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Behind the metropolis: understanding *Grand Paris* through the history of its regional plans

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ABSTRACT

The history of Grand Paris has been partly constructed around the markers provided in the major regional plans that have punctuated the development of the Greater Paris region, from the 1913 “Report for the enlargement of Paris” to the 2009 “Grand Paris international consultation process”. By providing an epistemic framework for understanding the major regional plans, this article clearly posits that their history – i.e., both their succession and development – has a structuring impact on the “reality” constituted by “Grand Paris”. The research we present here was conducted as part of the *Inventing Grand Paris* research program with the objective of visualizing what we have termed the “depth of plans”, their contents and conflicts as well as their nature and temporality. To this end, a research device was created in the form of a digital “Atlas of Grand Paris plans”. By presenting the vast corpus of archives generated by the development of regional plans, this helps present a nuanced perspective and clarify the complexity of the metropolitan dynamics of Greater Paris. By looking at the possibilities it opens up for understanding the process, this article ultimately explores the way in which the digital humanities can contribute to the history of planning.

KEYWORDS

Grand Paris, regional plan, metropolitan history, atlas, archives, corpus, temporalities, digital humanities

Introduction

Cities tempted by reforms have often latched onto the idea of a major plan to project their image. The “Grand Paris international consultation process” (*Consultation internationale pour l'avenir du Grand Paris*), launched in 2007, generated a plethora of visions of both the state and the future of the capital city region. At the inauguration of the exhibition in autumn 2009 at Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, French President Nicolas Sarkozy presented a certain number of future operations focusing on transport, amenities, neighbourhoods, etc., that were intended to showcase the stated ambition.¹ Since then, these projects have dominated all

¹ The “Grand Paris international consultation process” commissioned ten architect-urbanist teams to show what “the post-Kyoto metropolis” could look like. It was initiated by the French Ministry of Culture’s Office of Architectural, Urban and

metropolitan developments, simultaneously forming the backbone of a set of planning instruments and generating a certain number of controversies. The future 'Grand Paris Express' metro which will serve the Greater Paris area is currently being built by the Société du Grand Paris, set up in 2010 within the scope of the "Law framing the 'Grand Paris' building project" (*Loi d'orientation relative au Grand Paris*). All of these arrangements maintain a potential for confusion between the *reality* of the Grand Paris situation, the *design* of its large-scale transformation, and the *operations* that affect it, including the infrastructure of the super-metro running right around Greater Paris. This confusion stems from the circular relationship between projects and visions, with visions materialising in projects, and projects becoming embodied as visions in turn. It also leads to a certain number of mismatches due to the fact that although their trajectories are closely linked, they ultimately follow different courses.²

These colliding temporalities place history as the science of time back centre stage, however, it is often overlooked in planning processes, or restricted to knowledge of the past which would be unsuitable for use in considering the future. In particular, the resulting works lead to an absence of reflection about time, which is reduced to linear chronologies, whereas the complexity of the city lies in the depth of its strata and the condensing of its memories so that "the space contains compressed time" in the words of Gaston Bachelard.³ Even very recent history is erased, as can be seen from the scant media coverage of the proposals carried out by the teams invited to participate in the consultation process. Taken out of the context of the debate that inspired them, and limited to a few media-hyped images designed by some of France's star architects – the satellite view of Paris right up to Le Havre (Antoine Grumbach), the metro leaping out over the Paris ring road (Christian de Portzamparc), the super-skyscrapers lighting up the skies of Greater Paris (Jean Nouvel) –, the visual echoes have erased other, more complex and less iconic representations such as the porous city proposed by Studio 8⁴, or the soft metropolis advanced by LIN.⁵ In 2011, Nicolas Sarkozy returned to the Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine to talk about "Grand Paris – four years later". As a prop for his speech, a map displayed the lines and points of the future metro network superimposed on the pale urban geography of the Greater Paris region. In a style reminiscent of that used for 18th century *portraits de villes*, they were surrounded by vignettes of the urban projects that would be built around the future rail stations [Figure 1](#).⁶

The amnesia is even more pronounced in respect of previous episodes that have dotted the long timeline of Grand Paris planning, from the 1913 "Report for the enlargement of Paris" (*Rapport pour l'extension de Paris*), spearheaded by Louis Bonnier and Marcel Poëte, through to recent times. However, a few dates still stand out, such as the "Development and urban planning blueprint for the Paris Region" (*Schéma d'aménagement et d'urbanisme de la région Parisienne*) drawn up in the 1960s, which is all too often reduced to the contemporary modernity of the 'Trente Glorieuses' Post-War boom period and to projects that have continued

Landscape Research with strong support from the national political authorities. Read the summary that appeared in *Grand Pari(s): Consultation internationale pour l'avenir de la métropole parisienne*. In 2009, an exhibition at Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, inaugurated by President Nicolas Sarkozy, presented the findings of the consultation. Read the "Speech by the President of the Republic, Inauguration of the exhibition on the Grand Pari(s) ("Discours de Monsieur le Président de la République, Inauguration de l'exposition sur le Grand Pari(s)"). On 3 June 2010, the "Law framing the Grand Paris building project" set up the Société du Grand Paris which would oversee the construction of the 'Grand Paris Express' metro.

² Roseau, *Le futur des métropoles*, 143-156. And Chauvel, « La construction territoriale d'un problème public en contexte multiniveaux ».

³ « L'espace tient du temps comprimé », in Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace*, 36.

⁴ Secchi and Vigano, *Un projet pour le Grand Paris et la métropole de l'après Kyoto. La ville poreuse*.

⁵ Geipe and Andi, *Grand Paris-Métropole douce. Hypothèses sur le paysage post-Kyoto*.

⁶ "Déclaration by President Nicolas Sarkozy concerning the deployment of the "Grand Paris" project." ("Déclaration de Monsieur Nicolas Sarkozy, Président de la République, sur la mise en œuvre du projet du « Grand Paris »).

to leave their imprint on the contemporary urban landscape, especially new towns and megaprojects such as La Défense Central Business district, motorways and airports. But what about the intentions, instruments and projects that bound these plans together, forged their temporalities and had just as much of a structuring impact on the future of Grand Paris? The iconic nature of the plans is part and parcel of their reduction in historical terms. Just as the propensity to conceal the legacies of the past marks present decisions, the regular appearance of "radical solutions" testifies to a tendency to be "dazzled" by the future.⁷



Figure 1. “Grand Paris, 4 years later, Major projects in progress”, 2011. This was the support used to present the progress of the Grand Paris plan. The map shows the route of the projected metro network. The surrounding vignettes show perspectives of the planned projects: university campuses, cultural facilities, business centers, transportation hubs, etc. Source: Cité de l’Architecture et du Patrimoine.

How does the history of planning inform the present? First, it feeds into the historiography of metropolises through the knowledge and processes that have underpinned their regional plans. Second, it sheds light on the relationship between time and urban, social and political action, through a study of the successive planning sequences that have shaped it. By setting out an epistemic framework for understanding the major regional plans – i.e. their succession and their development-, the article clearly posits the hypothesis whereby their history renders the reality consisting of ‘Grand Paris’ more tangible. This raises the question of the methods of analysing these plans. How can we account for their origins and deployment, their nature and temporality? As part of the *Inventing Grand Paris* research program, the digital “Atlas of Grand Paris plans” was conceived as a device for visualizing what we have termed the "depth of plans". By examining the possibilities offered by this atlas, the article ultimately examines the contribution of the digital humanities to understanding the complex objects represented by these plans, and more broadly to understanding metropolitan history.

⁷ Edgerton, “From innovation to use”, 129.

Tracing the history of Grand Paris through regional plans

Although simple in appearance, the use of the term ‘Grand’ in Grand Paris is actually quite complex. In the case of Anglo-Saxon cities, the term "Greater" would be used. This "Greater Paris" is first and foremost the history of the relationship between Paris and its suburbs. Jean-Louis Cohen and André Lortie's book *Des fortifs au périph* (From the Fortifications to the *Périphérique*) traced this genealogy through the history of the Parisian belt created by the last remaining military wall, on which the ring road motorway was built.⁸ "Greater Paris" is also the history of the capital's relationship with the wider nation, as Greater Paris planning processes have always been strongly supported by National Government in a historically centralised country that mistrusted a city that constituted both a power and a threat. Prefect Eugène Haussmann, architect of the transformation of Paris under the Second Empire, wished to 'control' the organisation and future of Paris, even as the Paris Commune and accompanying insurrection of 1871 ended in the *semaine sanglante* or Bloody Week. The pamphlet entitled *Paris et le désert français* (Paris and the French desert) published in 1947, claimed that 'Paris' was hoovering up growth to the detriment of other regions of France. For these reasons, its development was either curbed or boosted, with the capital considered as the ‘engine’ of national interests.⁹

What is Grand Paris?

A major event concerning the extension of Paris' boundaries occurred on January 1, 1860 when the territories included in the 'Thiers wall', the last remaining defensive walls of Paris, were "annexed" by decree. The perimeter of Paris expanded to include eight newly-created *arrondissements*. While this stabilized the changes to Paris' administrative boundaries¹⁰, metropolitan planning policies continued apace, either tracking and/or anticipating periods of rapid or slower demographic and economic development. Among the many milestones are the “Report for the enlargement of Paris” (*Rapport pour l’extension de Paris*) published in 1913. This report was written by Louis Bonnier, *architecte-voyer* at the City of Paris and Director of the architecture and plantations department (*service de l’architecture et des plantations*), and Marcel Poëte, archivist-paleographer and Director of *Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris*.¹¹ It heralded an ambitious vision of the development of Greater Paris that reflects the relationship of Paris to its surroundings [Figure 2](#). Based on the existing network of roads and promenades, the report recommended a program of roads to be opened and widened, as well as a system of open spaces (*espaces libres*) inspired by the landscape architect Jean-Claude Nicolas Forestier and set out in *Grandes villes et systèmes de parcs* (1906).¹² This ambitious system was composed of vast public gardens in the military fortifications, a belt of woods and meadows to the northeast, two vast promenades to the north and south, and a dozen parks spread throughout the Seine department.

⁸ Cohen and Lortie, *Des Fortifs au Périph*. Bellanger, Flonneau, Fourcaut, *Paris/Banlieues*. Bourillon and Fourcaut, *Agrandir Paris*. Voldman, *Région parisienne*.

⁹ Read Couzon, « La place de la ville dans le discours des aménageurs du début des années 1920 à la fin des années 1960. »

¹⁰ The large Bois de Boulogne and Bois de Vincennes wooded parks were attached to the city much later, in 1929 while the “zone” of the fortifications was annexed from 1925 to 1930.

¹¹ Préfecture de la Seine. Commission d’extension de Paris, « Aperçu historique » (vol.1) and « Considérations techniques préliminaires : la circulation, les espaces libres » (vol.2), 1913. Read from Bertrand, Bourillon, Jaquand, *Inventer le Grand Paris. Relectures des travaux de la Commission d’extension de Paris*.

