

## **Rural Territorial Governance is Confronted with Urbanization in the Sub-Prefecture of Bingerville**



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**ABSTRACT:** Suburban and peripheral villages of big cities are undergoing deep changes related to urban pressure. Actors, issues, challenges as well as conflicts of land use are more and more numerous and influence the modes of governance of these rural territories. These changes raise the problem of competence of each actor in the management of evolution dynamics of peripheral rural spaces in a context marked by permanent encroachment of urban on rural. This study focuses on rural governance in Bingerville, one of the most affected sub-prefectures by Abidjan's spatial dynamics. It examines rural governance modes confronted with urbanization. How are economic and social development strategies implemented in villages considering morphological, social and functional changes that are taking place? The data collection methodology is based on documentary research and field surveys (observation, interviews and inquiry through questions). Observation has been necessary for estimating intensity of co-production of landscape by different actors. Interviews and inquiry through questions shed light on the modes of governance as known, settled and experienced by stakeholders. Results highlight two essential aspects:

- Local political system and rural territory's actors
- the various modes of governance linked to the games and stakes of actors involved.

Customary governance is based on a political system made up of generations with a rotating power time. Cornerstone of local system, the chiefdom, while striving to maintain a certain pre-eminence, choose all the time traditional and patrimonial governance. The State and local authorities choose a participatory approach involving village communities, private companies, families and individuals having interests in defined areas. The current peri-urban landscape thus has the mark of this everlasting conflicting combination.

**KEYWORDS:** Governance, territory, urbanization, peri-urban, Bingerville

### **INTRODUCTION**

Territorial governance according to Augias D. (2021, p.16) refers to the way of implementing different public policies associated with competences of territorial authorities by integrating private, trade union and associative actors, but also more and more, citizens who participate in this process of co-production of public action on territories. In this regard, rural territorial governance involves several actors in a dynamic interaction, especially when it concerns villages under the influence of large metropolises. Villages of Bingerville are submitted to two driving forces: the expansion of the city of Bingerville and that of Abidjan. This double spatial dynamism generates a co-building of peripheral rural spaces which takes into account all the interests and actors involved. This work focuses on governance in these rural territories acting as an interface between the rural and urban. A space described by some people as valueless space given its rural and urban characteristics. The fundamental question that arises in these areas is knowing the form of governance that can take into account all interests and a better end for conflicts of land use. The choice of the sub-prefecture is not accidental. Indeed, this sub-prefecture is a sort of conurbation of Abidjan city today. The influence of Abidjan city is such that all villages are undergoing deep changes. They are either totally integrated or on the way of being integrated. In regards of these irreversible changes, indigenous populations are finding strategies to make themselves not ignored. However, the risk of seeing their own territory slip away from them imposes adaptations on these rural communities that take into account the internal dynamics of these indigenous communities. Compromises with the State or with private companies or individuals do not work without revealing real problems of governance. Two elements structure this work.

- The analysis of the rural landscape as shaped by urbanization. This analysis takes into account the two driving forces that are the sprawl of Abidjan and that of Bingerville. Some villages are already within the city and form a single territorial entity with it, while others are waiting to be wolfed down.

- The actual modes of governance. In view of the numerous actors who have interests in these areas, it is certainly important to analyze the decision-making strategies for rural development. Do public authorities succeed in imposing the general interest in a

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context when the NIMBY phenomenon (protest against public investments without giving value to customary property) is becoming increasingly frequent and violent? Authors, such as OMAR Bessaoud and ANNARITA Antonelli (2009), believe that the state power must be shown. The analysis is based on an appropriate methodology for rural studies.

### METHODOLOGY

Methodology takes into account documentation, observation, interviews and data collection through inquiry by questions.

#### I.1 Documentation

Books on rural governance are rare. This study selected and analyzed a few documentary sources. These are the technical services of Bingerville town hall, scientific publications and satellite pictures. The collected data are related to urbanization in Côte d'Ivoire in general, from Abidjan city development and planning (Ministry of Construction, Housing, Sanitation and Urban Planning 2015 and the National Office of Technical Studies and Development), to urbanization of the sub-prefecture of Bingerville (LOBA, 2004).

