

Preface

8th July 2010

This work is an important contribution to a debate which commits the future of our metropolis, and whose purpose is to define the role of the river in our new urban civilisation.

Paris sprang up from the Seine, was built from the Seine and developed around it. It is the life-line of our capital. And what is more, our river is a fundamental, unifying element of Paris and its suburbs.

Rethinking our relationship with the Seine, means imagining the metropolis of tomorrow. Such is the essence of the consultation that we have begun concerning the future of the embankment roads. We hope that our citizens partake with complete freedom, and that they express their expectations, their ambitions and their concerns.

The objective is clear and fully assumed: to make it possible for Parisians, for the inhabitants of the metropolis, for visitors and for all lovers of Paris to win back this site that is unique in the world. And to this end, an instrument is being put in place to encourage diverse means of transport. It is not acceptable that a place of such magical beauty, listed as a world heritage site by UNESCO, remains an expressway.

At the heart of our metropolis over an area of five hectares, life – culture, sport and economic activity – is going to return to the banks of the Seine. It is a stimulating issue inviting creativity and inspiration, and it is open for debate... This work, produced by the APUR teams, which I would like to thank for their commitment and professionalism, constitutes one phase of this debate. Naturally, it brings the contribution and view from neighbouring communities entirely together, since our city sees itself, more than ever, in a productive, growing relationship with the suburbs of which it is the centre: Paris, the metropolis on the Seine.

Bertrand Delanoë, Mayor of Paris

Foreword

Paris-Plages occupied the right bank of the Seine for four weeks, between the 21st July and 18th August 2002, providing Parisians with quotidian access to “their” river. This occupancy exceeded the ambiguous authorisation in terms of time and measure that had been tolerated since 1995... It was the natural outcome of the restitution of a space normally intended for cars, up until then sparingly consented to on Sundays, between 9am and 5pm. It was another matter however to assume and have the conviction that the disadvantages imposed upon the motorists would be compensated by the advantages given to the city dwellers.

This renewed interest in the river was felt by others elsewhere in the metropolis: along the Seine of course, but also alongside the canal and on the banks of the Marne and the Oise rivers. Some communities felt the need to turn to these watercourses to enhance the quality of their environment but not only for the sole economic resource they represented. The international competition entitled Grand Pari(s)

de l’agglomération parisienne pays witness in its own way to the diverse approaches and resources that are represented by the river, waterways and canals passing through this dense urban area of Paris.

Over and above the debates that were brought up relating to the Paris-Plage operation, we can notice that the latter also made it possible to change the mental image people have of the city. From this point on, the lengthwise promenade by the river was no longer seen as exclusively for car traffic. It is now possible to be physically close to the waterway in the centre of Paris, and not just to the islands.

An essential statement of fact ensues from this: demanding, costly developments are not necessary to modify areas for new purposes, to transform the allocation of a building or to change the perception of a space or an environment in a sustainable manner. In terms of urban planning, this experience gives way to stimulating reflection, particularly for an extremely built-up, complex city such as Paris, which is sometimes thought of as being “finished”: a significant development can take on an undemanding, reversible form and a development cycle can benefit from a period of experimentation, evaluation and adaptation. It is this approach that APUR chose to put forward within the framework of the development project of the Seine riverbanks that the City of Paris has investigated, emphasising firstly a method by which it establishes long-term exchange of ideas between the users, designers, builders and the administrators who will be in charge of the installation and maintenance.

It is this project, this method and background that are presented in three sizeable chapters in the current issue of Paris Projet. The first two chapters deal with the Seine at length, the third tackles the subject in depth, through reports that relate to – or could relate to – the areas bordering the river that are undergoing change.

It seemed only natural to retrace the Seine’s history by recalling the roles that the Seine has played throughout the centuries, to be able to deal with the complex relationships woven between the capital and its river today. Progressive technicalities to the Seine’s riverbanks have emerged, even though we are constantly reminded of the numerous usages that have disappeared today.

This hindsight is very useful in understanding the current situation, which seems to be set in a vocation essentially focused on the mobility of people and goods: roads on the riverbanks for vehicle traffic; railway lines for public transport; waterways for transporting material, equipment and tourists... The second chapter presents the project and the method, which aim to balance the sharing of this public space to everyday users’ advantage.

The limits taken into account in this extensive presentation are mainly those of the Paris reach, from the lock at the Pont de Charenton to that of the Port à l’Anglais and to Suresnes. The main operations presented in the third part of this work were drawn from the area within these two markers. There are 6 of these “hooks”: from the confluence of the Marne – to the meeting of the waters at Alfortville, Charenton-le-Pont and Ivry-sur-

Seine – to the banks of the Bois de Boulogne, Bercy – Charenton-le-Pont and Masséna-Bruneseau – Ivry, as well as the district of the Gare de Lyon and Gare d’Austerlitz, Beaugrenelle and the Maison de la Radio, Issy-les-Moulineaux and Sèvres, Meudon and Boulogne-Billancourt. They assess the situation of some of the key operations in the Paris region, which in terms of the development plans, took the link to the riverbank into account to a certain extent. These presentations show, if this is indeed necessary, the persistent difficulties, which are sometimes encountered in this situation and the determination to rise up to overcome them.

It can be seen that usage characteristic to public spaces is changing, as are the desires and expectations of the inhabitants. This change generally takes place more quickly than that of procedures, which do not offer flexible support to these changes. Also, is it not our duty to examine the processes so that the expected alterations can be better controlled and carried out within more flexible timeframes? This issue of Paris Projet is intended to contribute to this debate.

1. Once upon a time the Seine

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Before the 19th century Paris, a capital on the Seine

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Prior to its gradual “regularization” in the 19th and 20th centuries, the Seine and Paris were bound together by the economy and its human and commercial circulation as well as by the resulting customs. The river was the main artery, the life line that fed the capital.

France and Prussia were at war. On the 8th of September 1870, the Chancellor Otto von Bismarck and his head general, Helmuth von Moltke, decided to lay siege to Paris. “We have to cut communication and supply lines to the outside world”, wrote Moltke. The Prussian armies camped 10 kilometres from the so-called Thiers stronghold. “To block the main routes, in most cases all that is necessary is to occupy the bridges of the Seine and the Marne”. The Prince of Saxony’s army was camping upriver on the Marne at Gournay-sur-Marne, on the Seine at Choisy-le-Roi, the cavalry downriver at Croissy-sur-Seine. Bismarck was counting on deprivation, riots and the hardship of winter. The consequence of one hundred and thirty five days of siege was a shortage of flour, meat, vegetables and fruit, fodder, coal and firewood. The temperature was to be -18° C and the bread was to have the taste of hay, residues of oats, haystack sweepings and loamy clay. The almost exclusive use of the Seine as a supply route is one of the lessons learnt from the blockade. The status of the Seine would change.

Morphogenesis

Paris was born of the waters of the Seine, around an island, La Cité, which was at little risk from flooding, to allow travellers to cross the fairly wide river lined with swamps. An island