

LEARNING FROM PARIS

TEN Group
Paris Study Tour
27, 28 September 2012

Produced by

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TEN Group

TEN is a small group of senior local government officers in London who have met regularly over eight years to share ideas and exchange knowledge on how to achieve urban renaissance. Using the principle of *looking and learning* they visit pioneering projects to draw out lessons that can be applied in their own authorities. In the process the members develop their skills as place-makers, and are able to build up the capacity of their authorities to tackle major projects.

Photographs: unless otherwise stated provided by TEN Group members and URBED. We would like to thank the following members for use of their photos in this report

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Front cover: Image Hayden Cooper

This report was written by Dr Nicholas Falk who chairs the TEN Group

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REPORT OF PARIS STUDY TOUR

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TEN Group

Introduction

In this, the Group's ninth year we went to Paris to examine how large scale developments are being undertaken and financed in a difficult economic climate. The study tour combined discussions with experts with visits to a number of major regeneration schemes that are far advanced.

- Our visit started on Thursday at the architecture centre of Pavillon de l'Arsenal to understand how Paris has evolved
- We went on to visit Paris Rive Gauche (the redevelopment of some 130 hectares of railway lands adjoining Gare d'Austerlitz) and which includes the French national library and a new university
- We walked over the new bridge to Park de Bercy and along the Promenade Plantee on the Viaduc des'Artes running up to Bastille. This is a disused railway line, which has been turned into a linear park with designer workshops below and housing alongside, and was the inspiration for the Highline Park in New York
- Over dinner we discussed what lessons London might learn from the experience of Paris with Paul Lecroart of the Institute d'Aménagement et Urbanisme d'Ile de France (IAU), consultant Thierry Bruhat, and Francois-Regis Cypriani of Plaine Commune, St Denis
- On Friday we visited Plaine Saint-Denis which is becoming the third office centre in Ile de France, triggered by the development of the National Stadium for the World Cup, which now accounts for a quarter of the development projects in the region and where eight local authorities had joined together to form a combined planning and development department
- And finally we ended up at Paris Nord Est., where we were shown round the most ambitious project in ZAC Claude Bernard on land just inside the Périphérique, in Paris XIX^{eme} where an amazing mixed use scheme has been developed by BNP Paribas in one of the Zones d'Aménagement Concerté (ZAC), where investment is focussed.



The TEN Group walk along the canal at St Denis

There are many good reasons for visiting Paris apart from the city's proximity to London, and historic rivalry. Though its centre is much denser and planned, Paris has faced similar challenges in losing much of its industry, accommodating waves of immigrants in its suburbs and connecting them up orbitally by expanding the capacity of its public transport infrastructure.

Noted for a series of 'grands projets', such as Mitterrand's National Library, many fail to appreciate that Paris is also redeveloping many of its old industrial areas, using parks and iconic architecture to transform areas that tourists are unlikely to have seen. The French pioneered the idea of 'social exclusion' and like London has had to cope with a series of riots, and the challenges of integrating diverse and physically separated communities. They have also used local authority owned development agencies to get major regeneration projects going.

Our report addresses a number of common themes, and has benefitted greatly from the generous inputs of French planners and time spent looking and learning from major redevelopments in edge locations. We were given a wealth of information, including an excellent edition of *Cahiers on Large Scale Urban Development Projects in Europe*, (which Paul Lecroart helped put together), a brochure on Paris Rive Gauche, the prospectus for Plaine Commune, and some valuable information

on ZAC Claude Bernard and BNP Paribas Real Estate, all of which are beautifully produced and in English too! We would particularly like to thank all those who helped us organise a truly memorable and valuable tour, and the many architects who showed us round ZAC Claude Bernard.¹

After the visit members were convinced that despite major differences between the French and British approaches, especially with regard to the role of the State versus the private sector, important lessons could be learned from comparing areas with similar challenges. For example there are strong similarities between the area promoted as Paris Rive Gauche and the Kings Cross regeneration area, while Plaine Saint-Denis has much in common with the Lea Valley, including being the French bid for the Olympic Games. Paris Nord Est. is a vast area for regeneration, perhaps on the scale of Thames Gateway. With 2/3rds of the homes in the outlying suburbs being social housing, and with very high concentrations of unemployment, disproportionately affecting immigrant communities, it is not surprising that there are major tensions, and both cities have been hit by waves of riots.

Local authorities are having to play a more proactive role, and to fill the gap left by the collapse in private confidence. The report therefore starts by summarising the context and key lessons, before elaborating on what we found in the different places we visited. The report is backed up by a slide presentation of illustrations to enable those who could not come to see what they missed.



Viaduc des Artes, Paris – view from the street and galleries as well as raised walkway above

¹ Our thanks are to Paola Lecinq of BNP Paribas for organizing our visit, Remi Ferrand of Agence Francois Leclercq for his introduction, Jacques Ferrier Architects, Sauerbruch Hutton International, Emmanuel Combarel and Dominique Marrec Architects who gave up their time to show us their work.

The Paris context

As many know the centre of Paris is much denser than London, thanks to the high density apartment blocks developed along the boulevards that Baron Haussmann drove through the centre. Some 2.2 million live in an area of 100 square kilometres bounded by the Périphérique; The ring road cuts the suburbs or ‘banlieues’ off from the centre, which is only a couple of miles away (as if Ringway 1 had actually been built, through Camden Town, Bethnal Green and Oval).