#### I.2. Observation

Observation was done at a double level. First, the urban landscape that has integrated some villages, and then, the rural landscape confronted with urbanization. Observation underlines the games of actors in the area as well as the issues at the top of decisions. It is followed by interviews.

#### I.3. Interviews

Interviews were conducted with managers of state institutions (devolved and decentralized) and village institutions (village chiefdom). Managers of private companies and real estate companies working in the area were also asked to participate in the interviews. The distribution of people involved is shown in the following table 1.

Institutions Managers or Private companies Managers	Numbers
Sub-prefecture	02
Town Hall	01
Ministry of interior	02
Village Chiefdom	03
Private Companies	03
Total	11

Source: our 2022 survey

#### I.4. Data collection through inquiry by questions

Two methods of questioning were chosen in order to take into account the specificity of villages: self-administration for those who can read and write and assisted administration for illiterates. The three types of villages (neighborhood- village, suburban-village, and peripheral-village) are taken into account. The choice of villages was made by a simple random draw without repetition. The distribution of household heads questioned in each village is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 : Distribution of household heads questioned in each village

Villages	Number of household heads
Adjamé-Bingerville	15
Akandjé	8
M'Batto Bouaké	10
Abatta	10
Total	43

Source: our 2022 survey

Results of these inquiries are revealed in the following chapters.

## II. RESULTS

Results obtained from investigations in various villages can be presented as follows: the complexity of rural landscapes whose analysis provides a key for reading the issues and the governance modes involved.

### I.1. Complexity of rural landscapes of Bingerville

Territories of Bingerville villages and their contents are complex. That complexity lies not only in the morphology but also and above all in the function and social content. This change is based on the organizing power of space through distance from a center according to Von Thünen's theory. Here, distance between villages and cities of Bingerville and Abidjan is the central core that organizes the area.

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### I.1.1. The changing rural landscape in the sub-prefecture of Bingerville

Three types of rural landscape can be distinguished in the sub-prefecture of Bingerville. The landscape of neighborhood villages, landscape of suburban villages and landscape of peripheral villages. This classification takes into account the position of each village; Characteristics of each landscape depends on the distance that separates it from the cities of Bingerville and Abidjan. Three classes (inspired by Dunlop J. 2009, p. 55 and 57, definition of suburb and periphery) are clearly noticed in the area: Neighborhood villages, suburban villages and peripheral villages.

#### - Neighborhood villages

These villages are entirely integrated into the municipality and form a single homogeneous entity with it. There is no longer any land to be coveted by private actors or to be kept by indigenous populations. The old rural core is easily distinguished from the city that annexed it because of its morphology; Houses are generally low and form a whole whose homogeneity is sometimes broken by renovations for rental purposes (picture 1).



**Picture 1: Main Road in the village of Adjamé-Bingerville at nightfall**  
**Photography: Kouassi Y. Frédéric**

The social content is less heterogeneous. It is the indigenous village that tries to avoid demands of town hall. These areas of the city are finally the only ones resulting from villages extension. Villages receive more and more people from other communities through rental and changes of houses for commercial purposes. Neighborhood village is a fine place with less important territorial stakes; there is no longer any possibility of extension of the village and morphological changes are rather inside. This specificity leads to a less conflicting mode of governance, which is not the case in suburbs.

#### - Suburban villages

Suburban village differ from those in the neighborhood by their position. These villages are on the way of being integrated into the city, but there is no landscape changes between the city and villages. Apart from the old rural core, the entire territory is in total change. It is an environment of heterogeneous sprawl where real estate projects, interstices and agriculture are mixed (Board 1).