¹² Forestier, *Grandes villes et systèmes de parcs*.

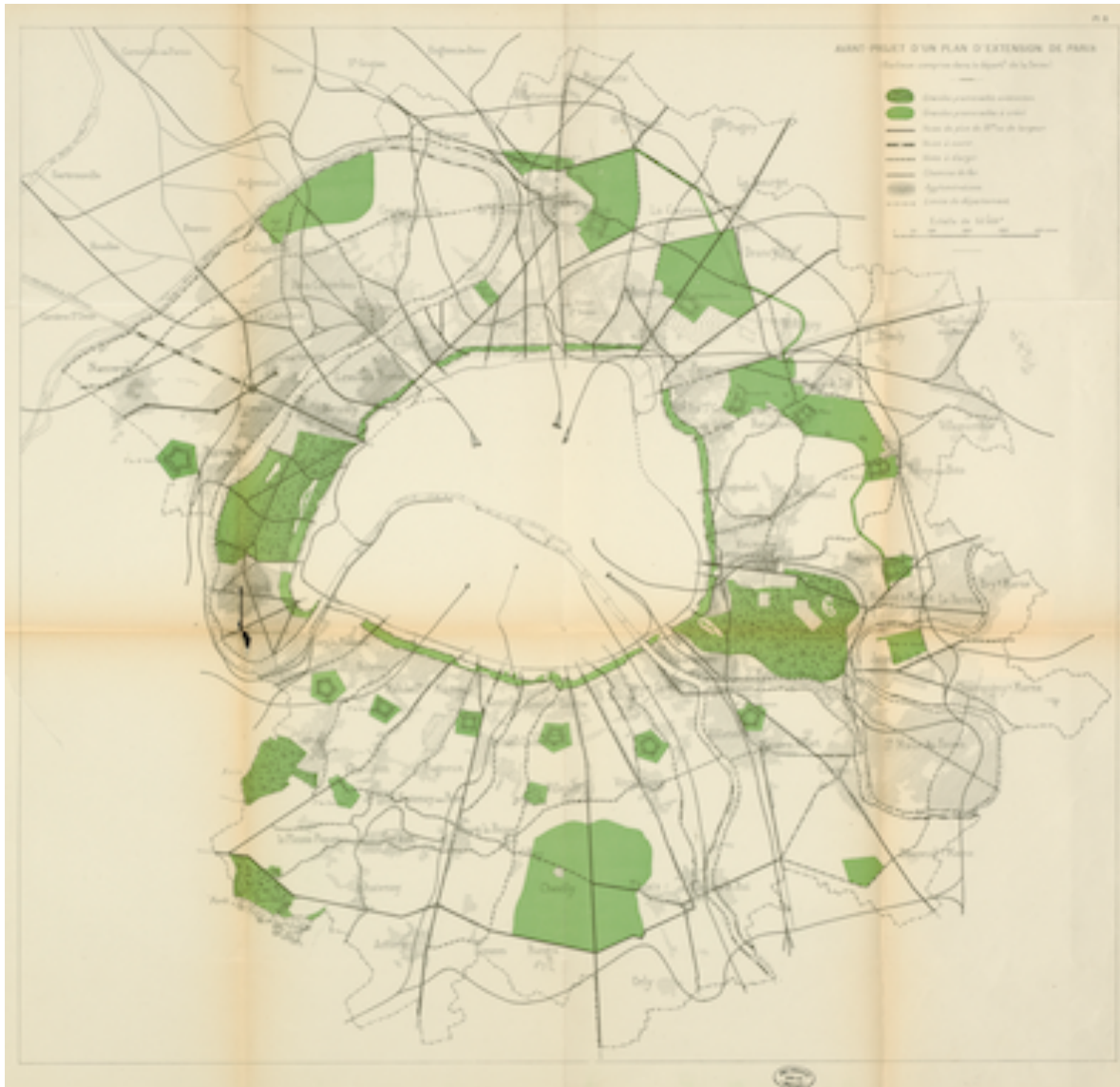


Figure 2. Outline of a plan for the enlargement of Paris (suburb included in the Seine department), scale: 1/50,000, *Rapport de la commission d'extension de Paris, 1913, Considérations techniques préliminaires (vol.2), planche 8*. The map shows the network of radiating and circular roads as well as the system of open spaces (*espaces libres*), composed of public gardens, promenades, parks, woods and meadows spread throughout the Seine department. Source: Atelier Parisien d'Urbanisme.

The first "Development plan for the Paris Region" (*Projet d'aménagement de la région parisienne*) took shape in 1928 with the creation of the Higher Committee for the Development and Organization of the Paris Region (*Comité supérieur de l'aménagement et de l'organisation de la région parisienne*). In 1934, a first plan was approved. It covered 35 kilometers around Paris, 656 municipalities and four departments, with the exception of the Paris City area [Figure 3](#). The regional dimension was reflected in the joint attention paid to networks, landscaping and site protection. Development favored the constellation of urban centers, based on the garden city model, which closely links buildings and the landscape framework.



Figure 3. Development plan for the Paris region (*Projet d'aménagement de la région parisienne*), 1934, general map, scale: 1/50,000. The plan shows the high density of Paris and its near suburbs as well as the constellation of urban centers further out. It projects the major highways and regional tourist routes. Other regional entities are indicated on the periphery of the plan. Source: Fonds Henri Prost, Académie d'Architecture, Paris.

The “Development and urban planning blueprint for the Paris region” (*Schéma d'aménagement et d'urbanisme de la région parisienne*) was completed in 1965. It addressed the change in scale due to strong Post-War urban growth and was part of a new organizational framework, the District of the Paris region (*District de la région de Paris*), which covered the three departments of the Seine, Seine-et-Oise and Seine-et-Marne. It was a major structuring plan developed around prefecture towns (Nanterre, Bobigny, Créteil) and the creation of new towns in the outer suburbs, as well as major transportation infrastructure: highways, express networks, and airports [Figure 4](#). The idea of linking habitat and nature became the strategy adopted for new

cities under construction. This plan was followed by the adoption in 1976 of the “Development and urban planning blueprint for the *Île de France* (i.e., Greater Paris) region” (*Schéma d'aménagement et d'urbanisme de la région Île de France*). It ratified the creation of the *Île-de-France* region by the Law of March 6, 1976. The environmental issues that emerged in the 1970s appeared explicitly under the theme of the management of open spaces and the notion of "large-scale landscape design" that incorporates the rural and the urban under the same approach [Figure 5](#).

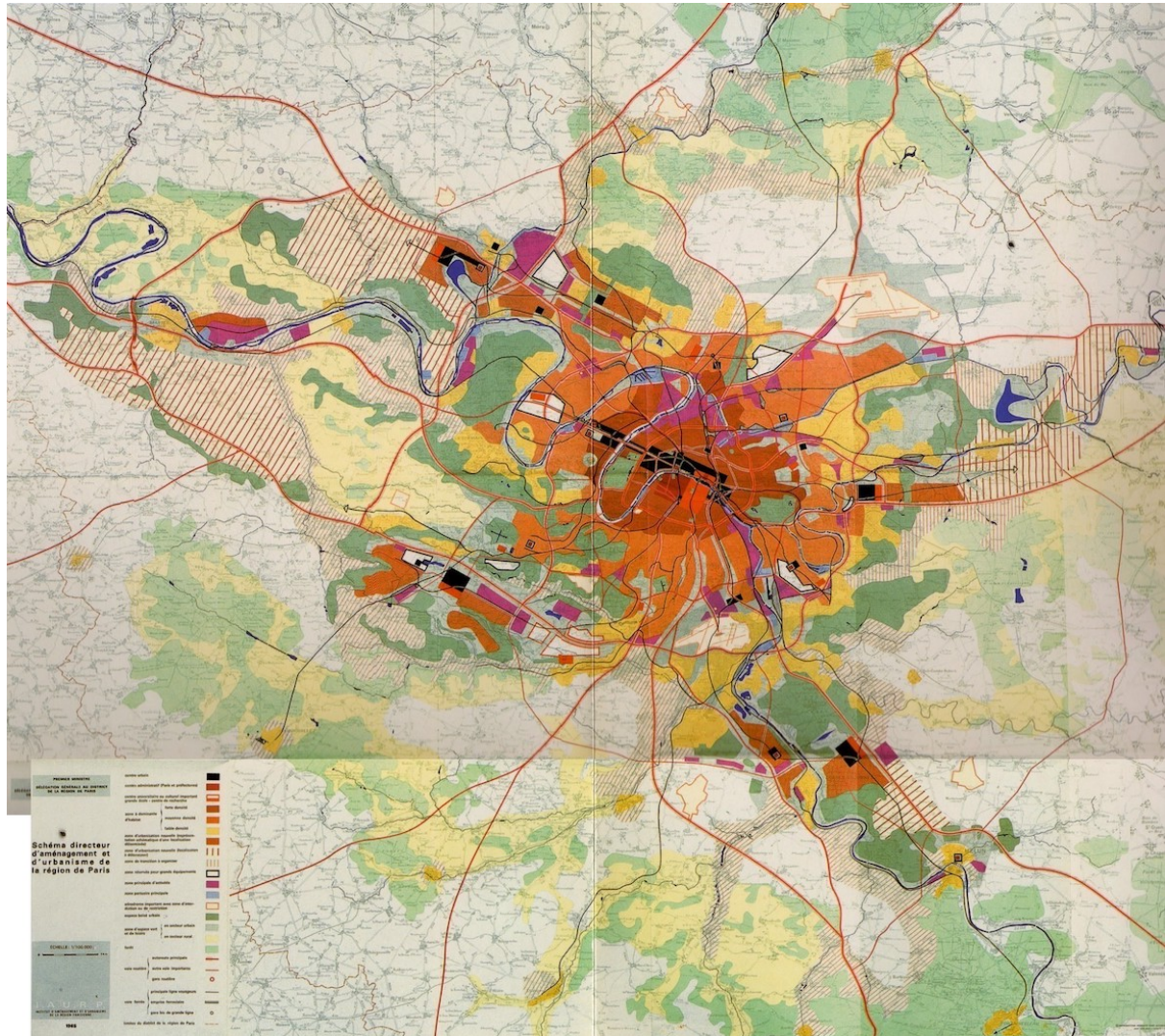


Figure 4. Development and urban planning blueprint for the Paris region (*Schéma d'aménagement et d'urbanisme de la région parisienne*), 1965. General purpose ground survey map (*Carte de destination générale des sols*), scale: 1/100,000. The map no longer indicates a perimeter but strong indications for future development, urbanization and major infrastructure. The crosshatching indicates the *Zones d'aménagement différé* (deferred development zones). Source: Direction Régionale de l'Équipement Île de France.