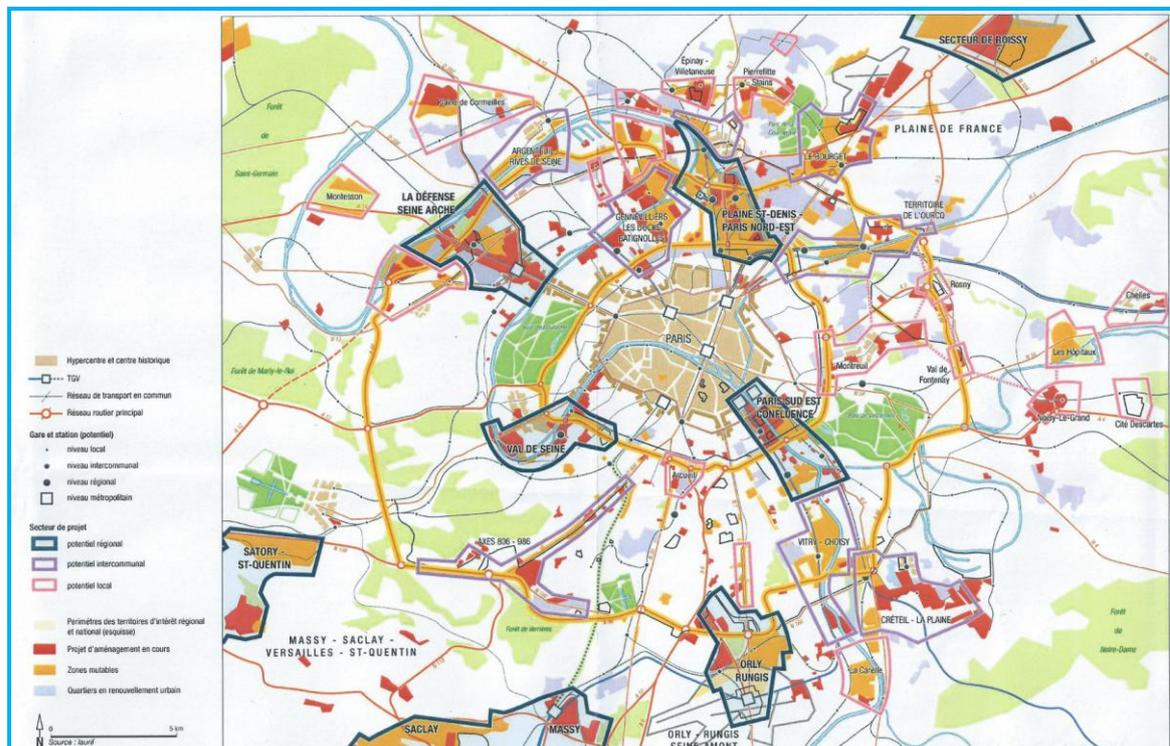
Greater Paris, with a population of nine million spreads out into the 8 departments of the Ile de France, Val de Oise, Yvelines, Seine St Denis etc. The region of Ile de France has a population of 11 million who live in Greater Paris (Paris Aire Urbaine) which covers 89% of the region’s land area. The distance from St Pancras to Olympic Stadium is much the same as from Gare du Nord to Stade de France, and Paris itself is equivalent in area to the boroughs of Islington and Hackney combined.
PH

In the 1991 report *London: World City Moving into the 21st Century*, Paris was credited with having a better educational and transport system for enabling a dispersed workforce to access jobs, and London was criticised for having lost a sense of direction. With its spacious streets, grand public buildings, and an intensive public transport system, central Paris has long been regarded as one of the world’s most beautiful cities, and desirable place to live. As a result, property values and rents in the centre are very high, and there is little space on which to build.

Paris itself (Paris-Ville) is made up of 20 arrondissements, each with their own Council and Mayor, with inevitable rivalries. Traditionally as the home of national government, Paris was run from the centre. But in 1982 and subsequently, planning was decentralised throughout France, and contracts started to be drawn up between central and local government (as is at last happening with the City Deals for the Core Cities Group in the UK). Increasingly councils have been encouraged to collaborate by forming into groups, and agreeing their spatial and investment plans with central government. Hence there is a lot to learn from Paris about making strategic planning work.

The challenge we were told has been not only how to improve connections with peripheral areas, which has been done splendidly by the RER (Réseau Express Régionale), but also how to develop any sites that become available, including creating housing where there was none. There are similar problems in regenerating old industrial working class areas as Paris like London has lost most of its industry and manufacturing. Some former industrial areas, such as the car plants or the abattoir have been turned into major parks, like La Villette. These are helping to transform the image and appeal of areas that had a very bad image for crime and dereliction. Grands Projets, such as the National Library, Football Stadium or Opera House have used iconic architecture and public funding to kick off investment, and President Mitterrand promoted nearly 90 of these.

Of greater relevance, a series of areas have been targeted as ZAC's for regeneration through partnerships (Zone d'Aménagement Concertée), and the principal ones are shown on the map below. In the French approach (which has much in common with other Northern European countries), municipal leadership of strategic development has been key, along with a planning system that joins up investment in infrastructure with development. The lessons became clearer as we visited each project.



Principal ZACs in Paris - Provided by Paul Lecroart (IAU)

