations, appropriations spatiales

Abstract

Place-branding as environmental capital

The concept of environmental capital provides an entry point into the exploration of the values by which the environment gets produced as well as the actors implicated in this process. The examination of place-branding models can contribute to disentangling environmental capital in that they rely on culturally produced representations of the landscape that are standardized through evaluation tools and what has been called “technologies of localization”, such as place-based *labels*. I investigate the label of the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France (*Association des Plus Beaux Villages de France*) and the transnational diffusion of its place-branding model, which culminated in the creation of a federated network comprising ten other nations that have joined under a common agenda of rural revitalization through rural heritage preservation and reinvention. Through its *Charte de Qualité*, the Association not only evaluates whether candidate villages embody the environmental canons it has delineated as representative of rural landscapes, but also influences local governance and planning in member-villages through the prescription of norms as conditions for sustained membership. The paradox between, on one hand, the pressure of retaining and even enhancing environmental specificity and local identities rooted in the cultural landscape, and on the other hand, the standardization of the lived environment and national appropriation (“*de France*”) that occur through the patrimonialization process leads to questions about environmental representativity, the bureaucratization of authenticity, the commodification of locality, and the relationship between environment and nation.