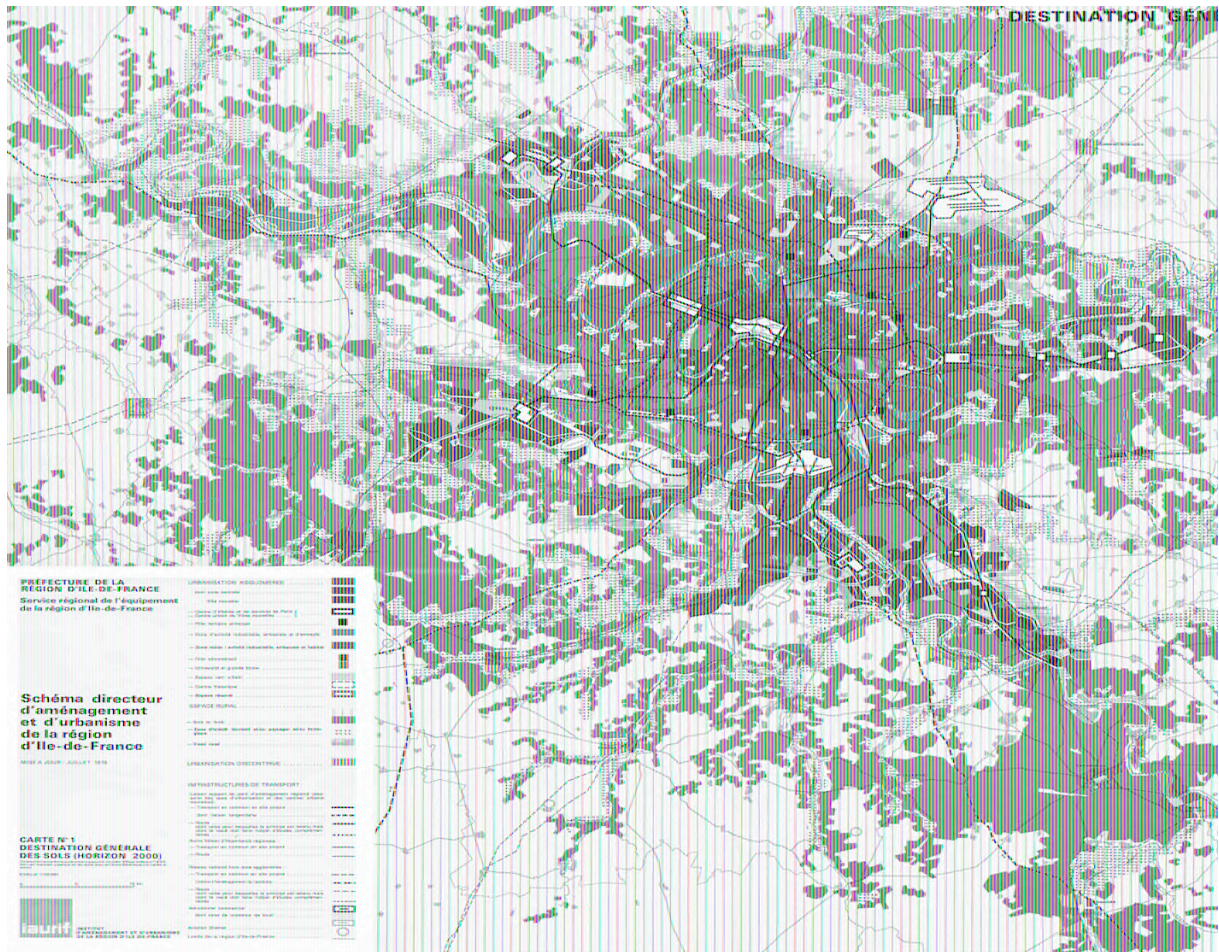


Figure 5. Development and urban planning blueprint for the Île de France region (*Schéma d'aménagement et d'urbanisme de la région Île de France*), 1976. General purpose ground survey map, (*Carte de destination générale des sols*), scale: 1/150,000. Articulating the urban and rural, the plan develops a "landscape planning" approach, advocating both the safeguarding, adaptation and projection of developments for the future. Source: Direction Régionale de l'Équipement Île de France.

In the meantime, the administrative reform approved by General de Gaulle in 1964 once again reflected the mistrust of a centralised government faced with a territory capable of standing up to the “Jacobin” state. When it was implemented in 1968, it signalled the end of the *Département de la Seine* (Seine department). Created in 1790 by the *Assemblée Constituante* of 1789, this latter comprised the municipalities within a radius of three *lieues* from Notre-Dame. It had since become synonymous with the capital’s densely populated districts and municipalities which had initiated many progressive planning policies, including social housing, garden cities, public amenities, utilities and parks [Figure 6](#). At the time of its abolition, it was home to more than 5 million residents and contained the "red belt", which was constituted since the 1920’s by the working-class suburbs of Paris and represented a political heart of French communism. Its administrative borders were then further divided into four new *départements* [Figure 7](#). Fifty years later, a brand new institution, Métropole du Grand Paris was created, a much less powerful body whose boundaries were almost similar to the old departmental boundaries which were subsequently subdivided [Figure 8](#).¹³

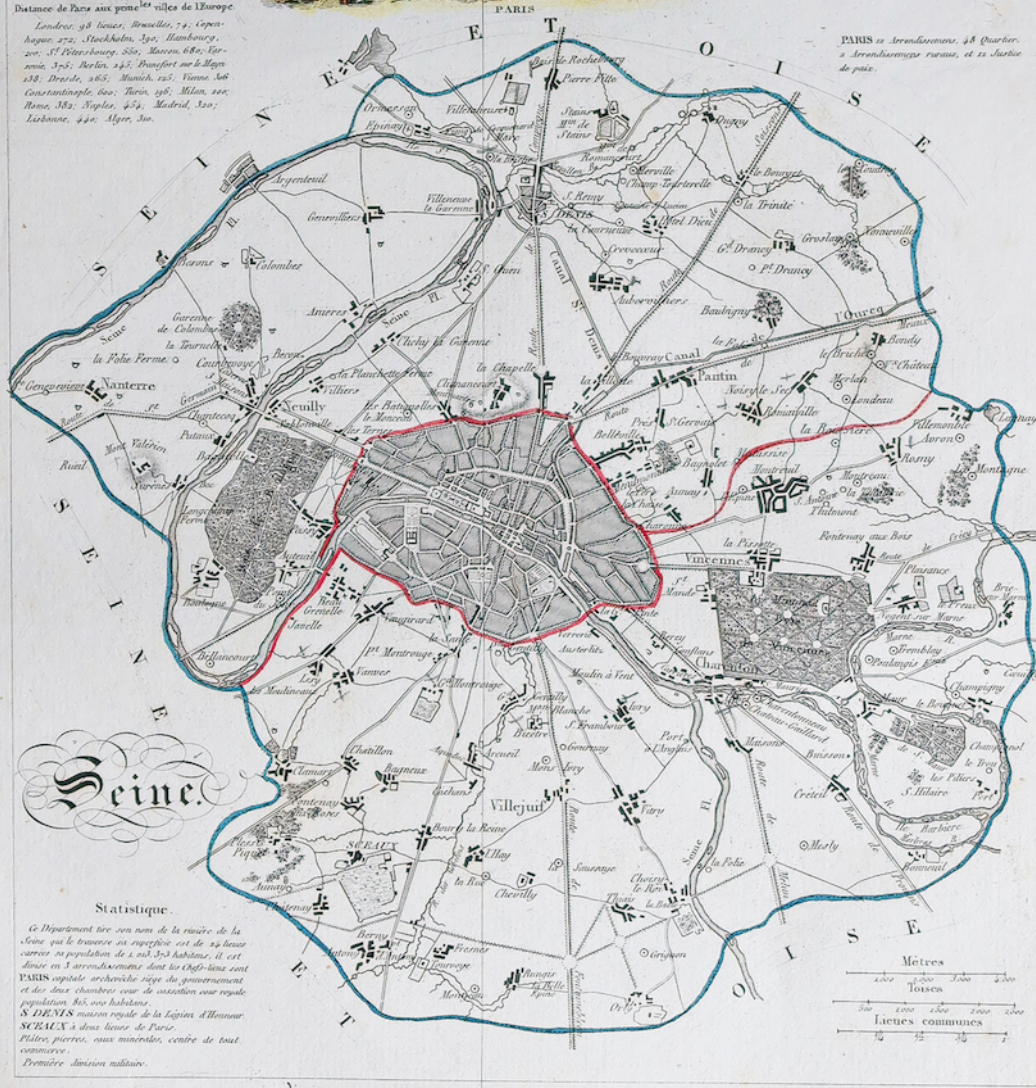
¹³ Bellanger, « La traversée historique du Grand Paris ».



Distance de Paris aux principales villes de l'Europe

Londres, 98 lieues; Bruxelles, 74; Copenhague, 272; Stockholm, 392; Hambourg, 201; St. Pétersbourg, 550; Moscou, 680; Varsovie, 375; Berlin, 247; Brunsfort sur le Mayn, 188; Dresde, 265; Munich, 235; Vienne, 306; Constantinople, 600; Turin, 246; Milan, 200; Rome, 384; Naples, 454; Madrid, 320; Lisbonne, 440; Alger, 300.

PARIS se divise en 48 Quartiers, 3 Arrondissemens ruraux, et 12 Jurisdictions de paix.



Statistique.
 Ce Département tire son nom de la rivière de la Seine qui le traverse au sujet de ce qui est de 24 lieues carrées sa population de 1,000,000 habitans, il est divisé en 3 arrondissemens dont les chefs-lieux sont PARIS capitale archidiocèse siège du gouvernement et des deux chambres cour de cassation cour royale population 800,000 habitans
 S. DENIS maison royale de la Légation d'Honneur
 Sceaux à deux lieues de Paris.
 Palais royaux, aux ministères, centre de tout commerce.
 Première division militaire.

ANDRIEUX et BARRESWIL éditeurs Rue de la Pompe N° 45. À VERSAILLES

Michel fils aîné

Gravé par Dardelins, rue de la Pêche, N° 2.

Figure 6. Map of *Département de la Seine*, 1835. Andrieux et Barreswil éditeurs. At the time of the design of this map, the *Département* (1 million inhabitants) had three districts whose *chefs-lieux* were Paris, Saint-Denis and Sceaux.

LA PREMIERE COURONNE : ORGANISATION ADMINISTRATIVE



Figure 7. *La première couronne.* Administrative Organisation. The dismemberment of the Seine and Seine-et-Oise departments imposed the power of the District of Paris region (*District de la région de Paris*) and limited the influence of left-wing parties. Source: Schéma directeur d'aménagement et d'urbanisme de la région Île de France, 1976.