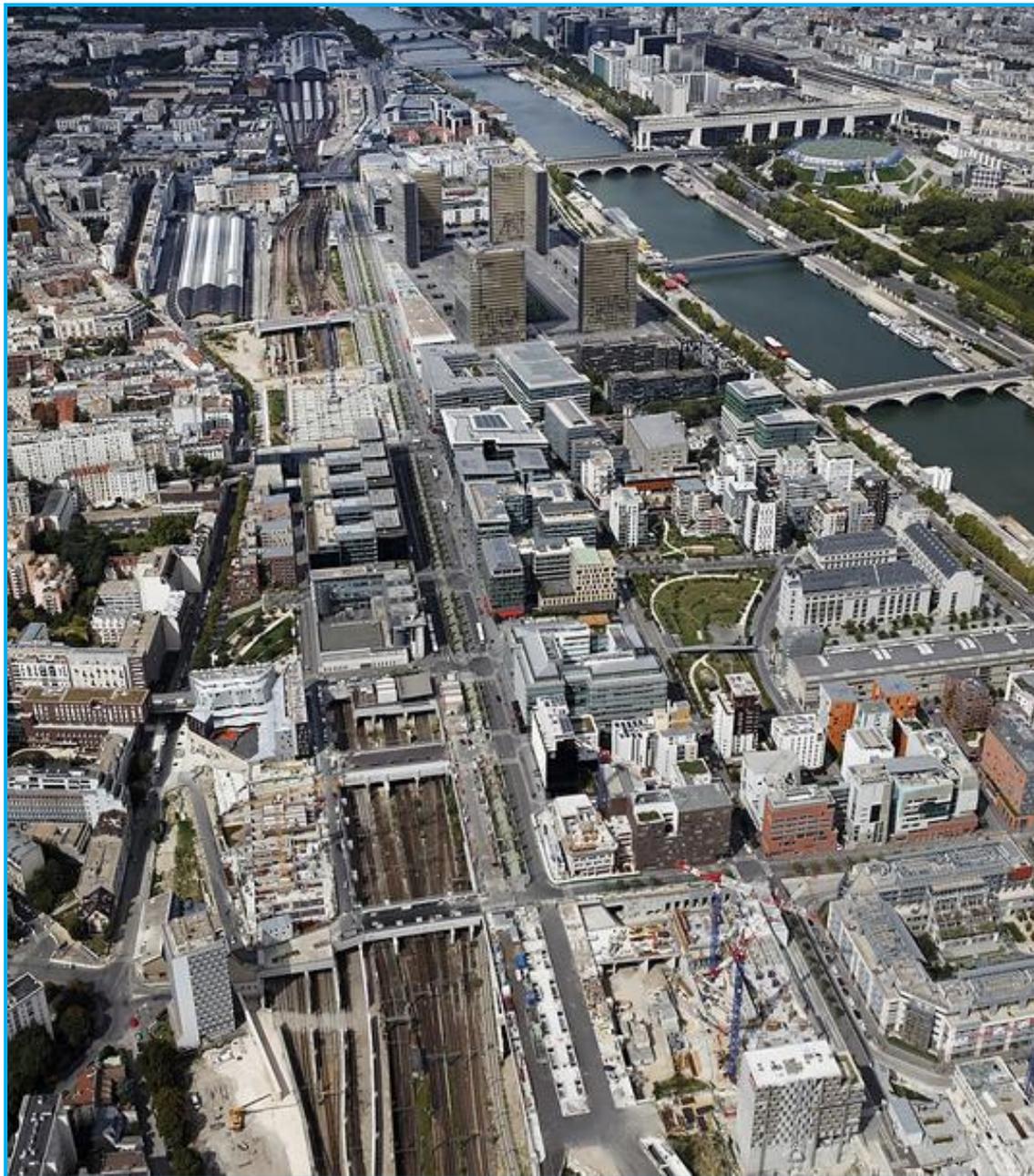
The lessons can be summed up as:

- Municipal leadership
- Advance infrastructure
- Integrated and proactive development planning (Amenagement plus Urbanisme)
- Public development agencies and pragmatic partnerships
- Concerted investment in priority areas
- Intelligent procurement and development frameworks
- Urban greening and 'open blocks'

The three projects visited

1. *Paris Rive Gauche, SEMAPA*

Paris Rive Gauche is one of the largest regeneration projects in Paris, and has been led by a public development agency or 'societe mixte). The programme for Paris Rive Gauche, excluding the office quarter still to be built, comprises 5,000 homes, 700,000m² of office space for 60,000 employees, 400,000 m² of shops and private facilities, and 650,000M² of public facilities, including the university. It is developing a site of some 130 hectares, and involved covering over some 20 hectares of railway tracks extending out from the Gare d'Austerlitz along the Left Bank of the Seine. The National Library acted as a 'bookend' for one edge of the site, while the relocation of a university next to the Périphérique forms the other edge. In between all the uses are mixed in terms of both use and finance. Tower blocks are no longer in fashion, and instead, lower rise buildings are used because they are less dominating, and support a better public realm. Tall office towers are restricted to the Eastern end of Paris Rive Gauche, which will be the last phase. In general, continuous streets of office blocks are now preferred (perhaps a response to the bleakness of La Défense). Significantly the university in Paris Rive Gauche, which replaces one that suffered from asbestos, consists of seven different buildings spread around the area, and all highly accessible. One reuses a former flour mill, and another is set in a large warehouse, and all are open to the public. So though there are similarities with the Kings Cross railway lands, there is much greater activity at the street level, which may well also help promote creativity and liveability.



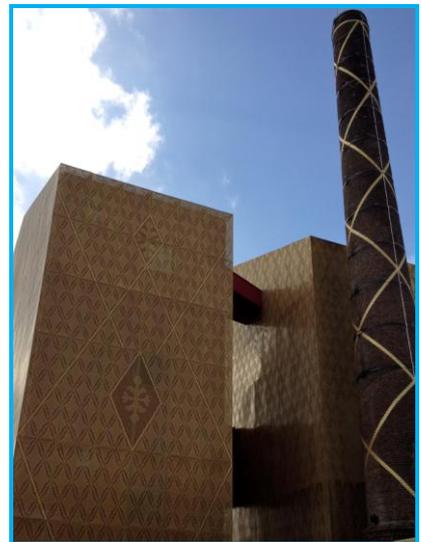
Paris Rive Gauche. Image sourced from www.parisrivegauche.com

2. La Plaine Saint-Denis, Plaine Commune

The focus of our visit to St Denis was as much on the administration Plaine Commune as it was on the physical place. Plaine Commune means shared territory. The aim of the administration is to achieve solidarity, and with eight municipalities, soon to be nine with what will be a combined population of 400,000 Plaine Commune are well on the way to achieving their goal.