**BOARD 1 : A variety of elements that exist in the suburban villages**  
**Photography: Kouassi Y. Frédéric**

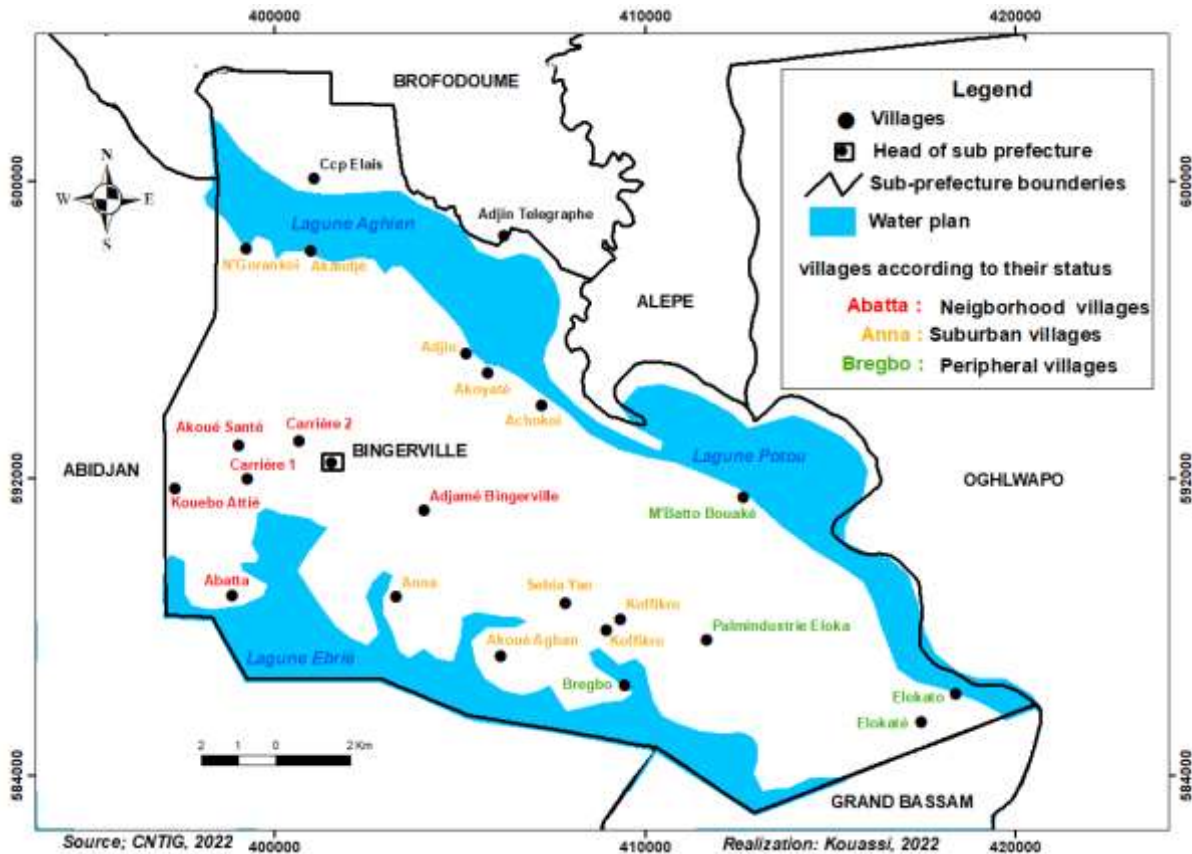
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Stakes here are enormous. Conflicts linked to the differentiated use of land require a particular mode of governance. A few kilometers from this area lay the landscapes of peripheral villages.

- Peripheral villages of Bingerville and Abidjan

Very few in number (five), they are characterized by a relative rugged landscape with the town of Bingerville, which is itself entirely integrated into the one of Abidjan. Agriculture, in a precarious situation, is still predominant. The territorial stakes are even more important. Indeed, these territories are perceived as area of great future projects linked to large Abidjan area. As a result, customary authorities feel threat of possible dispossession of land for public interests. These three rural areas do not offer the same economic and functional opportunities.

Map 1 shows the position of each village in regards of Bingerville town.