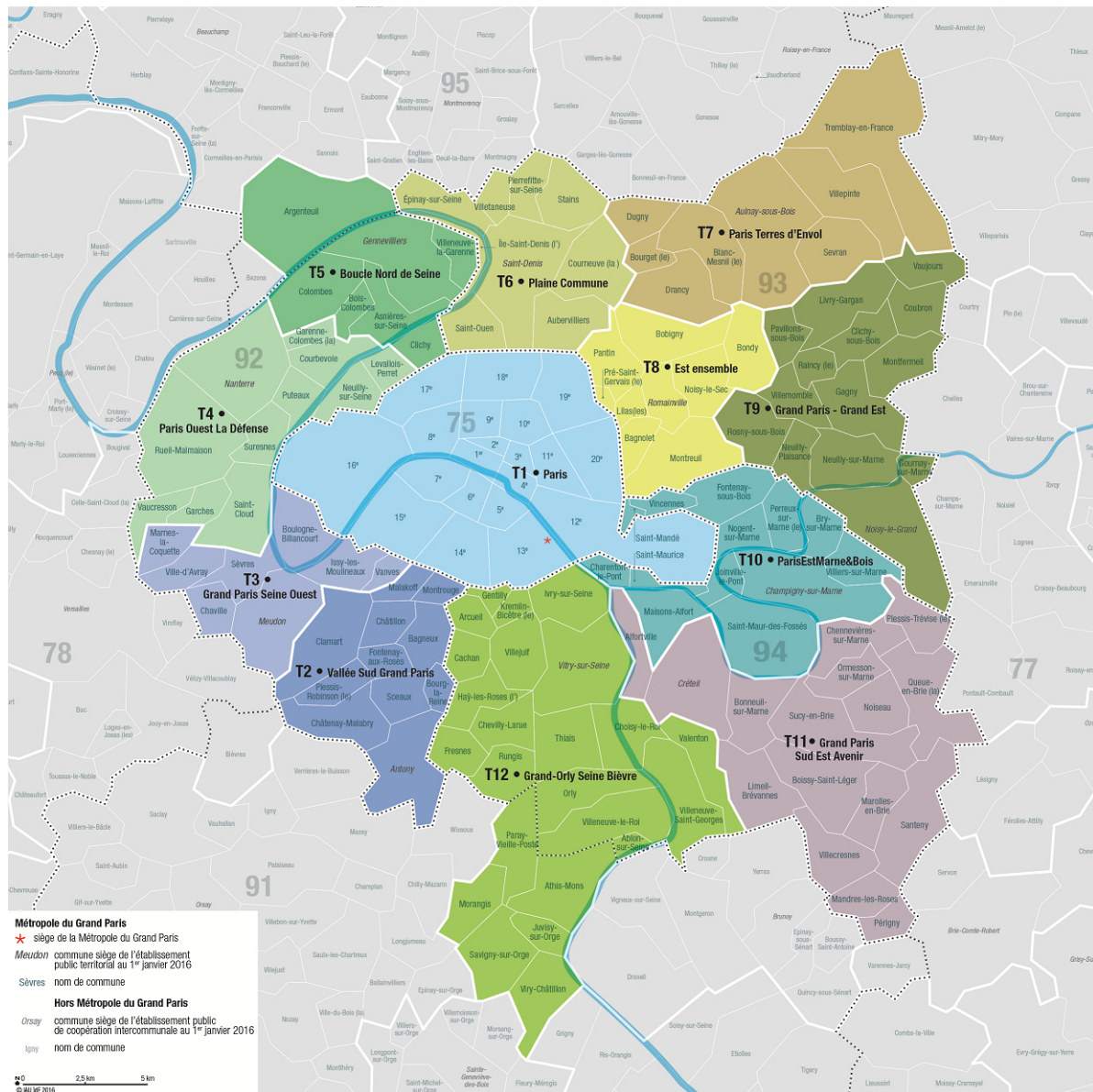


Figure 8. Map showing the boundary of “Métropole du Grand Paris”, 2016. The new institution (7.5 million inhabitants in 2020) brings together the City of Paris, all 123 municipalities in the inner suburbs and 7 municipalities in the outer suburbs. Source : Institut d’Aménagement et d’Urbanisme Île de France.

Aside from the fluctuations in its boundary and definition, the term "Grand Paris" reveals many ambiguities, as illustrated by an analysis of how it has been used in recent debates. Does it refer to the political process of gearing up for the future of the Paris region, termed “new Grand Paris” by one prime minister? Or is it a major publicly managed infrastructure project that encompasses a series of development projects – the 'Grand Paris Express'? Or is it a new political institution, “Métropole du Grand Paris”? This whole matter is also a target for denigrators of an essentially neo-liberal approach to urbanism due to the expected financial value-creation processes involved. Therefore, the term "Grand" can give rise to a whole series of interpretations or bias, for example by favouring the monumental and concentration, to the detriment of diversity or heterogeneity. This was the "city" that writer François Maspéro and photographer Anaïk Frantz covered from North to South and described in their essay *Les passagers du Roissy-Express* (The passengers of Roissy-Express). More recently it was depicted by film-maker Alice Diop in *Nous* and the photographers invited by the French Villa

Medicis for *Regards du Grand Paris*.¹⁴ This photographic commission which lasted 5 years, gave rise to a multi-form and itinerant exhibition, returning on this occasion to the places that witnessed the birth of these images **Figure 9**. All of these cultural productions inform the imaginary which feeds the perceptions of Greater Paris.



Figure 9. Poster for the “*Regards du Grand Paris*” photographic exhibition, Magasins généraux, Musée Carnavalet, 38 Grand Paris sites and Grand Paris Express building sites, 2021. Photo: Lucie Jean, *Cité lacustre #7/* Graphisme: Kidnap Your Designer. The exhibition featured the works of artists who participated in the first five years (2016-2021) of the eponymous photographic commission, entrusted by the Ministry of Culture to Ateliers Medicis.

¹⁴ Maspero and Frantz, *Les passagers du Roissy-Express*. Diop, *Nous*. *Regards du Grand Paris*.

Grand Paris is above all the geographical and urban reality of the Paris region, inhabited by ten million people, a reality that covers major socio-economic, urban and political contrasts resulting from a long history and reflected in the successive expansion of the capital city region over several centuries. In other words, the idea of 'Grand' in the term 'Grand Paris' corresponds as much to a reality that is present as to a collective construct, projected, accumulated and stratified over time. This was the subject of the 2017 exhibition on "the origins of Grand Paris" organised at the Museum of Urban and Social History (*Musée d'histoire urbaine et sociale*) in Suresnes, a western Grand Paris municipality [Figure 10](#). No doubt due to the visual interaction, this event, covering over 130 years of history of the development of Grand Paris through numerous plans, maps, photographs and films, provided a good understanding of the various large-scale policies undertaken over more than a century. In so doing, through a historical construct based around the major regional plans that shaped its state and possible future at key moments in its history, the exhibition narratives and materials – maps and drawings, studies and documents, views and photographs, film and radio extracts – presented metropolitan dynamics in palpable form, clarifying the notion, reality and history of Grand Paris.¹⁵



Figure 10. Exhibition “*Aux origines du Grand Paris. 130 ans d’histoire*”, Musée d’histoire urbaine et sociale de Suresnes, 2017. The exhibition recounted the history of Grand Paris. The scenography borrowed documents and objects from some twenty national and territorial institutions. Source: Ville de Suresnes-Direction de la communication.

¹⁵ Corteville, Deguillaume, *Aux origines du Grand Paris*.

Inventing Grand Paris. Exploring a century of major regional plans

These various questions were at the origin of a 2012 initiative launched by a group of urban, architecture and landscape historians involved in the “Inventing Grand Paris, Entangled history of metropolitan areas” research programme (*Inventer le Grand Paris, Histoire croisée des métropoles*). Originally, this project was based on the observation that little consideration had been given to history in contemporary metropolitan plans and the fragmented nature of historiographic publications on Grand Paris. The programme had a twofold objective within the context of the current renewal of urban debate around the future of the Greater Paris region: first, to begin compiling an inventory of research into the history of the development of Grand Paris; second, to re-evaluate the major plans and thematic studies that marked the twentieth century in terms of understanding Grand Paris and the relationship between Paris and its suburbs. “Inventing” therefore has a double meaning here. First as *inventory*: what is the status of past and current research and how can we evaluate this body of knowledge in terms of an overall project covering the history of Grand Paris? And second as *invention*: what historical questions will renew our knowledge of the contemporary city?¹⁶

“Inventing Grand Paris” began by organising a multi-year cycle of conferences focused on four historical sequences spanning the twentieth century, and centred around key “moments” that are deemed important for understanding planning in the Greater Paris region. These “reports”, “plans” and “blueprints” have dotted the history of Grand Paris. They are regularly referred to and their importance can be measured by the frequency with which they are cited, without it being possible to assess their influence. By considering them as sequences in a diachronic history of Grand Paris and by focusing on the studies, texts and exchanges that underpin the range of expertise and professions involved, the aim was to highlight the relationships and actions that shaped them.

From the outset, the metropolitan history we proposed was an entangled history. Different research approaches are compared and contrasted with a view to historical interdisciplinarity, namely between social, political, landscape, planning and architectural history. Moreover, the objective is a cross-comparison of urban contexts within a transnational historical perspective. This international context is that of city planning debates at the turn of the twentieth century. As early as 1913, the report of the Commission for the enlargement of Paris drew comparisons between the capital cities of Berlin, London, Moscow and Washington. The discipline of urbanism itself emerged in a number of countries in the wake of international urbanism congresses and the accompanying exhibitions. These provided forums for intense exchanges of ideas, knowledge and professional expertise as well as for the movement of people. But aside from the study of these exchanges and movements, we need to understand how these transfers affected the initial situations.

This transnational framework therefore highlights new analytical perspectives and new topics for reflection and regional plans were undoubtedly one of these. It is essential to examine the solutions developed in Paris in light of other regional plans deployed in New York, Berlin, Tokyo or Moscow in order to consider both converging and singular practices. Urban and territorial concepts have thus been developed in a number of large cities in the 20th century in

¹⁶ For a presentation of this project, go to www.inventerlegrandparis.fr. This project was initiated in 2012 by a collective of researchers composed of Emmanuel Bellanger, Frédéric Bertrand, Florence Bourillon, Laurent Coudroy de Lille, Corinne Jaquand, André Lortie, Clément Orillard, Frédéric Pousin, Nathalie Roseau and Loïc Vadelorge. In 2017, it integrated the LabEx Urban Futures (*Futurs Urbains*) program, resulting in the research website www.inventerlegrandparis.fr, produced by post-doctoral researcher Cédric Ferial and web designer Jérémie Bancilhon (GoOnWeb). Since then, the collective has expanded to include new researchers as the work developed.

a parallel and intersecting manner, with very different degrees of success depending on the circumstances: from parkways to park-systems, from garden cities to new towns, from technical networks to spatial infrastructures. Understanding the regional plan as a complete object, with its specific contexts and effects, its ideas and actions, its representations and its temporalities, also implies considering the metropolis as a political stage, not only dominated (from above) by the central power that assimilates it exclusively to a state capital, but also constituted (from below) by a number of layers through which the consultations, negotiations, mobilizations, power relationships and coalitions that shape its future are forged.