St Denis was the first Bishop in Paris and all the French kings were buried in St Denis. Half way through the 19th century the area became a buzzing industrial district along a major canal and railways, but by the 1960's it was the 'dumping ground' for Paris. By the end of the 1980's almost all the industry was gone and what was left was a run-down suburb in serious need of some help. Paul Lecroart describes well what we saw²:

“The Plaine Saint-Denis area took off after the 1998 World Cup—5 years after the wise decision to locate there the Stade de France (1993) and over 10 years after the start of the regeneration process. The strength of Plaine Saint-Denis regeneration approach is that it is not a single flagship project, but a coherent spatial vision and strategy...The combination of flexible physical planning, public direct intervention, support of private investments and making use of opportunities, has worked fairly well in the Plaine Saint-Denis regeneration process. Community involvement in the process by the local residents and businesses has been successful. But at wider levels, for instance at the level of the Paris region or internationally, Plaine Saint-Denis needs to build up a stronger image. The area lacks a real centre and cultural landmarks—with the exception of the stadium. The regeneration is mainly a local project supported by higher-level players, and not a metropolitan project supported by local communities. However, in many aspects, the Plaine Saint-Denis regeneration process stands out among other large-scale urban projects as trying out an original and interesting path to sustainable development.”



*Images of St Denis:
Stadium above,
Infrastructure around canal middle
and new primary school bottom.*

² *The urban regeneration of Plaine Saint-Denis, Paris region, 1985-2020 and forms the Case study prepared for the Global Report on Human Settlements 2009*

3. Zac Claude Bernard, Paris Nord Est., BNP Paribas

The visit to the new mixed use development, which is kicking off regeneration in Paris Nord Est, offered a number of lessons for how to engage the private sector. The largest French bank BNP Paribas is investing in an innovative 100,000 m² mixed use scheme in ZAC Claude Bernard because it says *'the City is committed to the area's regeneration'*. The site comprised a former hospital (4.2 hectares) and the banks of the ring road and canal (another 10.4 hectares) on the Northern edge of the La Villette Park. The site originally involved both BNP and ING, who dropped out, and there are a number of private funders, with BNP Corporate Banking acting as the main commercial tenant.

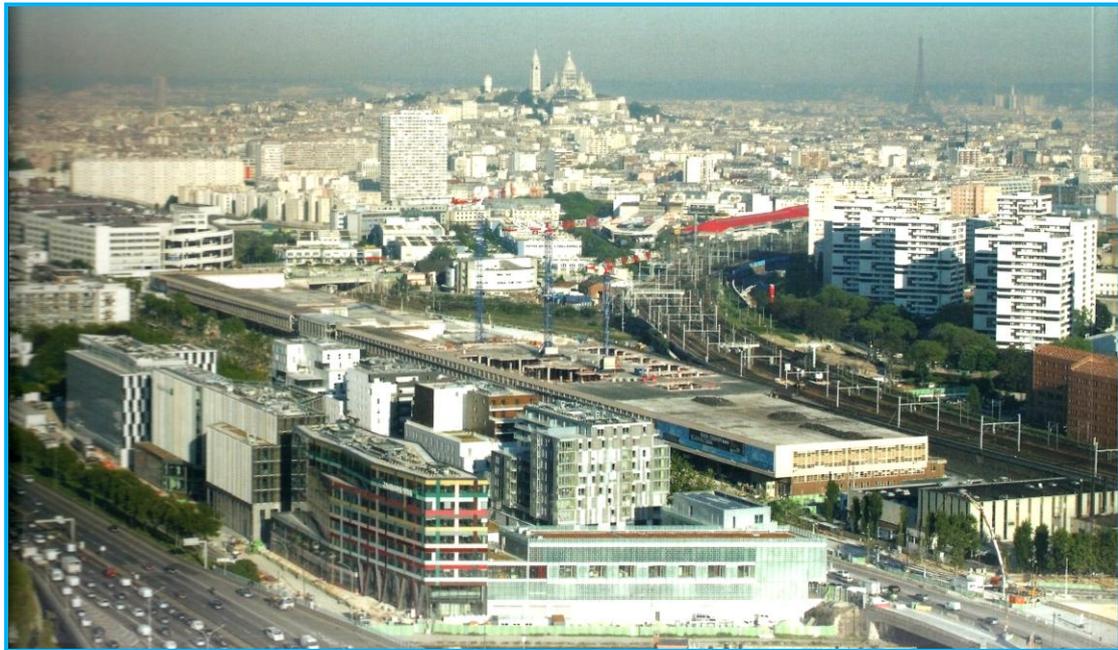
This mixed use development in Avenue Macdonald provides a good picture of current French thinking regarding regeneration and design. First is the stress on the context, and making the most of what exists, such as public transport links. Second, are the high environmental objectives, reflected in both the mix of uses and energy saving measures. Third, by redeveloping an old publicly owned hospital in a partnership between a public development agency and the subsidiary of a private bank (BNP Paribas Real Estate), the risks are reduced.

The area is one of six parts of Paris being developed through the city's regeneration agency SEMAVIP, which was founded in 1985. Its role is to realise the goals of urban policy of the City of Paris: by improving the quality of life, developing diversified housing, and reducing slums, reducing territorial inequalities, re-energizing the economy, and innovating in terms of sustainable development and architectural creativity

Building a high density high quality mixed use scheme is seen as more resilient than building offices or new apartments on their own. The scheme includes 41,000 m² of offices, 300 apartments (half social), and a care home for the elderly, all in very close proximity around a wild looking green courtyard. Shops and a multiplex are also underway. Planning for the project started in 2001, and is the first quarter to be built in the massive project to regenerate Paris Nord-Est.