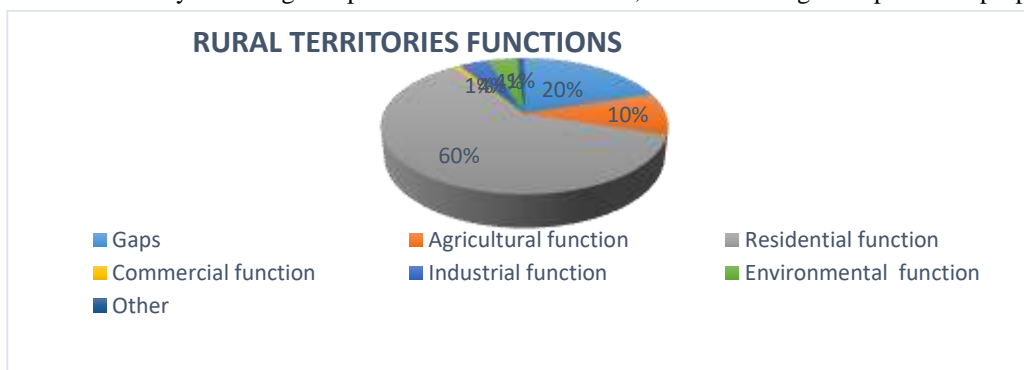


MAP 1 : Position of villages according to their category

The further away the village is from the city, the less it is subject to land pressure of cities of Bingerville and Abidjan. These villages are subject to different issues and governance mode that prevails in them is strongly linked to their specificity and their position. The complexity of these areas is also linked to their functions.

### I.2 Increasingly complex functions

Function of rural areas is becoming increasingly complex, so much that it is more appropriate to speak of variety of functions. Indigenous population, formerly farmers and living essentially of farming and fishing economy, which gave the rural population its agricultural function. Today rural environment has acquired several functions due to development of Bingerville and Abidjan. The agricultural function is clearly declining compare to residential function, which is taking an exponential proportion (Figure 1).



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Human habitat uses more space than all economic activities (Table 1). Economic activities are in sharp decline; cocoa and coffee cultivation has totally disappeared from the area. Only rubber trees are still resisting urban expansion. Its position can be explained by its recent cultivation into the production system of local population and also because of informal landowners.

**Table 3: Land use in sub-prefecture of Bingerville between 1969 and 2020**

Name	Period 1969		Period 2000		Period 2020	
	Area (ha)	%	Area(ha)	%	Area(ha)	%
Dense forest	12 961,91	44,59	1 236,75	4,25	-	-
Degraded forest	440,11	1,51	1 342,22	4,62	1 056,70	3,63
Swamp or gallery forest	2 256,54	7,76	2190,90	7,54	2 125,04	7,31
Cocoa and coffee	244,04	0,84	-	-	-	-
Rubber tree	926,23	3,19	742,22	2,55	1 503,06	5,17
Palm grove	3 229,94	11,11	5 529,63	19,02	3 353,62	11,54
Other cultures or secondary thickets	2 701,92	9,29	11 021,17	37,91	3 205,30	11,03
Water plan or water retention	5 481,02	18,85	5 921,15	20,37	5 979,12	20,57
Marshy area	-	-	-	-	265,42	0,91
Human habitat	830,38	2,86	1 088,04	3,74	11 583,83	39,85
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>29 072,08</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>29 072,08</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>29 072,08</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Source: CNTIG 2020

Such a change brings a new way of managing the territory. The social content of these territories, intimately linked to their morphology, is also becoming complex.

### I.3 Complexity of the socio-political content

Ebriés people are the indigenous population of Bingerville. To this population, neighboring people were first added through internal migrations and then Malian and Ghanaian fishermen. Today, we notice a cosmopolitanism that undermines the indigenous population, especially in neighboring village. Actors (physical and moral) constituting interest groups are also increasingly numerous in the area. These include the State, local authorities (Town hall and District), the village community, real estate companies, industrials, individuals, farmers, NGOs, etc. At the political and administrative level, these villages are under control of several levels of command. Interventions of each entity obey the principle of subsidiarity (a principle according to which a territorial authority of a higher level is only given powers that cannot be carried out by another territorial authority of a lower level). Thus, the State, District and the Town Hall each invest according to their competencies in these villages. In some places, the local chiefdom takes investment initiatives that recall its claimed place in the economic and social management of villages.

