



# BUILDING RESISTING TERRITORIES

HOW THE LONGTERM MOVEMENT STRATEGY OF THE FRENCH ASSOCIATION „TERRES DE LUTTES“ IS EMPOWERING HUNDREDS OF LOCAL COLLECTIVES


Joel, involved in anti-nuclear struggles in eastern France, speaks about „Terres de Luttes“ (übersetzt: „Widerständige Territorien“). Founded in 2020, the association aims to empower struggles against polluting projects across France. Their strategy focuses on building coalitions of local groups facing large corporations, providing direct support through training, legal assistance and funding. Terres de Luttes' methods include creating a map of local struggles, conducting sociological studies and organizing coalitions on regional and thematic levels. They offer trainings on communication, mobilization and legal issues, connect activists with lawyers and organize large gatherings. Terres de Luttes' current strategy for countering the fascist uprising involves researching local far-right influence in order to strengthen resistance networks. They are organizing webinars on far-right resistance and plan a thorough study of the „territories“.

 *Can you briefly introduce yourself, who are you and how long you have been around?*

I'm Joel and involved in anti-nuclear struggles in France, mainly around the resistance against the plans for a huge nuclear waste site in Bure. In the last 20 years I was engaged in many social and environmental struggles in Paris and France. Since three years, I'm working with the association Terres de Luttes. It was created in 2020 by Victor and Chloé, who were very much involved in climate movements before.

 *Thank you. Why does Terres de Luttes exist? And what are you working towards?*

**Terres de Luttes is aiming to empower struggles against polluting in ecocidal projects all over France.** Our goals are to support those struggles with all they need and connect them together within a large environmental struggle network. We want to put pressure on the state by a big interconnected network of local struggles.

 *What are your strategic approaches?*

Everywhere in France we have smaller or bigger collectives with very different political visions and motivations who are fighting harmful projects in their territories. And they are often facing big companies with only few means and experiences. **In Terres de Luttes we consider that coalescing all these struggles together will make them stronger to face these big companies.** Also because in a lot of places they fight against the same



**We are supporting different forms of coalitions: thematic and regional.** It's important that we bring collectives together who fight the same things, for example against road projects. But we also have to support regional coalitions, so that collectives who are not fighting on the same things but who are acting in the same territories can come together.

**In our direct support of the collectives we built up trainings on communication, legal staff, mobilization.** But we don't say to them „that is what you should do“. It's more to collect experiences from many collectives and to share with the people like „some people did this in this place and others did this in this place and it was successful; maybe you should do that, maybe you can try this“. And not to explain people what they should do because each place has their own realities.




**We are also offering legal support.** We have two people in our association who have legal knowledge. So we connect the collectives directly with lawyers or with other legal support structures. Next year we plan to publish a book on environmental appeals in libraries so that everybody can do their own appeals.


**We also think it is important to gather, to have big gatherings with all these collectives and coalitions.** Last year we organized a big meeting in Larzac with 7,000 people. We had 100 workshops and conferences at the same time during four days. It was really, really strong to empower all these collectives and coalitions. It is as if in four days we did the work from three years.

**More recently, we decided to create an endowment fund with coalition representatives in the administrative team.** We use this fund to finance collectives directly during the whole year with friendly foundation's money. In two years we have supported around 40 coalitions and collectives. Recently we also financed several salaries for coordinators of coalitions. We want and cannot be inside all coalitions the whole time. But if we want the coalitions to stay mobilized and reactive, we need some people with paid resources as coordinators.




 ***I love it. And - How can we imagine your concrete political work? What are your important components of your outreach work, your regular offers?***


We work on several levels. We have direct political work on the ground with the collectives and the coalitions on a regional and national ground. We are supporting the organization of meetings and gatherings. We also open spaces between struggles and big national organizations like trade unions, the farmer unions and environmental organizations. In those big organizations, we are also pushing a political vision on local struggles in big organizations so they are more concerned about the realities of the local struggles and their actions.