Property development accounts for 29% of the turnover of BNP Paribas Real Estate, and 22% came from residential. The bank sold 2,700 residential units last year, and the value was almost as much as commercial property. It is committed to achieving

high standards of sustainability, and its new offices at Kings Cross will be rated BREAM Excellent. As their fine brochure shows, ZAC Claude Bernard illustrates how to ‘cook with loving care’ (mitonner) an urban quarter, using seven teams of architects and combining their skills. These include Jacques Ferrier Architectures, who run a ‘sensual city studio’. The whole scheme won the award for best residential project at MIPIM in 2012.



Zac Claude Bernard is on the edge and office buildings shield the rest of the development from Boulevard Périphérique



The entrance to BNP Paribas Offices at Zac Claude Bernard

Lessons for London

1. *Municipal leadership*

Since 1982, when powers were developed to the cities, the municipalities, and particularly their elected Mayors, have provided much greater strategic direction than in the UK. Though there are political swings, and major differences between left and right, there is greater continuity as far as development is concerned. Not only do Mayors go on to become Prime Ministers but Ministers return to run their cities, or carry on with both jobs. We were told that success was due to individuals who were 'passionate' about their cities. This passion is effective because it is combined with cities and communes having power and resource beyond British equivalents.

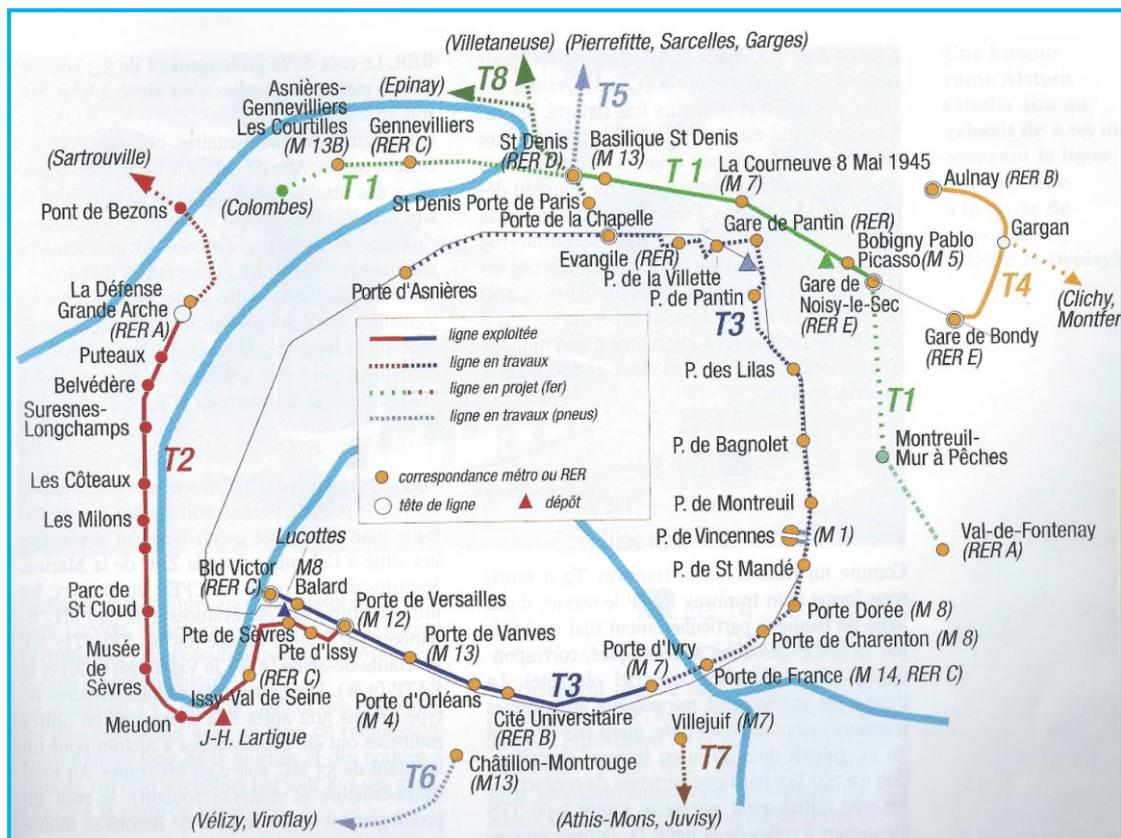
Agreements or 'contrats' are forged between national and local government that run for sufficient time to support infrastructure investment. Thus investment in the Greater Paris Express; a series of new tramways and Metro extensions, is seen as crucial to breaking down the physical barriers of Paris. The Périphérique and associated land between Ville de Paris and the inner suburbs, creates a significant obstacle, a kind of 'no-man's land'. For instance at Porte de Clignancourt there is a 400m gap between the urban fabric of the city and that of Saint-Ouen: not just the motorway, but sports grounds, depots etc with nothing linking the two sides. In addition to the Greater Paris Express, major clusters in creative arts and aerospace are being promoted to replenish the economic base of Plaine Commune, and, for example, a major TV studio set up in an old warehouse, while the main company involved in internet sales of luxury goods is based there.

By joining together, as eight authorities have done to form Plaine Commune, they have been able to negotiate from greater strength with central government and the rest of Paris. The 340,000 plus inhabitants now have a shared planning department of some 40 professionals plus a further 50 in building control, which gives them all an expertise that they individually might have lacked. Similarly, as seen in the Paris Rive Gauche project, the Mayor of Paris is the President of the public development agency or Societe Mixte called SEMAPA (Société d'Étude, de Maîtrise d'Ouvrage et d'Aménagement Parisienne) who have run the development.

2. Advance infrastructure

The municipalities have paved the way (often literally) for investment in the infrastructure needed for private development. The main factor that governments can directly influence is infrastructure (transport, utilities and education), and the state still controls these, with a level of investment that has in recent years been two or three times the British level. The high speed system (Trains à Grand Vitesse) now links Paris with all the French provincial towns. France is integrated into a European wide high speed network connecting major capital cities that the Eurostar for instance is yet to penetrate. Gare d'Austerlitz, which now has 30 million passengers annually, is expected to grow to 40 million.