In short, the complexity of rural landscape, whether morphological, functional or social, constitutes an internal and external force that shapes governance in villages.

## II/ INVOLVED MODE OF GOVERNANCE

Whether one is in a neighborhood village, or in a suburban village or in a peripheral village, the first key for reading governance mode is the political system of indigenous people. Indeed, the countryside is a set of heritage territories. The territory itself is a suitable space, lived and managed by a community. This community projects onto the space its picture, its culture and its developments related to its civilization. Thus, one of the factors that lead the choice of options for rural territorial governance in Bingerville is the political system of Ebriés natives, which is trying to adapt to changes imposed by urbanization.

### II.1 A local socio-political system in a situation of adaptive and resilient governance

Age groups and chiefdom are the two important institutions of local community. Until colonial era, decision-making power was in the hands of elders. Colonization of the area watered down gerontocracy and added chiefdom to it. The chief is chosen within the age group in power, which is in fact at the center of decision-making process.

#### II.1.1 The decision-making process

The chief is the interface between administration and rural community. Decisions and development strategies are therefore taken by the ruling generation. The group of the generation in power is the body that designs and executes village development policy. It is the place where development strategies are incubated and hatched around the chief. The chief therefore relies on a council of



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notables. Each notable has a role assigned to him. This is then a democracy with an age class practicing a collegial system of governance. But with urbanization, new issues appear (land management, management of lagoons, taxes in villages, exploitation of natural resources, etc.). Commodification of land is becoming the determining factor in the decision-making process. It is at the center of all conflicts of interest observed in rural area. The autocratic governance of certain village chiefs often does not sit well with the changes observed, so there is increasing talk of integrating other bodies such as the committee in charge of land, youth and women in the decision-making process. As land becomes an important economic stake, there is a process of affirmation of family identities. Families interests are taken into account by those in power. Rural governance is adapting to these changes and becoming resilient insofar as the notion of sustainability of investments is being introduced into strategies to replace irreversible loss of land. This ambition often leads to the dismissal or even imprisonment of village leaders. An illustration of this resilience of generations in power is given in the village of Adjame-Bingerville through the building of housing estates for rental purposes and commercial and cultural centers to perpetuate collective income of villagers and take into account interests of young people (Board 2).



**BOARD 2 : Houses and commercial center built by generation in power in ADJAME-BINGERVILLE, neighborhood village of BINGERVILLE**

**Photography: Kouassi Y. Frédéric**

Rural communities, disturbed by the desire to perpetuate their tradition of governance and demands imposed by urban development, are making investments that allow them to adapt. They initiate projects and manage them according to their tradition. However, despite these measures to guarantee well-being of present and future generations, conflicts are increasingly recurrent and violent.

### **II.1. 2. Conflict resolution, from palaver tree to courthouse**

One of the important aspects of governance in rural areas is conflict resolution.

Even if conflicts are inherent to collective life, certain factors are the most determining factors in their occurrence in villages of Bingerville; this is the case for land management. Conflicts that arise in these areas are mainly caused by land management. In the tradition of natives, the settlement of conflicts is the business of elders justice. All conflicts were brought before village authorities. The palaver tree was used as a place to settle disputes. Credit given to this form of justice is tending to disappear and the road of courthouses is more and more requested because of the complexity of those conflicts. There are several cases of conflicts between neighboring villages over subdivisions that do not always take into account village legitimate or legal boundaries.

However, it is not only internal dynamics related to indigenous management system that affect village mode of governance. External powers such as the state, local authorities and private actors have an important influence, driven by urbanization. Proliferation of actors in space requires multi scalar governance of territories.

### **II.2 Multi scalar governance for harmonious and peaceful development of villages under urban influence**

This is an approach that makes it possible to tickle governance at several integrated levels. This governance mode involves a wide range of actors. It is a system of dynamic entanglement. This mode of governance, more or less adopted in rural landscape, takes into account the fact that no village near big cities can settle its own development without taking into account the urban fact. Several interlocking scales of decision can be observed.

#### **II.2.1. Decision-making levels**

These are either village communities, or the State and its interland authorities or local authorities.

