

GERAR Seminar on Land Consolidation
Lyon, 25th – 28th September 2013
70 years of land consolidation in France.
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Ladies and gentlemen,

GERAR is a 40-year old professional association which is known as the national syndicate of land surveyors specialising in rural land consolidation.

All the members of the syndicate are land surveyors registered with the *Ordre des géomètres experts* (the French national Order of Land Surveyors), and are also officially recognised by the Ministry of Agriculture.

Within our syndicate, our mission and objectives are :

- To promote land consolidation in all its forms,
- To modernise the procedures in order to bring them into line with the challenges and demands of rural development, and
- To provide proper training for its members.

GERAR wanted to organise this international seminar on rural land consolidation which took place last week in Lyon firstly because its members are extremely interested in land consolidation, secondly because they are convinced that it is a tool which has demonstrated its effectiveness for the last 70 years and, finally, because they want to make information on the French expertise and approach available to as wide a public as possible.

Land consolidation is a tool applicable both to the present and to the future, as it preserves harmony between local development, the need for agricultural production and respect for the environment. We wanted to share this conviction with other land specialists both in France and other countries.

In order to introduce the debate, several international organisations presented their vision of the subject.

Next, three eminent researchers told us about the first steps in land management, and on the origins and the results of land consolidation in France:

The so-called « *abornements généraux* » in France, which aimed to provide a delimitation of all private property in the countryside, between 1830 and 1880.

The first land consolidations began in 1942 and became general from 1945 on.

Today, we can count more than 16 million hectares of consolidated land, in 22000 different operations.

In order to present the French experience and to compare it to other foreign practices, we have broken it down into 5 topics:

- Regulatory basis ;
- Large-scale construction projects ;
- Forestry-related;

- Local and environmental development ;
- Amicable exchanges of property.

In addition to presentations covering French experience on these topics, the experience of other countries was presented to us, namely: in the two regions of Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia), Finland, Greece, Rumania and Switzerland.

The programme was rich and the presentations were very high quality.

There were 140 people registered for the seminar, of whom 70 came from other countries : Algeria, Belgium, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Denmark, Finland, Gabon, Greece, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mali, Morocco, Norway, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Togo.

The participants fall into 3 groups:

- 1) personalities who came to deliver a message;
- 2) those who regularly practise land consolidation and who came to compare and share their experience;
- 3) observers who came to inform themselves.

1- The first group refers to leading personalities from international organisations: the World Bank, the WPLA, FAO and FIG (the International Federation of Land Surveyors).

All of the organisations gave the message that it is essential to improve agricultural production so as to ensure food for the world's population, which is continuing to grow.

In order to do this, it is necessary to enable the creation or installation of agricultural production facilities and the improvement of production conditions, to make them effective, profitable and durable.

Land consolidation is an essential tool for achieving this.

However, before consolidation, it is essential to define and identify the property rights or title to the land.

They presented the fragmentation and consolidation procedures undertaken to this effect in the countries of Eastern Europe.

2 – The second group consisted of technical experts, from countries which have been practising land consolidation for decades, who came to present their procedures and examples relating to particular challenges.

We were able to note that the procedures of all these countries developed in the same manner.

They went from mainly agricultural consolidation, as was the case 50 years ago, to land consolidation which takes into account local development and environmental improvements and place the same importance on all 3 objectives.

In each country, we can see that the legal and regulatory procedural basis is very precise and guarantees fairness of exchange and equality of treatment of those concerned.

The land consolidation in the various countries are based on the same issues and arrive at the same results. Only the procedures change according to the country.

Land consolidation in the Northern European countries is guided by administrative structures or multidisciplinary expert committees which design the projects and then put them to the public in the form of a political consultation process.

They then adapt them according to the observations made. These procedures are often very long. The length of time depends on the number of experts involved and the number of political

consultations required to achieve a general consensus. They can drag on for more than 15 years!

Land consolidation in France differs from other approaches by the fact that it is always piloted by a local committee, made up of representatives and users of the land in question.

Such committees systematically consist of:

- 2 representatives of the local authority where the land is based;
- 3 local representatives from among the landowners concerned;
- 3 local representatives from among the farmers affected;
- 3 qualified persons representing the protection of the local environment;
- 3 representatives from among the local foresters, if a forested area is affected.

With the assistance of the land surveyor appointed for the task, this committee first carefully examines the relevant cadastral data with a view to identifying the real landowners; then it ranks the land in question, in terms of agricultural production value or market value, according to the type of procedure chosen.

Then, the land surveyor individually consults all of the owners, farmers and foresters, local associations and the local authority, in order to collect their wishes and requirements and to set up a project plan for land exchanges and any related works, always keeping in mind: the predefined objectives of general interest to be achieved, the expressed individual interests and the legal requirements which have to be respected.

This plan is then validated by the local committee, after which it is submitted to a public inquiry, to enable each owner to make remarks or to appeal the plan.

The role of the state administration in the procedure is to establish and/or verify that the project respects the rules of law and the environmental requirements applying to the consolidated land.

In summary :

- The land consolidation plan is established in concertation with all local parties concerned.
- Complaints regarding the content are examined by another local committee (at « département » level.
- The procedural rules and respect for the environment are verified by the State administration.

This procedure is a model of participative democracy, where each individual is involved in the consolidation of his/her land.

Such projects take around 7 years to reach a conclusion (from the initial studies to the end of the works) and always arrive at a successful conclusion.

3- The third group of seminar participants can be called observers. The majority of them came from African countries, but also, in some cases, from Eastern Europe.

They are in the process of considering which procedural model for land consolidation could best be instigated in their own countries.

We feel that the choice should be determined by the history of their country, the personality of their inhabitants and their concertational customs, i.e. they should choose between:

- Procedures piloted by the State or the administrative bodies of the country ;

- or: procedures by which land consolidation plans are established by committees of experts;
- or again, procedures in which local representatives are involved in the construction of each Land Consolidation Plan.

The important thing is for the procedure to be as simple and quick as possible, and for it to be profitable for the parties concerned and for the State to see an adequate return on its investment.

Before ending this brief summary of the seminar, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that we intend to produce a publication compiling the approximately thirty presentations which were given during the seminar.

Thank you for your attention.