Local accessibility is also being promoted, and around St Denis some four new tram lines are currently being built, which should help everyone access jobs and services. The first tramway was built some 20 years ago, as Paris, like London, had removed all its trams to accommodate the car. The new lines should be in use by 2017 and are on reserved routes, which will make them much faster. In all some eight new tramlines and 70 new stations are being built in Greater Paris.



Plan of tramway network from *Connaissance Rail* edition *Les Tramways Français en 2012*

The political commitment to infrastructure also extends to improving access for those on foot or bike. The links between the stadium and the surrounding residential areas, with new bridges across the canal, have shared the benefits. The links have helped the area escape from the worst riots as most people feel that things are getting better. Similarly in Paris Rive Gauche, the main focus has been on breaking down the barrier of the railway and connecting development with the hinterland as well as with the river.

The general planning philosophy is to make the most of what exists, such as the transport networks that run along the historic road & rail links to the north. The planners in Plaine Commune are committed to expanding the population through new housing and want to ensure no one is squeezed out by gentrification. The population rose from 308,000 inhabitants in 1999 to 354,000 at the end of 2008, reversing decades of decline. There are also some 40,000 students, many working in new research buildings. 60% of the new housing is being built as 'rent-to-buy', and private and social housing looks indistinguishable. However growth is putting pressure on social services and education, and a new primary school is needed each year to cope with a growth rate of 1.5% a year. These are designed to boost confidence in the area (though many of the surrounding buildings still look dilapidated).

Superior public transport can be attributed to a different funding system. First land is acquired by the municipality or a joint venture, often with more generous compensation than in the UK, and less weight is given to objections. The conurbation or city region is regarded as an economic entity, with regions having an important role in the provision of infrastructure. Private developers play their part, but do not lead the process. Instead of believing that project assessment can be reduced to a single number through some form of Cost Benefit Analysis, greater reliance is placed on the business case, and a municipality's capacity to bring the necessary funding together.

France has built five times the number of tram systems and ten times the route miles of the UK, creating an important industry in the process. The finance involves a cocktail with the region typically paying for 70%. A report by Faber Maunsell for

Yorkshire PTA in 2003 (forwarded by Thierry Bruhat) says at the start: *'The success of French tramway schemes is not possible in Britain under current public transport policy. A unique blend of shared financing, committed politics, and integrated planning have come together to make French tramway systems the success stories that they are.'*³

Versement transport Instead of depending on government grants, municipalities are able to tap local funding sources through the Versement Transport. According to Wikipedia *'the money is directed to the autorité organisatrice de transport urbain (AOT, "Urban Regional Transport Authority"), the local government authority responsible for organizing public transport. In 2008, for example, this tax provided nearly 70% of the funding for the Syndicat des Transports d'Île-de-France (STIF), the AOT for the Île-de-France, which includes Paris, with a levy of 2.6% on gross salaries on those employing over nine employees. The STIF distributed the money between the Régie autonome des transports parisiens (RATP, the metropolitan transport authority) and the Société nationale des chemins de fer français (SNCF, the state railway operator).'*

The process of getting approval means that municipalities have to build good relations with employer organisations and neighbouring communes. Behind the French enthusiasm for modern forms of transport is a concern to outperform other cities, and promote French industry. Tram and TGV suppliers like Alstom are then well-placed to secure export contracts, whereas British firms suffer from a wildly fluctuating home market, and a propensity to buy wherever it is cheapest without regard to the long-term consequences.

3. Integrated and proactive development planning (Aménagement plus Urbanisme)

Planning is seen somewhat differently in France, and a distinction is made between spatial planning (aménagement du territoire) and development management (urbanisme). Communication is regarded as the key to successful development, as can be seen in powerful presentation on *Creative Urban Planning* that SEMAPA gave at a conference in Budapest. However in fact the language has many traps or 'false

³ <http://www.pteg.net/NR/rdonlyres/B4142077-F4F3-4650-9012-A65DD91E3B1F/0/LRTfrenchcomparisonsreport.pdf>

friends’, as the main terms do not translate directly. There are also very different approaches to linking up strategic spatial planning (or *aménagement*⁴) with investment in development projects. Municipalities play a greater role in derisking development⁵

In the typically British approach, planning is aspirational and regulatory, and depends primarily on the private sector taking the initiative. It is not integrated. More use seems to be made of consultants for studies. In France there is a more contractual approach, with the public sector involved in negotiating funding using a larger staff. Thus IAU (*Institut d’Aménagement et d’Urbanisme de l’Île-de-France*) employs some 200 staff. The state is involved in setting priorities, and also in assembling and preparing land, before selling off the development rights. ‘Urbanisme’, is the ‘science and techniques of the organisation and development-planning of conurbations, cities/towns’. The nearest British equivalent would be the role that was played by Development Corporations.

Projects are identified at a local level, and then bid to become part of the regional masterplan (*Schéma Directeur*). Once they are accepted, there is a chance of being taken up in the next Investment Plan (*Contrat de Développement Territoriale*), which releases funds for the crucial engineering and feasibility studies. There is a great stress on integrating development zones with the surrounding area. Thus Paris Rive Gauche not only reconnects the district of Ivry-sur-Seine with the river, but is also linked via an elaborate footbridge with the Parc de Bercy on the other side of the river. Efforts are concentrated on specific areas or ZAC's (*Zone d’Aménagement Concertée*) so that investment has a combined effect.