 ***How does your mapping project work? Who can find themselves on it and how can you network?***

**Many struggles write to us and register directly on the map. We do not have to find them because they come to us - they want to be visible.** Others hear about us through our newsletter where many many people and collectives subscribed. We also have a toolkit website where we have resources from the struggles. Many collectives are looking for very precise information and find tools on the website. Finally, some join the coalition space because often they have a new project near to their home. The project is, for example, a new road so they're contacting the coalition on the roads and we have not a direct contact. More often, we are directly contacted by collectives for questions on legal support as many need support for their appeals.

 ***How do you research new local groups initiatives, how do you actively approach these groups? How do you win them over?***

We don't have to win them over, I have the feeling, because they come naturally to the coalitions. **They need the coalitions because they are often not strong enough to fight alone against the companies.** So as soon as they have contacted the coalitions, we bring support. And they know, they'll do it through this support.


 ***Really nice. How do you see your role in the movement landscape and in the relation to the uprisings of the Earth?***

**As Terres de Luttes, we have an empowerment role in the movement. We are in support of the movement, but we don't lead the movement. We bring experiences we have on the local struggles in this movement.** In the Uprisings of the Earth, for example, we bring trainings, experiences, facilitate the links with local struggles – that is our main action in the Uprisings of the Earth. It's more a tool approach.


**Nowadays – talking about the evolution of the movement landscape - it's a very fragile movement.** In the actual context, several anti-environment laws and many political speeches are criminalizing the environmental activists. It makes us lose environmental activists and our recent victories and successes quickly. We are very aware about the



fact that what we are building up is fragile, also this big Uprising of the Earth is fragile. **We have to be very prudent about the fact that what we are doing is more to try to empower people locally than to empower the movements between the collectives.**


 **What have been your organizational highlights in the recent times?**

We had big concerns about the far-right in the national elections [in July 2024]. **We decided to renew our strategical approach totally, to enlarge it and to consider: How could the resistances against harming projects build up other visions? How could they be extended to the world territories and enforce resisting territories?** Today, we try more to think about what could be „resisting territories“ to the far-right: What in territories builds up resistance against harmful projects, but also resistance against conservative and far-right visions?

 **What are your strategies in rural areas also in relation to anti-fascist strategies with the shift of the far-right in France and in Europe?**

For now, we have decided to begin in the same way how we have started with *Terres de Luttes*: We have to have a better understanding from the territories, a better understanding of the far-right establishments, a better understanding how and what is resisting the far-right in the territories. That’s a big part of our reflection at this moment. In a first phase in the next six months, we plan to ask many people on the social networks and all our contacts in the local collectives to participate in a big study on the territories. We want to understand: What is specific to the territory? How is the economical, the immigration, the social situation? How are the inequalities and discrimination? **We want to understand everything, to have a mapping of the territory. We want to cross this information with the far-right establishment: What makes the far-right so strong in these territories or less strong in others? In the second part – and already since three months - we have begun to have webinars about far-right resistance.** In this

webinars, we are explaining what people have tried in some territories to resist against far-right with concrete examples, showing what people are doing to fight racism or discrimination in the territories. Each month we plan to have a new webinar on this frame. **And in the third phase – in six months when we will have the report of the analysis on the territories - we begin to enforce the resisting territories as we did for the local instruments.**


 **For people who do not know your idea of territory, can you shortly say what do you understand as a territory?**

We have the same question. A „territory“ can be a department as many people in France are thinking on department or regional level because many






things are linked to it. But we don't want to enclose our vision in this administrative frontier. **We know that territories can be cultural, they can have cultural frontiers or geographical realities. We want to have the possibility to extend our vision about what is a territory.** It could be a living territory, where people are close, with the same history, with historical or cultural proximity. **For us, a territory is what people are feeling as the land where they are living.** And if the land is a department, then we have to work on the department. If the land for them is a region, then we have to work on a region level.

