

Inventer le Grand Paris /Inventing Grand Paris

Perspectives on the Metropolis and Paris, 1919-1944

4 & 5 décembre, 2014 – Petit Palais (Paris)

CALL FOR PAPERS

This conference aims to re-evaluate the planning of the greater Paris area by bringing together for parallel study the varying approaches developed during the period 1919 – 1944 to understand and deal with the phenomenon of the metropolis. Interdisciplinary and international in scope, the conference goal is to shed light on a relatively long period in the history of urban thought. It covers over two decades marked at either end by wars: a context that requires reconsideration of the links between urbanism and politics.

Despite the intensity of the conflicts and national feelings of the time, there was no slowing in the international circulation of models for regional and metropolitan planning. On the contrary, such exchanges gained momentum between the wars, stimulated by the development of associations and professional groups as well as by a few emblematic political and academic personalities working in the areas of urban reform and « municipalism ».

In France, two important laws, one national in scope, the other more regional, mark the beginning of this intense period of reflection and work on urban and regional planning. First, the law of March 14, 1919 on the documents required for planning, beautification and extension (*Plans d'aménagement, d'embellissement et d'extension PAEE*), followed by the law of April 19, 1919 on the unlisting of the fortifications of Paris and the annexation to the capital of the reserved band of land protecting them (*zone non-aedificandi*). Increasing professionalization and new fora for intellectual debate stimulated and energized the milieu of planners and local elites during the inter-war period: international conferences, competitions and exhibitions on architecture and planning; the founding in 1919 of the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes Urbaines*, precursor of the *Institut d'Urbanisme* of the University of Paris; the creation of new journals such as *La vie urbaine* (1919), and *Urbanisme* (1932). The intensity of this activity suggested to us the need for placing the social and urban experience of *le Grand Paris* into a larger perspective and for comparing it with that of other large metropolitan areas, whether national capitals, regional metropolises, or the imperial, colonial and American cities where French planning expertise was imported. What do these cities share with the development of Paris, which continued to be a reference?

In addition to planning questions, the realizations of the period also attracted the attention of contemporaries. Transportation networks and large urban services, programs for developing and improving housing, new metropolitan amenities were on the agendas of governments, elected officials and professionals. The intensity and energy of public intervention and private initiative responded to increasing population and issues of social pacification. How were political frames of reference redefined during this period? How were urban form and landscape structure changed, with new stakeholder configurations and new modes of financing that deeply affected the transformation of urban areas?

2014, an anniversary

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It was in 1934 that the architect Henri Prost and the Paris extension office completed the development Plan for the Paris region (*Plan d'Aménagement de la Région Parisienne PARP*). This was at the request of the Higher Committee on Planning for the Paris region (*Comité Supérieur d'Aménagement de la Région Parisienne CSARP*) which had been created in 1928. Approved in 1939, it was the first official urban planning document to foreground the goal of controlling growth in the capital region.

Eighty years after its publication, this ambitious plan raised many questions which still seem relevant today, such as that of how to « organize Greater Paris instead of extending it further ». The question, hitherto framed essentially in terms of extension, was now considered in terms of limits and artificially resolved in the plan of 1934 by the geometry of a circle of 35km measured from Notre Dame that has been ceaselessly repeated ever since. To this recurring question was added that of rationalizing the organization of the Paris urban area and in particular its outer suburbs, seen as cut off, under-equipped and under-governed. Significantly, Paris appears in maps and plans of the time as an undifferentiated spot at the heart of the region to which it gives its name, as if it were not concerned by these efforts at regional reorganization.

But the *PARP* was also an opportunity to explore innovative new approaches -- like zoning, or the « *autostrades* » with their landscaping -- which were at the heart of international discussion and which gave rise to the development of new skills. Prost, Grand Prix de Rome laureate named urban planner of the Protectorate of Morocco, was a vector for disseminating his own experiences and training in a colonial context that some have considered a research laboratory for French urban planning. But in the images of « *autostrades* » for example, paths of highways that could be called parkways, we can also see traces of experiments developed in North and Latin America. The *Institut d'Urbanisme* of the University of Paris, where Henri Prost -- like Jean Royer, another member of the *CSARP* -- gave classes, was another intense center for emulation that shouldn't be neglected.

If we are thus essentially concerned with the inter-war period, it is also important to consider the posterity of the *PARP* during the Occupation and Reconstruction in France: this through the triple prisms of the Modern Movement, of a certain technocracy in planning and of the international context.

A multi-year program of conferences

This conference which will take place on the 4th and 5th of December 2014 is part of a multi-year program which aims to reconsider the plans and studies undertaken on Greater Paris throughout the 20th century. The first conference, held at the *Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine* in Paris in December 2013, dealt with the work of the Commission on the Extension of Paris which published a report in 1913 considered to be the first formulation of an overall plan for « Greater Paris ». After the first World War, in 1919, the Commission organized an international competition for the « extension of Paris and planning of the Paris region », won by the Grand Prix de Rome laureate Léon Jaussely (1875-1932). Our first conference emphasized the international context of the time which saw the emergence of the first urban planning conferences and major regional planning documents.

With this second stage of our project, undertaken on the 80th anniversary of the 1934 report, the emphasis is perhaps less on the history of *le Grand Paris* itself as a metropolitan concept, than on the history of the tools – whether methodological, technical, political or « pedagogical » -- that were developed to give body and shape to this concept.

Everywhere in the world, the period is marked by an affirmation of the regional scale in urban planning which changes expectations about urban composition and plan and gives rise to more abstract modes of representation. These means of investigation were open to groups of disciplines at the origins of modern urban prospective planning and as well as to approaches of urban ecology that borrowed from biology to found a dynamic vision of society.

It is interesting to study from an international and comparative point of view the ways in which the projects were publicized and made available to the general public, the variety of media, exhibitions, brochures, publications, documentary films.

The objective of the conference, which is addressed to a wide audience, is to reconsider the construction of *le Grand Paris* as compared to other metropolises, in order to better understand the constancies and the changes of territorial dynamics over the long term.

Proposals for 20-minute papers, in French or English, should be sent to the following address before May 20, 2014:

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Proposals should be sent as Word documents a half page in length (about 1200 characters), along with a short Curriculum Vitae (name, address, education and degrees, current position and institutional affiliation, research themes and main publications).

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