##### **II.2.1.1. Territorial authorities (town hall and autonomous district)**

In addition to the city, six villages are integrated into the municipality. These villages are subject to double management: Management of Town hall and that of traditional chiefdom. Under the terms of Law No. 2003-208 of July 7, 2003 on transfer and distribution of powers from the State to the local authorities, the Municipality must, among many other duties, coordinate development actions in districts and villages of the Municipality. To do this, it is necessary to involve villagers in decision-making

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when it concerns development actions in villages within the Municipality. It is village chiefs who are generally invited to the working sessions. The matter of representativeness is itself problematic; Chiefs are often challenged or even dismissed from their position by rural community. This is because villages interests are sometimes sacrificed to those of chiefs themselves. Governance at the center of relationship between the Municipality and village communities concerns several matters:

### **- Financial governance**

Taxation matter is at the center of debate. Which taxpayer and which subject should be taxed in the villages? Or should villages be considered as non-taxing areas in the Municipality? Can all economic activities in villages be subject to taxation? The Town hall sometimes encounters difficulties because villagers want to collect taxes themselves. Chiefdoms act as development institutions that need to control their income sources. Land field is another element at the center of rural governance.

### **- Land governance**

Land matter is the element of discord between rural community and town hall. Here, governance requires use of principles of cooperation. Development of Municipality can only take place on land base which is villagers customary property. Thus, cooperative governance would bring together villagers and municipal authorities for harmonious land use in order to preserve interests of all stakeholders. This principle, which is well known to all, hardly resist to ambitions of actors. In fact, village housing estates are often made in collaboration with private operators without necessarily waiting for approval from public authorities. Request for approval is made later. This process, which has become commonplace and almost legal, settles rural community at the center of land governance because it is upstream of the decision-making process concerning land acquisition. Village attestation is a document that has become essential. Process of land acquisition begins with recognition of the owner and his or her property title under customary principles. Land governance thus combines custom and positive law and involves several actors with sometimes contradictory interests. Multi-scalar governance of the village can be schematized as shown in Figure 1 below.

### **- Governance of infrastructure and economic activities**

The achievement of certain basic infrastructures falls within the competence of Town hall. However, Traces of Town hall are almost invisible, the farther away one is from the city, so that the 7 km radius around the city that is accepted as communal territory is problematic. Indeed, suburban villages are mostly outside this regulatory framework because they barely benefit or not at all from communal investments. The problem that arises here is the choice of localities to house or benefit from investments. This unilateral choice is decried by some villagers. A courthouse (the case of Adjamé-Bingerville) or a primary school, for example, built on the land of a suburban village offers opportunities to that village. The price of a square meter of land has increased dramatically (from less than 10,000 CFA francs to more than 20,000 CFA francs in 5 years) since the building of the courthouse began. Cooperation principle, considered as one of the pillars in context of rural development, is less settle; villagers are most often presented with accomplished fact and are only invited in the context of negotiations for the purging of customary rights related to land use. Thus, development projects that are not settled in concert with village community that holds customary rights reveal problem of governance, which needs to be improved. Apart from Town hall, the autonomous district remains an important actor. The district has intervened in many villages in terms of investment. The improvement of the living conditions of villagers in the sub-prefecture has resulted in the building of infrastructure, mainly roads and social community facilities. The district has thus taken into account interests of villagers in its governance by involving them in formulating their needs. Local authorities, as the decision-making center, participate in multi-sector rural governance, as does the State.

### **II.2.1.2. The State, the upper level of multi scalar rural governance**

The main question raised by intervention of the State in suburban and peripheral villages is the strategy put in place to reconcile customary ownership and the need for development induced by urban sprawl. The State has created the legal framework that governs relationship between actors. This was achieved through transfer of competences under Law No. 2003-208 of July 7, 2003, on transfer and distribution of competences from the State to territorial authorities. The State's support for villages is also reflected in the appointment decree that is given to village chiefs to indicate that they are effectively government's representatives in the village. The presence of the State is also seen in the deconcentrated administrations, particularly the sub-prefecture, which is the interface between the State and village community. As such, any investment project in villages of Bingerville must be authorized by the sub-prefecture. This is the case for sand quarry operations. Ministries of Justice and of Construction and Housing are also contacted for decisions on subdivisions and settlement of conflicts. Thus, the State, through its branches, is the highest level in decision-making process for rural development.