As far as Plaine Commune is concerned, five year ‘contrats’ or agreements between the intermunicipal association and the State set out what is to be provided in the form of a ‘deal’ so that 166m² of residential accommodation must be built in return for building 100m² of offices, and ‘priority is given to public development transactions.’ As property rates are only a third of the Paris level, and office

⁴ Defined as: policies aimed at achieving the best spatial allocation of economic activity in terms of natural and human resources

⁵ as Paul Lecroart points out in *Large-Scale Urban Development Projects in Europe, Cahiers de l’Institut d’Aménagement et d’Urbanisme de l’Île-de-France, IAU 2006*

employment grew faster than anywhere else in the region, this is an effective way of cross- subsidising the provision of affordable housing. Such an approach is much easier to understand and apply than complex Section 106 negotiations or the Community Infrastructure Levy.

4. Public development agencies and pragmatic partnerships

In situations such as Paris Rive Gauche, where huge upfront investment is required, but where the demand should eventually be strong, the solution has been for the municipality to set up publicly owned development agencies (société mixte) that can operate with the flexibility of a private company without its loans being counted as public debt. The agency has an option on all the land, which means it does not pay for the sites until they are developed, and can also compulsorily acquire adjoining sites if required. SEMAPA was set up in 1985 and was selected, as ‘a responsible urban developer’ whose ‘primary concern is to cater to general interest’ in 1991 to carry out the Paris Rive Gauche programme. This is one of a number of mixed development zones (Zone d’ Aménagement Concertée or ZAC).

SEMAPA Construction Board on site at Paris Rive Gauche

The City of Paris and the Council for the 13th arrondissement set up the company which originally included SNCF and a construction company as its shareholders. More recently, to comply with European rules, the company has been turned into a wholly owned subsidiary of the Councils, with the Mayor of Paris as President, and is

now known as a SPLA (Société Publique Locale d'Aménagement). It would appear that this is treated as part of the public sector for EU procurement, but as part of the private sector as far as the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement is concerned, as its funds come from private banks (and it is currently paying around 2.6-2.8% on loans).

The company provides continuity while avoiding burdening the Council with liabilities, and is described as a 'tool of the City' that can act entrepreneurially. It will take some 25 years to build the project 2.5 million sq metres of space. So far the Deputy Director who showed us round, and is an architect, has outlived three mayors. The company employs some 40 professionals, with a full range of disciplines. As well as controlling what happens on Paris Rive Gauche, SEMAPA also taken on other development projects, such as the one we visited in Paris Nord Est.

There are nine different areas, each under the control of a different supervising architect. This ensures the variety and diversity which characterises the best urban areas, while the same street signs and road surfaces are used as in the rest of central Paris to ensure a sense of continuity. Each of the area involves many phases, and the decking over the tracks is undertaken by SNCF to minimise disruption to services and otherwise complex indemnity and insurance arrangements, with SNCF sharing in the value created by development, so that it has an incentive to collaborate. While the company works within guidelines for Paris, it defines the design brief for each site, and negotiates what is built with potential developers. In this way a high standard of design, with considerable variety is achieved, without all the frustrating negotiations between architects and planners that can delay progress.

5. Concerted investment in priority areas

As in the UK there has been a concentration of public investment in specific areas, but instead of having to rely on government grants, municipalities have been able to access long-term loans from a public investment bank. Infrastructure projects are publicly promoted but access private finance through the use of a 'Société d'Economie Mixte' (SEM) or its more recent equivalent a SPLA. This is helped by the existence of a state investment bank Caisse des Dépôts, that dates back to the early

19th century, which in the early days of Paris Rive Gauche played a key role, and owns several office blocks in the new development⁶

With over 200 billion euros of assets, Caisse des Dépôts invests where there is 'market failure', for example in retrofitting existing homes to cut energy consumption. Its 37,000 staff and 25 regional offices, gives the bank exceptional expertise in evaluating projects, employing specialists in different themes, such as tourism or the knowledge economy. This overcomes a major obstacle to raising institutional funds for development in the UK. It provides 35 year loans to Councils and also funds a third of the new social housing that is being built (some 133,000 homes in the last year). The bank is particularly concerned with the 'durability of assets', and is a member of the Long-Term Investment Club that involves similar banks in other European countries.



Construction of multiple office buildings in St Denis underpins long term debt

Figures in the SEMAPA presentation show that the initial investment in assembling, planning and preparing land may be recouped by selling off development rights (which is sometimes known in the UK as 'land value capture'). Thus in 2008 SEMAPA had invested over 3 billion euros in the purchase of land and provision of infrastructure, and recovered 73% of that from selling off serviced plots, largely to private companies. Infrastructure accounted for 38% of expenditure, and includes a district heating system.

Outside the Périphérique, property values are much lower. As a result of space being much cheaper but also highly accessible to staff, many companies have

⁶ The source is a presentation by Frank Horovka at an RICS/Housing Forum seminar on financing infrastructure for housing.

moved into their own office buildings. The main growth is coming from larger companies (though 81% of private firms employ less than 10). Thus Veolia Environment is building a 75,000 m² head office and research centre in Plaine Saint-Denis that is expected to house some 4,000 employees. Intriguingly public rental figures distinguish between sustainable offices, new offices and refurbished offices, with low energy offices securing a small premium. The French development system seems to produce a higher investment in infrastructure, possibly at the expense of lower land costs.

6. *Intelligent procurement and development frameworks*

One of the benefits of the French approach to development is to reduce the waste of resources involved in competitive bidding and masterplans that are never built. This is particularly important in the UK now that the private sector is no longer willing or able to take the lead in major projects. The use of project coordinators (*assistant à maîtrise d'ouvrage*), who will often but not necessarily be Coordinating Architects working with a number of different firms enables much greater flexibility as far as planning is concerned. The local authority simply sets down a framework with the basic rules in terms of amount of space to be provided for different uses, densities or plot ratios, and public benefits, such as the proportion of social housing (around 50% in Paris).

The development is undertaken in phases, starting where is easiest, and thus able to stop at any time. In the case of ZAC Claude Bernard, the BNP Paribas site, discussions were held with practices on the City's panel, to find those firms who shared a similar philosophy, but without requiring the submission of design proposals. In other cases limited design competitions are held. There are some clear over-riding principles, such as integrating the development with the surrounding area, using similar materials for the public realm, and keeping the housing blocks relatively small (typically under 50 units).