The depth of plans. Questions and sources

The regional plans are understood here as complex objects constituted in contexts whereby they are designed and negotiated over a relatively long period, while the manner in which they are implemented is just as important as the way in which they are prepared. Take for example the 1934 “Development plan for the Paris Region” (the “*PARP*” plan) initiated in 1928. This decision was finally approved in 1939 just before the outbreak of the Second World War without ever really being implemented. Initiated in 1961, following approval of the “Paris region development and organisation plan” of 1960 (*Plan d'aménagement et d'organisation de la région parisienne*), the “*SDAURP*” planning and urbanism blueprint for Paris Region of 1965 was not legally approved but gave rise to a number of operational decisions before its final production (e.g., “Deferred Development Areas” or *Zones d'Aménagement Différé*) as well as a number of construction projects that would only bear fruit long afterwards. It is also interesting to note that these two plans are often called after their most famous author: the architect Henri Prost, who was commissioned to carry out the preliminary study for the first plan, and the Delegate General in charge of the Paris Region, Paul Delouvrier, who oversaw the second plan. However, because these plans governing the future of the Parisian metropolis were prepared for the long term and involved different types of stakeholders and issues, and because they concern the capital region on a large scale, they cannot be definitively considered as the production of a single person or even a single structure.

It was precisely this iconic aspect of the plan that we wanted to get beyond. Iconic because frequently reduced to the map that accompanies it, whereas the discourses and narratives actually have a major structuring impact and the preparation of plan documents presuppose that studies have been carried out and terms of action negotiated. Iconic because frequently associated with the name of its main backer. Iconic because often condensed into a single date (date of publication, date of approval), whereas the plan is prepared and implemented over several years, meaning that it is a sequence as much as a moment, raising a series of research-related questions.

The founding act of the decision to draw up a regional plan is often the result of a long gestation period in which political stakeholders, technical structures and project owners produce analyses, set out guidelines and propose long-range plans, setting off a whole range of actions and decisions that will contribute to the plan's production. Aside from the documents that help to shape it, the design of the plan triggers a range of actions around intentions and issues that will impact regional development, regardless of the outcome of the plan itself.

A first series of questions concerns the *existence* of the plan. Under what conditions does the need for a regional plan arise? What novelty does the plan introduce over previous policies that covered *Grand Paris*? What different types of cooperation will it lead to? A second series of

questions concerns the *nature* of the plan. A forward-planning, programming or operational instrument; visual and textual; report, map or dissertation; forum for interdisciplinary analysis and summary actions; source of international exchange and temporal landmarks. The plan appears in all the diversity of its form and complexity of its objectives. How can we understand its contours? What do they say about planning conditions? How is it disseminated and what can it be used to communicate? A third series of questions concerns the plan's *temporality*. What will happen to it once it has been approved? Should its effectiveness be measured in terms of the intensity of its design, the success of its reception or the impact of its deployment? How persistent is it?

Answering these questions means opening the (big) black box of the plan's production and unfolding its *thickness*. Examining the polysemous nature of the object, with its blurred contours and multiple functions covering different types of sources: legislative and legal arrangements; surveys and technical, urban and consultative reports; reports of exchanges, team organisation charts, and communications and publications that summarise and circulate ideas. Identifying these *bodies* of sources immediately raises questions about the city archives, which are complex and multi-faceted, often scattered and fragmented (or even threatened with disappearance or dilution) and for which no overall view exists. Firstly, this approach forces us to deal with both the "multiplicity" of metropolitan archives and their abundance and diversity, making their exhaustiveness unattainable.¹⁷ Secondly, it raises the question of a cross-disciplinary approach to these archives that would make it possible to constitute a "corpus of plans". How can we deal with this multiplicity? How can it be made legible, in other words, understandable and accessible? These are the questions we will now tackle by presenting the idea and the tool we have developed, namely an Atlas of Grand Paris plans that will reflect all of the depth of said plans.

Creating the Atlas of Grand Paris plans

When it was published by Jacqueline Beaujeu-Garnier and Jean Bastié in 1967, "The Atlas of Paris and the Paris region" (*L'Atlas de Paris et de la région parisienne*), was hailed as a new genre.¹⁸ It focused both on the capital city and its region and Paul Delouvrier believed that it adequately met the needs of development. "This means that all sources of information, both public and private, have contributed to the very fabric of the work. The atlas summarises all existing knowledge about the region".¹⁹ This atlas, which we would now describe as metropolitan, was part of the wave of regional atlases designed as sets of maps that spatialised the knowledge produced for a particular territory. As a summary representation bringing together diverse data – particularly quantitative data – it provides a vision and a complex understanding of the territory concerned by the planning project. Indeed, this atlas ends with a map of the 1965 planning blueprint for the Greater Paris region, projecting the reader into the future [Figure 11](#).

¹⁷ Cf. the research program *Archival City. Bridging Urban Past and Future*, held by Gustave Eiffel University, <https://archivalcity.hypotheses.org>.

¹⁸ Beaujeu-Garnier and Bastié, *Atlas de Paris et de la région parisienne*.

¹⁹ Delouvrier, Preface to *Atlas de Paris et de la région parisienne*.

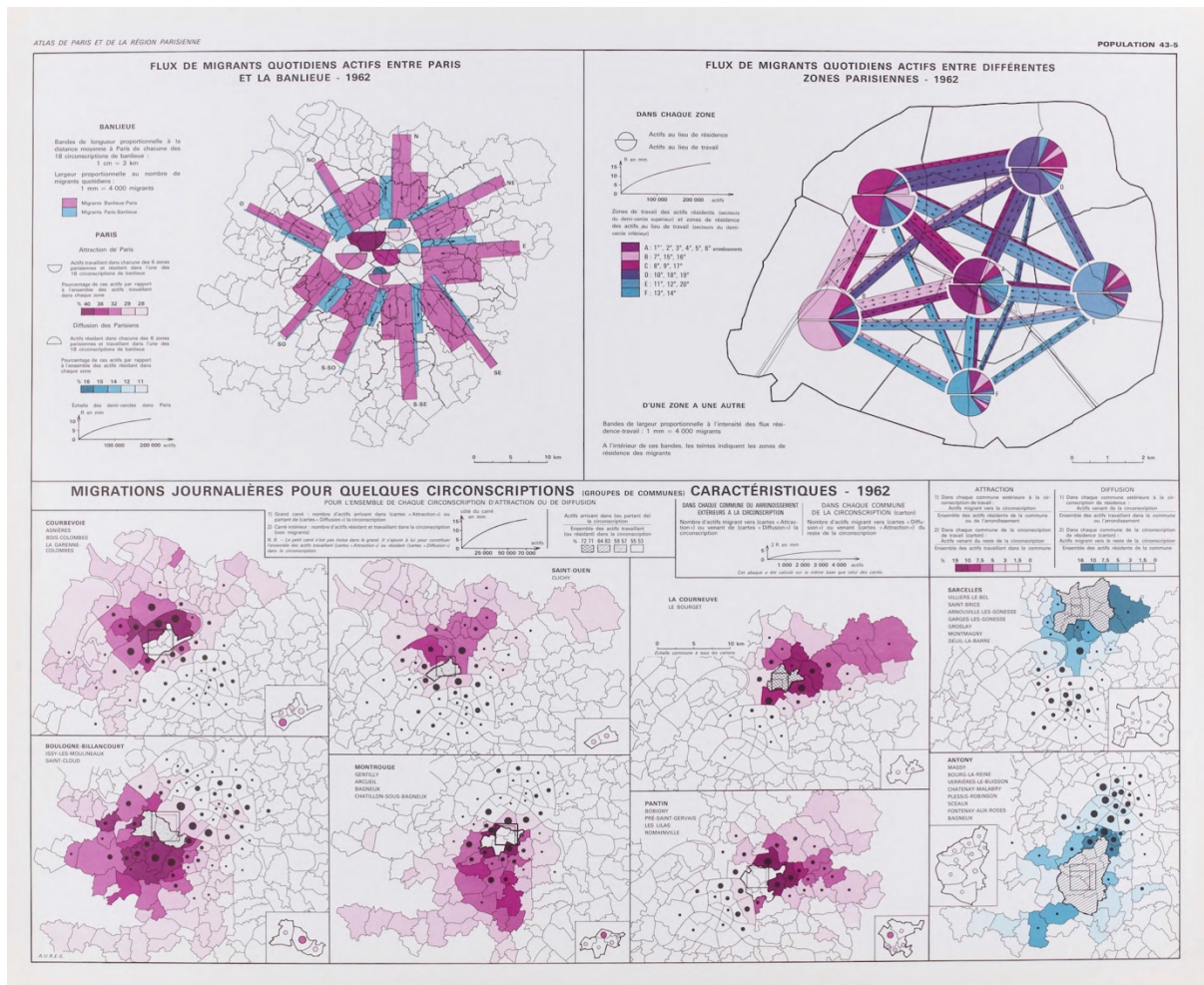


Figure 11. *Atlas de Paris et de la région parisienne* by Jacqueline Beaujeu-Garnier and Jacques Bastié, 1967 (Éditions Berger-Levrault, 92 p.), illustration showing population daily migrations, p.33. Conducted in parallel with the 1965 regional plan, this geographic atlas presents the numerous data characterizing the territory of the Paris region in the form of images.

The atlas as means of representation

Can the atlas, as a means of representation, explain the complex realities of the regional plans? These plans were produced at the juncture of several fields of analysis, namely urbanism, architecture, geography, engineering and the social sciences. They comprise maps, texts, drawings, photographs, etc., reflecting heterogeneous modes of action. As an assembly “workshop” that structures data and productions from various disciplinary fields and professional backgrounds, the atlas can reflect the “thickness” of plans. Their physical thickness first and foremost because a plan is underpinned by a multiplicity of maps of different scales depicting the numerous components of the city and territory. It is also underpinned by texts that shed light on its various aspects. Secondly, their chronological thickness because it takes several years or even decades to deploy the procedures required to produce a plan. The plans succeed and respond to one another, or they may take the opposite tack from what was planned, thus revealing the links that unite these objects over time, which are too often isolated in order to highlight their originality.

Lastly, their narrative thickness, the chronological succession of maps and plans highlighting urban transformations and analysing the mechanisms involved in the city's production.²⁰ As such, the atlas shares the properties specific to a book, i.e., those of an editorial device.²¹ As an assembly “workshop”, the atlas is also a place of editing, making it possible to vary the way in which things are put together to construct a number of narratives depending on the focus adopted.²² Here we encounter one of the properties of the atlas genre, which proposes routes, itineraries, or even journeys through its constituent maps. Because it makes it possible to construct a number of scenarios and to shed light on various aspects of the reality of a territory, the atlas becomes a tool for producing knowledge.