 **Interesting. The left theoretician and journalist Raúl Zibechi from Latin America developed the concept about „territories of resistance“. It's about how mainly the poor classes self-organize and build up resistance, how people build up territories where they resist, produce and create more autonomous and self-government structures and how by this they create these „resistance territories“.**

**I think we have the same approach. We found five pillars of our strategy. First, it is about enforcing independent places.** It could be buildings, struggle places, grounds, farms, every place which is building up a resilience and a resistance to the content of Artif-Vision. **We have also a pillar on activist networks existing in the territories:** How are they're acting, how are they connected, how could they be a resistance, how can they build up autonomy and resistance? **But we also consider the solidarity, social and associative help networks and connect them more to the activist networks.** Our idea is that they're not simply helping people every day in the cities, like distributing food and other things, but that they are more connected in a strategic vision about how we can change the territories. We want all these actors who feel as non-political and not-engaged to be more engaged and more connected to strategic vision about how to push away the far right. Many of this association have left people involved in it but are not identified as left acting entities. **The fourth of our pillars is acting on mutual aid.** If we answer to social problems of people in the territories everywhere, it's a common political basis. We have to think about how we can act on the realities which makes the far-right so strong in some territories and how we can respond to concerns from the people in the territories. We have to help the people in their concerns, so that they feel concerned by what we




defend. **The last pillar is auto-defense**, more active against far-right and conservative forces: identify, enforce or create antirepression, antifascism, antiracism, fighting discrimination networks locally through cultural, counter cultural or educational frames.


 ***I think it's useful, yes. In Germany we had a large climate movement with strong mobilizations until 2021. In part very academic and mainly in the cities, little rooted in the countryside and little anchored in rural or agriculture practices. What can we in Germany learn from your approach?***

It's difficult. **I had the feeling when I came to Germany that our realities are really different. For example, this countryside question.** Many of our struggles in France are built on countryside mobilizations since 40-50 years, like Notre-Dame-des-Landes, LARZAC and other places against nuclear projects during the 70's and 80's. **We also inherited a very strong farmer resistance network. And another really important aspect in France which supports our struggles a lot is that in the last 30 years - and especially since 10 years - many young leftist people from the cities decided to live in the countryside.** They really pushed leftist vision alternatives in rural areas. On a more marginal level this is also going on in Germany, but not as such a large movement. This is something really strong in our movement landscape and something to think about in the coming years: **How can we enlarge this movement back to the countryside?**

**And in local struggles it is very important how we are connected with the people living in places where big projects are planned: How can we be more connected with the people living there?** Those regions are often places where we don't want to live, but where we have to be present. We have to imagine how we could live there, how to make it desirable to live there. It's not easy because in far-right places, as where I live, many activists say: „Oh I would not live there. It's really hard here.“ I think we have to think how we can strategically make it possible. Because living there is important in supporting them as well as on this basis we can pretend to be part of the land we aim to defend. **It is important in direction to those people living here, showing them: „We are part of your land. We are not coming to fight from outside. We are living here, too.“**

 ***What questions do you have for the environmental and climate justice movement in Germany?***


**I would say my question is more to which spaces could we meet more to have a better understanding about our differences; how these differences could make us learn about how we could act in another way we are not used to think?** When I was in Germany, even though I am half German, I'm not thinking, not living in a German way. And coming to Germany I realized: Many things we are doing in France could not work there in the same way, as we for example have very different ways of activist organizing. But many things could be interesting to share and to see how it could be thought in a German way. For example, the Ende Gelände movement was really inspiring and brought interesting approaches and discussions to some groups in France like the radiation movement. They organized several gatherings in France, learned very much about the way Germans were thinking and organizing the struggle. They changed totally the way of acting and thinking their collective in a more German way but on a French mode.

 ***Awesome, it sounds very interesting for me and I think for our readers as well.***



And are there events or processes you want to invite groups or persons from German movements to?

Yes, the first one is LES RÉSISTANTES: The LES RÉSISTANTES is that very big gathering we did last year. In 2023 we didn't have an international part, but in 2025 we want to have an international opening. It could be a good place to meet and to share questions or experiences. LES RÉSISTANTES will happen from 6th to 10th of August 2025, from Thursday to Sunday, in Normandie. Secondly, I have the feeling we have to invent more internationalist or European spaces to share experiences. In the last 15 years we totally lost the habit to think in internationalist ways, but it's very rich to meet from one country to another to learn about what is working on another way in other countries and regions and to see how we can learn from it.

 Great. Thank you so much.

Weiterlesen:

- Webseite von Terres de Luttes: <https://terresdeluttes.fr>
- Raúl Zibechi: Territorien des Widerstands. Eine politische Kartografie der urbanen Peripherien Lateinamerikas, Assoziation A (2011).