Architects told us that the key features now are the 'shortlist', which enables cities to choose who they want to work with, and the 'workshop', which is used to develop principles between the architect and the client. It is possible that the British approach adds to costs, for example in producing studies and masterplans that are never used, without necessarily leading to better results. Now that French

construction companies are starting to operate in the UK, and there is disillusionment with the Private Finance Initiative, there could be scope for making comparisons, and drawing out the best of both systems.

7. Urban greening and ‘open blocks’

A different approach to urban design is emerging, as a natural or wild landscape starts to link blocks together. This forward thinking approach is now being applied to new developments to make them more sustainable. Paris Nord Est is one of a number of new ‘eco quartiers’ which the former French President promoted through channelling public finance via the Caisse des Dépôts into getting eco developments underway. There is consequently not only an emphasis on minimising energy consumption through high levels of insulated cladding and solar panels on the roof, but also the use of district heating through new local power stations. With a stress on using public transport or new cycle ways, car usage is being cut. The theme is ‘sol sur sol’ that is rebuilding the city within the boundary of the built up area, and stopping further sprawl.



Massena Quarter, Paris Rive Gauche, Open plot outside the university

Perhaps the most interesting lesson is the focus on ‘walkability’ within sites. This can be seen in the route from the RER station to the football stadium, which is pleasantly landscaped. The stadium at Plaine Saint-Denis is not surrounded by a desert of car parking, which instead is all underground (something the British police will not allow). Mixed use is favoured at ZAC Claude Bernard, where a single quarter include offices, housing both social and private, a care home for the elderly, and even space for small service businesses of the ‘white van’ kind, and eventually a multiplex! However though a new tram is being built, and a forest is proposed to shield the development from the motorway, the entrance area around the Metro station at La Villette still seems fairly hostile.



Pedestrian Bridge leading to Mitterrand Library, Paris Rive Gauche⁷

The latest French approach to landscaping makes much greater use of natural planting and water, and in Paris Rive Gauche every resident lives within 400 yards of a public garden. The approach known as ‘open blocks’ was devised by architect Christian de Portzamparc. He realised that a different urban form was needed from the medieval city, with its tight streets, or the typical French city, with its continuous perimeter blocks. He argued for using landscape to make the city truly permeable. Whereas the ‘rain forest’ in the centre of the French National Library may not have quite achieved Portzamparc ideals, as you are not allowed into it, the extensive areas of wildflowers or water plants around Massena in Paris Rive Gauche help to humanise what might otherwise seem hostile environments. It is as if Camley Street Natural Park was at the heart of the Kings Cross development, and not on its edge.

Conclusions

After the visit members were convinced that there was much to learn from detailed comparisons of specific schemes and areas, particularly as far as suburban regeneration is concerned. For despite major differences between the French and British approaches, especially with regard to the role of the State versus the private sector and the decision making process; the challenges for development are very similar. The French reliance on public finance, and regulations, may deter private investors. Despite tax incentives, the returns on investment may not be enough. It is also not clear whether the greater investment in local public transport and the public realm has achieved the desired results, particularly as far as social inclusion is concerned.

Important lessons could therefore be learned from comparing areas with similar challenges. For example there are strong similarities between the area promoted as Paris Rive Gauche and the Kings Cross or Euston regeneration areas. Plaine Saint-Denis has much in common with the Lea Valley, including being the French bid for the Olympic Games, and having an airport. The RER is the prototype for Thames Link and Crossrail. In both cases regeneration needs to go beyond gentrification and polarisation, where those who can move further away from the inner suburbs and those working on low wages are squeezed out.

There is also scope to learn from different approaches to providing housing and training for disadvantaged groups. With 2/3rds of the homes there being social housing, and with very high concentrations of immigrants, it is not surprising that there are major racial tensions, and both cities have been hit by waves of riots. But could the idea of 'rent to buy' and the involvement of a public investment bank on the lines of the Caisse des Depots provide a practical way of restarting the British housing market?

In such a short space of time, it is hard to draw firm conclusions other than that the French approach to managing and financing strategic developments may now be required in parts of London and the UK following the collapse in private

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http://hetivalasz.hu/data/Konferenciak/konferencia_prezentaciok/kreativ2009/Gilles_de_Mont_Marin.pdf

development confidence. Lessons can also be learned about sustainable urban design, and mixed uses, and, for example, the value of drawing up ‘quality charters’, and encouraging employers to commit to both sustainability and local employment objectives.

Above all simply building infrastructure or attracting new employment clearly does not overcome the deep-rooted social problems of poorer areas. As was clear from movement outside Plaine Saint-Denis station in the early morning, though there are now more jobs than ever, they are mainly taken by people coming in from outside, and it may be many more years before the suburban areas become balanced again. Hence this year’s TEN Group European study tour suggests that we need to use the ongoing financial crisis to learn how to make better use of our heritage or ‘patrimoine’ to rebuild civic pride. Now more than ever, there is scope for local authorities to play a more proactive role, and to fill the gap left by the collapse in confidence.

Delegates were as follows:

Nicolas Falk, Founding Director | URBED

Jess Bousie, Assistant | URBED

Vincent Reygiraud, Intern | URBED (French Urbanism student from Sorbonne)

Mark Lucas | Acting Chief of Planning and Regeneration | London Borough of Redbridge

Pat Hayes | Executive Director Regeneration & Housing | Ealing Council

David Hennings | Consultant (Ex Head of Regeneration | Catalyst Housing Group)

Ching Wah Wong | Housing Estate Renewal | Lambeth

Stephen Tapper | Consultant and Senior Vice President | Planning Officers Society

Haydn Cooper | Senior Development Manager | Grosvenor Britain & Ireland