## **II.3. DISCUSSION**

This study has shown the complexity of rural landscape in Bingerville. This complexity is due to the sprawl of Abidjan and Bingerville cities. The resulting rural governance takes two forms: a local socio-political system in a situation of adaptive but resilient governance and a multi-scalar governance with a necessary pre-eminence of the State.

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### II.3.1. The complexity of the rural landscape driven by urban sprawl

Villages of Bingerville are under influence of two cities (Abidjan and Bingerville). In fact, both the city of Bingerville and its rural hinterland are under influence of Abidjan city. The polarizing power of Abidjan metropolis introduces several changes in rural peri-urban landscape. These morphological, functional and social changes, which this work reveals, appear to be a universal movement. In developed countries, as indicated by GILLARDOT P. (1997. 187), the changes that make rural territories complex concern the uses that are made of them and which, on the whole, have become more complicated. In the case of Bingerville, the city is the element that explains these changes. The city viewed as an important key of rural change is widely discussed by rural and non-rural authors. Chaléard J.L. and CHARVET J.P. (2004, p.121) estimate that "urban growth leads to urban sprawl without considering agricultural land [...] in the United States, urban sprawl consumes 500,000 hectares of agricultural land per year. In France, each year, several tens of thousands of hectares change assignment. Even if statistics remain silent on this level in our case, it is well known that the diversified and differentiated use of land has led to complexity of the peri-urban territory. The resulting governance is first based primarily on tradition of indigenous people and takes into account different actors whose interests sometimes contradict each other in the area.

### II.3.2. Governance modes involved

Social, economic and functional changes taking place in peripheral rural territories are generating considerable resilience. Confronted with urbanization, indigenous populations are finding ways to resist; better in addition, they are creating conditions for their being unavoidable. The lack of gap on part of authors on the subject does not spoil anything from the need to evaluate our results in the light of a few writings. For ANOMAN P.R. and KOFFI-DIDIA A. M. (2022, p.57), " Response of indigenous populations is organized in a set of strategies carried out at different levels to seize economic opportunities linked to urban issues on built and unbuilt land".

Multi scalar governance takes changes policy and becomes local or territorial governance to join AUGIAS D. (2021, p.16) for whom this form of governance is "the way of implementing the different public policies associated with competences of territorial authorities by integrating private union and association actors, but also, increasingly, citizens who participate in this process of co-production of public action on the territories". In this increasing number of actors with often divergent interests, OMAR B. ANNARITA A. et al. believe that the role of the State must be predominant. Indeed, as they themselves say, the new challenges, those related to sustainable rural development and the insertion of rural community and economies in the global context requires public authorities to adopt deep reforms in public policies and rural governance institutions. Despite the scarcity of books on the interweaving of decision-making scales at rural level, our results, when compared with some others, confirm the idea which in this context stipulates that peripheral rural territories should only use, cooperative, participatory and collaborative governance: that is what we summarized by a more federative notion: multi scalar governance.

## CONCLUSION

Confronted with urbanization, rural territories are becoming increasingly complex. This complexity is reflected in changes that are taking place in rural landscape. Three types of villages can be observed in space. The neighborhood villages fully integrated into the city, the suburban villages on way of integration forming no landscape gap with the city and peripheral villages relatively further from the city. These types of villages are associated with functional and social changes. Indeed, the social content of villages has not only changed but it is the function that marks the most obvious break with past; residential function has taken over agricultural function. Agricultural land is irreversibly disappearing confronted with real estate companies. Governance modes resulting from these changes are based on the political system of indigenous communities and consideration of diversity of actors involved in the area. Indigenous village community is developing strategies to adapt and to continue having control over the land. In order to take all interests into account, the most appropriate mode of governance is one that takes into account all levels of decision-making, from the village to the State, including local authorities and private companies. This is the form of governance that we have called "multiscalar governance".

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