Identifying and mapping archives

To produce the Atlas of Grand Paris plans, it was first necessary to get the sources to converge and into the same space. While the usual archive centres preserve the sought after plans, there are also many other places where plans are preserved, and not all are known to specialists. The exhaustiveness that would seem to be just within reach – especially for the better-known plans – quickly proves to be a utopian myth. Indeed, as soon as one explores a collection to access how the plan was produced, it is not uncommon for documents to refer to other collections. This is the case with the aerial photographs present in the Prost collection at *Centre d'archives d'architecture contemporaine*, but which are taken from campaigns conducted by the French army's geographical department (*Service géographique des armées (SGA)*) and kept at another archive centre. It was therefore necessary to pool documentary resources and bring together librarians, archivists, documentalists and historians.

These investigations made it possible to build an initial map of Grand Paris plan archives and identify the collections of a number of archive centres that have preserved archives that are of interest to this specific history: the Paris Archives, *Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris* (historical library of the City of Paris), *Bibliothèque de l'Hôtel de Ville* (City of Paris library), the National Archives, the Archives of the Seine-et-Marne Department, *Centre de ressources documentaires Aménagement, Logement, Nature (CRDALN* – a resource center containing resources on planning, housing and nature), *Direction régionale et interdépartementale de l'environnement, de l'aménagement et des transports d'Île-de-France (DRIEAT* – Greater Paris regional and interdepartmental office of the environment, planning and transport), *Institut Paris Région, Académie d'Architecture*, and *Centre d'archives d'architecture contemporaine (Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine)*.

The work of identifying the collections took several forms based around documentary research campaigns involving interns and research engineers.²³ It revealed that different versions of the same plan could be conserved in several different collections, demonstrating that these plans circulate physically between institutions, departments and groups of individuals that go beyond the plan signatories and their associates. Tracking the “archival grain” therefore makes it possible to prefigure a body of protagonists, often unknown to the regular historiography, who

²⁰ Van Damme, « Les atlas de ville et l'administration du passé métropolitain au XIXème siècle ».

²¹ Jacob, *L'empire des cartes*.

²² Didi-Huberman, *Atlas ou le gai savoir inquiet*.

²³ Three student internships of four months each were financed over two academic years. The three undergraduates in the UPEM history master's programme entitled "Historical Diagnosis and Urban Planning", directed by Loïc Vadelorge, were hosted at LATTs (one of the Université Paris Est research labs partnering the "Inventing Grand Paris" research programme) and supervised by Cedric Fériel. Each student worked on a single plan: Abdennour Kermadi (2017, PADOG), Sara Azil (2018, PARP 1934), Amira Boumaaza (2018, PARP 1956).

nevertheless testify to their contribution in their production through the actual presence of these plans in their archives. In other words, constituting a body of plans makes it possible to feed knowledge around how the plan was produced and its influence. As such, the question of archives is both practical and epistemological.

Temporalities and classification

The documentary campaigns were limited to three plans: the first *Projet d'aménagement de la région parisienne* (Development plan for the Paris region), better known by its author's name as the Prost Plan, the second plan which succeeded it, known by its acronym *PARP*, and finally the *Plan d'aménagement et d'organisation générale de la région parisienne* (Paris region development and organisation plan), also referred to by its acronym, *PADOG*. The period covered dates from 1928 when *CSAORP* was set up (i.e., *Comité supérieur d'aménagement et d'organisation de la région parisienne* – Higher committee for planning and organisation in the Paris region), to 1961 when *PADOG* gave way to a new regional plan.

The first regional plan was developed in 1932 under the leadership of Henri Prost, *urbaniste en chef*, accompanied by Pierre Remaury and Jean Royer. The arduous work of collecting and updating documents and studies was carried out, resulting in numerous maps, notes and reports that made it possible to present a first development project in 1934. This complex document included a general report by Henri Prost, an introduction by Louis Dausset in his capacity as President of *CSAORP*, a file of sketches and perspectives, five site protection plans and a land use map and building regulations. It was subsequently completed by a public inquiry in 1935 and approved in 1939 on the eve of the War.²⁴ [Figure 12](#).

Adopted in 1956, the revised *PARP*, embodied in a printed report and several maps, pursued the national objective of limiting growth in the Paris region.²⁵ It tightened the urbanization perimeters and identified the sites of a few major structuring facilities such as Orly Airport, and La Défense business district. It focused on densification of the transportation network (highways and expressways) and travelling into Paris via planned new ring roads. Based on a study of the aesthetic protection of the Paris region conducted in 1950, the plan created a regional protection zone of green spaces together with a reforestation strategy and urbanized sectors subject to regulations for the enhancement of landscapes and historical monuments. [Figure 13](#).

Approved on August 6, 1960, *PADOG* was developed under the *aegis* of Pierre Sudreau, Minister of Construction and adapted for communication purposes.²⁶ It was drawn up in the context of a rapidly growing population, the arrival of new private actors, and the creation of

²⁴ Among the documents included in the Atlas are: "*Cartes des transports du secteur ouest de la région parisienne*" (1933, Archives Nationales, file number 20030430/22), "*Rapport et projet de vœux sur la réglementation des transports publics automobiles*" (1933, Archives Nationales, file number 20030430/23), the entire 1934 plan (Direction régionale Île-de-France (DRIEAT), file number 787 SE 2), as well as the public inquiry file (1935, Archives de Paris, file 85WR).

²⁵ "*Projet d'aménagement de la région parisienne pris en considération le 12 janvier 1956 par Mr. Roger Duchet, ministre de la reconstruction et du logement*" is composed of an 88-page printed document that presents the general development program (City of Paris/Historical Library reference number 25291), a global plan that presents the plans of the municipalities of the Paris region at a scale of 1:50,000 (reference number FM AT 4), and a central section made up of 4 thematic maps (reference number 2529), as well as technical appendices.

²⁶ The plan was published in two versions: a complete version dating from 1960, signed by Michel Debré, Pierre Gibel, Pierre Sudreau, and another abridged version dating from 1962, with 62 color pages presenting a summary of the plan in three languages (English, German, and Spanish), then in French. Both versions are included in the Atlas: i.e., the complete version (153 p., Direction régionale Île-de-France, cote 75.0784SE.002_1), and the abridged version (Archives de Paris, cote 1934W 23).

Priority Urbanization Zones (*Zones d'Urbanisation Prioritaire*). The method adopted distinguished between two scales: the entire regional territory and the central part of the agglomeration with more accurate zoning. Polycentrality is illustrated by the desire to strengthen the communes in the inner suburbs and medium-sized towns outside the urban area. Park cities were planned in the vicinity of Versailles and Vélizy-Villacoublay as well as new cities at the four cardinal points within a radius of 40 to 50 kms from Paris. Following on from the 1956 *PARP*, *PADOG* maintained a ring of agricultural areas and forests in a wide perimeter around the urban area [Figure 14](#).

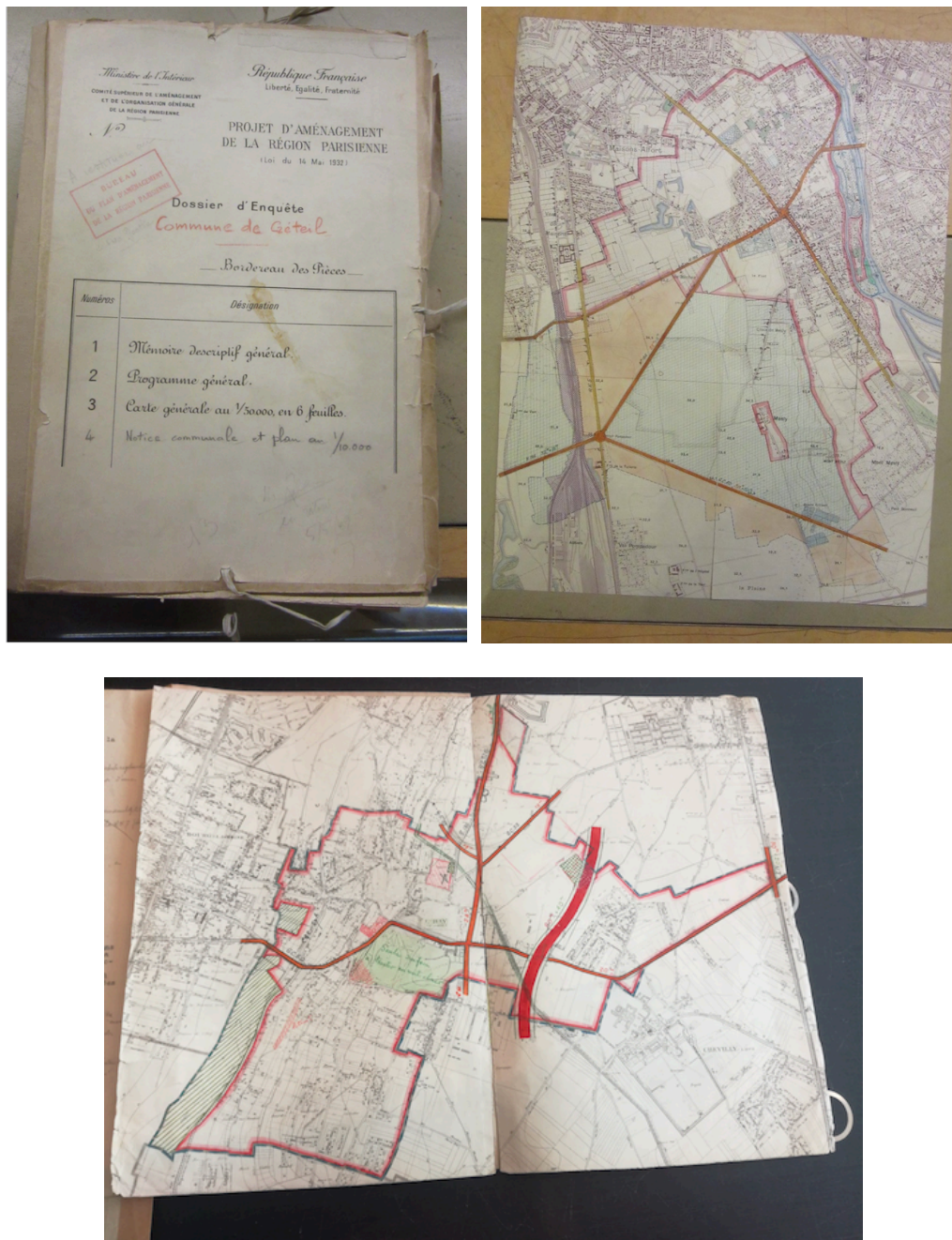


Figure 12. *Projet d'aménagement de la région parisienne* (Paris region development plan) (Law of 14 May 1932), *Comité supérieur d'aménagement et d'organisation de la région parisienne* (Higher committee for planning and organisation in the Paris region), a : Survey (Commune de Créteil), 1935. Source: Archives de Paris (Cote 85WR) ; b : Survey (Commune de L'Haÿ-Les-Roses), map, scale: 1/10,000, 1935. Source: Archives nationales (Cote 19770911/7).

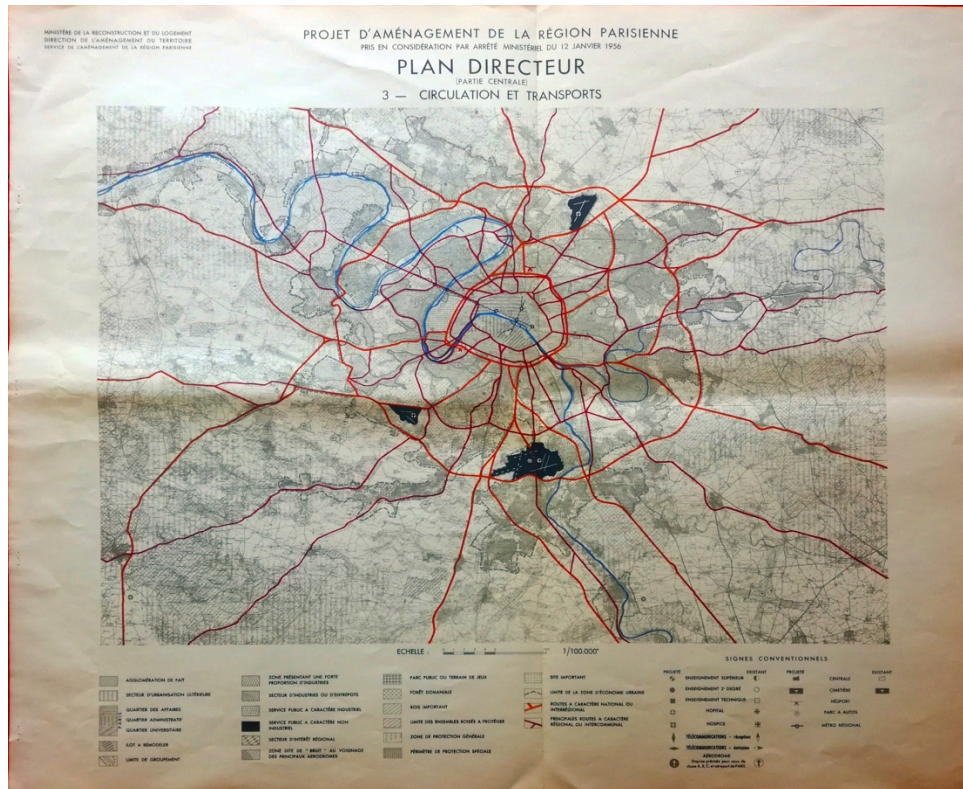


Figure 13. *Projet d'aménagement de la région parisienne* (Development plan for Paris Region). *Pris en considération par arrêté du 12 janvier 1956*, a : « Plan directeur (Partie centrale), 3. Circulation et transports » (« Planning scheme, Circulation and Transportation »), scale 1 : 100000. Source : Bibliothèque de l'Hôtel de Ville de Paris, Cote 25291 ; b : « Plan routier » (« Road scheme »), scale 1:50,000. Source : Archives Nationales, Cote 19790843/1.

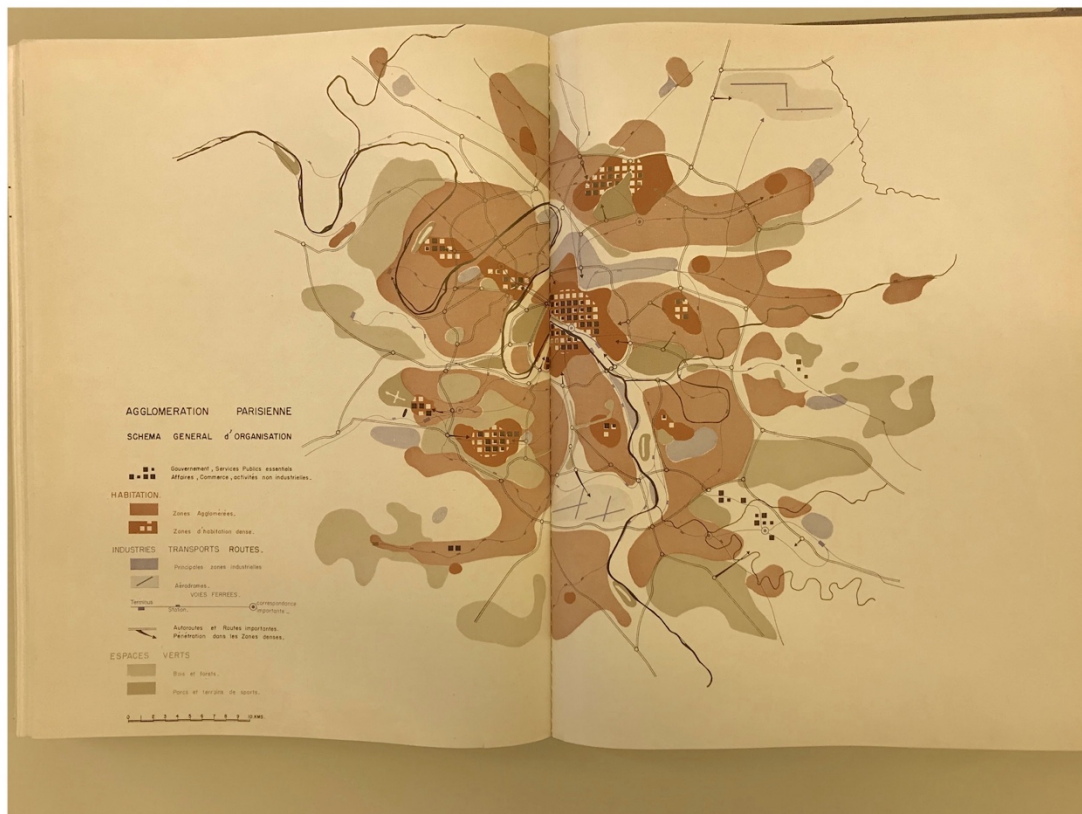


Figure 14. « Agglomération parisienne. Schéma général d’organisation ». *Plan d’aménagement et d’organisation générale de la région parisienne* (Paris region development and organisation plan), 1960. Source : René Magnan et Louis Lemoine, « L’une des bases de l’aménagement de la région parisienne : l’organisation polycentrique », *Urbanisme*, n°68, 1960, pp.10-11.

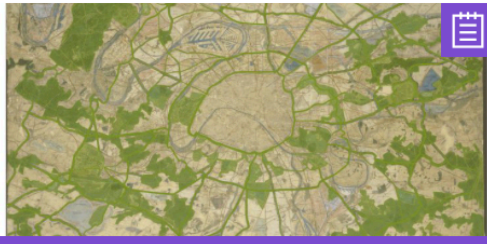
The individual campaigns conducted on each of the three plans have raised important methodological and technical issues concerning the historiography of the regional plans. They made it possible to identify sets of documents in the archives and documentary collections, to characterise them (i.e., nature, title and "author"), note their rating and to photograph them in digital format. They culminated in the construction of a database in the form of Excel spreadsheets and digital image files [Figure 15](#). In the ten archive centres visited, 233 documents were analysed and photographed: 55 documents for the “Prost plan”, 88 documents for *PARP* and 90 documents concerning *PADOG*. The image database contains a total of 13,140 digital photographs. A long technical process of fine-tuning and standardising photographic content (straightening of shots, cropping, gumming, rebalancing colours, etc.) proved essential for making the raw images usable. Once this “post-photographic” work had been performed, an initial "recollection” took place, consisting of compiling the metadata in a single Excel spreadsheet and attaching the photographic documents to the metadata. This database provides the visual and textual material used to formulate a number of hypotheses in appreciating the history of the plans of Grand Paris.

Archive	Photo	Plan de référence	Période	Titre du document	Objet/ Plan comme corpus	Type de document	Année	Mois	Jour	(service, administration, etc)	(personne)	Description	Lieu de conservation			
1934W3	1934W3-4	PARP	1944-1960s	Aménagement de la région parisienne, première étude de la protection des zones touristiques	objet	Carte	1948			Ministère de la Reconstruction et de l'Urbanisme, Direction de l'Aménagement du territoire, Service de l'Aménagement de la Région Parisienne		carte présentant la première étude de la protection des zones touristiques	Archives de Paris	Cartes - protection des zones touristiques		
19790843/1	19790843/1-2	PARP	1944-1960s	Agglomération Parisienne Localisation possibles de groupes importants d'habitations	objet	Carte	1	7	1957	Secrétariat d'Etat à la reconstruction et au logement Direction de l'aménagement du territoire Service de l'aménagement de la région parisienne		Carte à l'échelle 1/100.000e présentant la localisation des opérations de construction d'habitations projetées et en cours de réalisation ainsi que la localisation des opérations de construction des grands	Archives nationales	Carte-plan groupe d'habitation		
19790843/1	19790843/1-4	PARP	1944-1960s	Projet d'aménagement de la région parisienne Plan routier	Objet	Plan		1	1956	Ministère de la Reconstruction et de l'Urbanisme Direction de l'Aménagement du territoire Service de l'Aménagement de la Région Parisienne		Plan à l'échelle 1/200.000e présentant le nouveau plan routier pris en considération par le ministre de la reconstruction et de l'urbanisme	Archives nationales	Carte-plan routier		
19790843/1	19790843/1-5	PARP	1944-1960s	Projet d'aménagement de la région parisienne Plan routier	Objet	Plan	12	1	1956	Ministère de la Reconstruction et de l'Urbanisme Direction de l'Aménagement du territoire Service de l'Aménagement de la Région Parisienne		Plan à l'échelle 1/50.000e présentant le nouveau plan routier pris en considération par le ministre de la reconstruction et de l'urbanisme	Archives nationales	Carte-Plan routier Paris		
19770784/1	19770784/1-3	PARP	1944-1960s	Plan directeur	Objet	Plan						Plan à l'échelle 1/500.000e présentant le projet directeur qui divise le territoire de la région parisienne en trois parties distinctes: zone d'économie rurale, zone	Archives nationales	Carte-zonage		

Figure 15. Extract from the table of data locating and describing documents contained in archives for *Projet régional d'aménagement de la région parisienne (PARP [Paris region development plan] -1956)*. Source: Database of archive documents for Atlas of Grand Paris plans/ Inventer le Grand Paris.

Visualizing the Atlas through the digital humanities

When it came to “publishing” the work that resulted from the multi-year cycle of *Inventing Grand Paris* conferences, and when we realised that these were merely milestones, the digital media appeared to be the ideal place for collating the collected productions – textual, visual, oral, articles, seminars and archives – within a single mosaic that could be seen and placed in perspective and updated with new material, including reflective contributions on this same material. The digital platform opened in 2017 and was designed within this perspective as a scientific forum for publishing articles, research in progress and sources that we have structured under three headings: panorama, projects and corpus. Under this third heading, alongside the Grand Paris bibliographic database, listing several thousand sources relating to the history of Grand Paris from 1789 up to the present day, appears the Atlas of Grand Paris plans, which we have designed as part of a reflection on the digital humanities. [Figure 16](#).



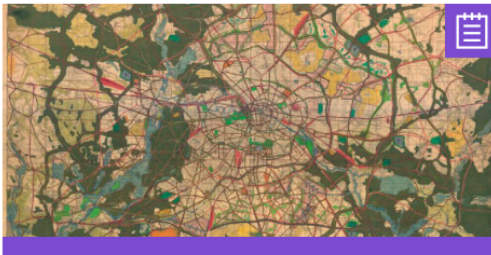
Séance 1 - Les paysages du Grand Paris

Ecole nationale supérieure d'architecture Paris Belleville
Jeudi 20 décembre 2018 : 9h-13h30



Séance 2 - Le Grand Paris du XIXe siècle

Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Paris-Belleville
Mardi 15 janvier 2019 : 14h-18h



Séance 3 - Atelier Paris-Berlin : Grand Berlin, écriture de l'histoire et politiques urbaines

Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Paris-Belleville
Jeudi 21 février 2019 : 9h30-13h



Séance 4 - Journée d'étude – Aménager la banlieue parisienne : les mondes de l'économie mixte et leurs histoires

Cité Descartes, Champs-sur-Marne, Bâtiment Bienvenue,
Lab'urba, Plot A, salle A301
Jeudi 28 mars 2019 : 9h-18h



Séance 5 - Journée d'étude – 1919, les quatre saisons de l'urbanisme

L'Esplanade, salle multimédia, esplanade des Courtieux et
Musée d'Histoire Urbaine et Sociale de Suresnes
Jeudi 18 avril 2019 : 9h00-19h



Séance 6 - La limite de Paris. De la Zone et ses archives à la révision du périphérique

ENSA de Paris-Belleville. Salle 12
Jeudi 20 juin 2018 : 10h-18h30

Figure 16. “Inventing Grand Paris, Entangled history of metropolitan areas”. This scientific web platform is a space for publishing work, a portal for hosting forthcoming research and a guide to historical resources. The seminar (in this case, the program for 2018-2019) is regularly published, thus highlighting work in progress. Source: www.inventerlegrandparis.fr.

Indeed, the work involved in classifying the mass of material collected in the course of the documentary campaigns highlighted the need for a *matrix* to organise these sets of material: a matrix that aims to organise and assemble the sources put together and to provide functionalities that will feed future research from the issues raised by the researchers. As a result, our goal was not one of formatting research results or representing the state of knowledge. Designed as the

atlas’ digital structure, the matrix we created is intended to be an instrument for organising the data collected for research purposes.²⁷

Designing the matrix

Structuring this matrix involved reflections on how to characterise the documents, leading to a typology that distinguished between maps and reports, decrees and regulations, official documents, consultation processes and surveys, and correspondence. The reflection process also focused on defining the author of these documents, which may refer to persons, services or institutions [Figure 17](#).

First, a timeline structures the distribution of the documents, making it possible to identify sequences. The time between years provides visual information on the density or otherwise of the productions. This timeline is then broken down into nine parallel axes which structure and reveal the “thickness” of each plan. The *legislative* axis lists the various laws and provides the decrees and regulations that have dotted the planning process. The *official documents* axis displays the plans, blueprints, portfolios and books presented publicly and/or approved. Here we find the iconography that has been circulated widely.

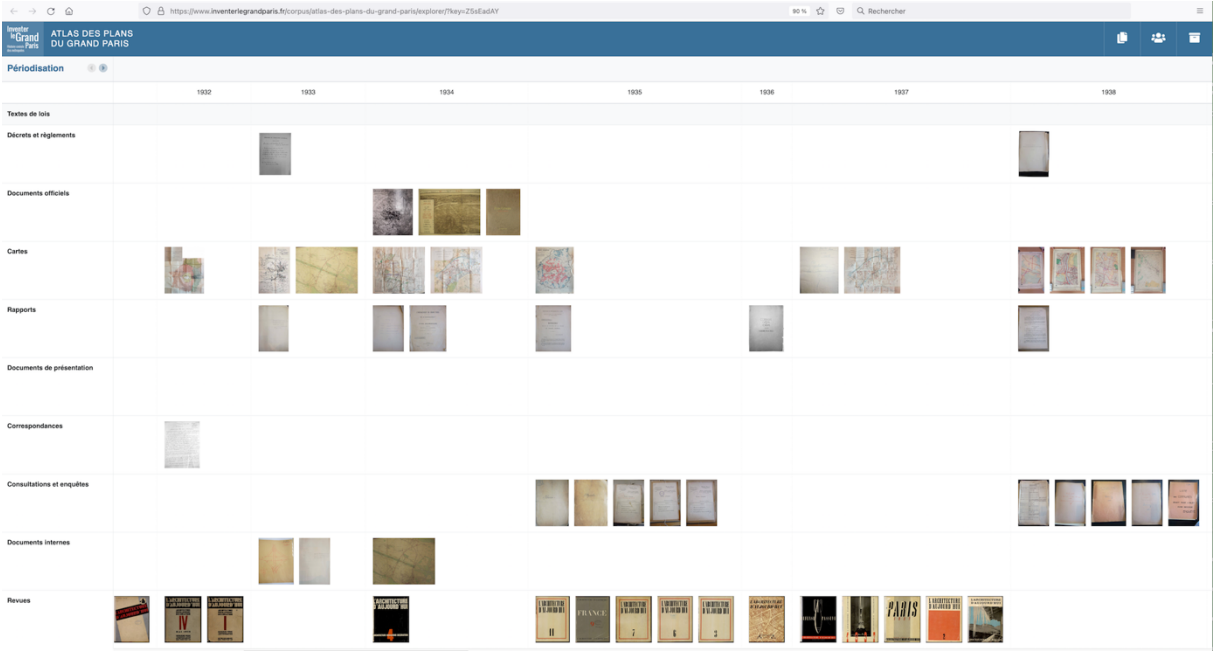


Figure 17. Atlas of Grand Paris plans. Extract of the nine axes matrix, 1928-1938. Source: Atlas of Grand Paris plans/ Inventer le Grand Paris 2023.

It is more by considering the other axes that we can gauge the true thickness. The *maps* axis draws attention to the extensive cartographic work involved in drawing up the plan, varying in scale from the 1:100,000 regional maps to the 1:10,000 scale used in the municipal maps. These different scales demonstrate the need for the plan to focus in detail on the communal level, which determines the acceptance by the population of the objectives and projected

²⁷ The results of the various campaigns were summarised by Alessandro Panzeri, post-doctoral researcher, who designed the atlas matrix. Following this work, Yoko Mizuma, research engineer, carried out several complementary campaigns and worked on the final format of the atlas.

transformations. The detailed study is not only a matter of cartographic scale, but is also expressed through thematic maps and a multitude of diagrams. As not all of the territory receives equal attention, certain sectors or subjects are investigated in greater depth and specific projects are conducted. Therefore, the maps axis highlights favoured themes like transport and roads. The chronological distribution of the maps reveals the complex thickness of the plan, which is also temporal in nature. In the case of the first development plan (i.e., the *Prost* plan), numerous 1:10,000 scale maps were produced well after the 1:50,000 scale overview map prepared at the outset.

As regards the texts, the *reports* axis underlines the administrative work involved in producing the plan. Progress reports and studies shed light on how the terms of action are negotiated. These sometimes prescriptive documents make it possible to appreciate the process of translation into measures and actions. Thus, a study of the aesthetic protection of the Greater Paris region (produced by Pierre Remaury in 1950) confirms that this theme acts as a lever for future conservation initiatives. The *presentation documents* axis represents a requisite for communication strategies aimed at the general public set out in *PADOG* but which had not previously focused on the expression of the plan itself. The *correspondence* axis sheds light on the links with national politicians and how the plan is handled by the Higher Committee in charge of it. Exchanges between institutions and government departments reveal the personalities involved in creating the plan. The *consultations and surveys* axis provides information concerning the administrative procedures for consulting citizens and disseminating the conditions for implementing the plan and rendering it acceptable. In the case of the *Prost* plan, a major survey was conducted in two phases in 1935 and 1938²⁸. Lastly, the *internal documents* axis comprises preparatory drafts, memos, opinions, technical studies and speeches for a specific department or stakeholder. This work, which has not always been in circulation, provides information on the day-to-day workings of the administrative departments.

A final axis is reserved for architecture and urbanism *reviews* (namely *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, *La Vie Urbaine*, *Urbanisme*). It provides an understanding of the communication efforts undertaken around the plan as well as its reception in the professional sphere. The articles – which may be consulted in series – also reveal the reflexive analyses delivered over the course of the plan design process.

Unlocking the heterogeneity of plans

The nine axes matrix helps structure the plethora of writings and figures generated by the plans. In addition to its evolutionary character, making it possible to add sources and sequences, the possibility of selecting and handling documents makes the atlas as a dynamic and interactive tool. The functionalities provided also make it possible to get beyond the images by accessing the documents: reading the entire report, exploring the detail of a map.

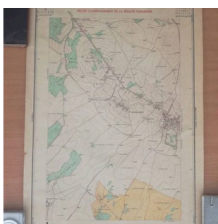
By visualizing the Atlas, the digital matrix provides a detailed and demonstrative account of the considerable dual heterogeneity of regional plans. First, the intrinsic heterogeneity of the plan itself, as revealed by the various constituent documents distributed along the matrix axes. This heterogeneity concerns each of the plans produced for the development of Greater Paris to varying degrees. Second, the heterogeneity between the plans themselves. Indeed, each set of documents gathered over the term of the plan has a distinct visual value. The documents

²⁸ See Coudroy de Lille, Fernandez Agueda, « Entre enquête publique et consultation. Le Projet d'aménagement de la région parisienne de 1934 à 1937 ».

produced by the Henri Prost agency include detailed plans with spectacular perspectives as well as numerous topographical representations. The 1956 *PARP* takes the form of a written report and is visually represented through diagrams, a few maps and tables. The 1960 *PADOG* was produced in several versions, one of which was especially slick from a communication perspective.

To manage the heterogeneity of the plans, the atlas displays the documents in the form of thumbnails in a minimal and systematic format to reduce the variety of reference documents. Clicking on each *thumbnail* gives access to the intrinsic thickness of the plan (a descriptive sheet describes the document components in the form of photographic images and metadata) [Figure 18](#).

Plans des communes de la région parisienne : 1 à 48



Confronter

Année :	1938
Fonds d'archives :	Direction régionale Île-de-France (DRIEAT)
Cote :	787 SE 3
Acteur(s) :	Henri Prost
Description :	47 cartes de communes de la région parisienne au 1/10 000e. Ces communes classées dans l'ordre de numérotation sont : Cormeilles-En-Vexin-Ouest, Cormeilles-En-Vexin-Est, Mézières, Hérouville, Nesles-La-Vallée, L'isle-Adam, Presles, Noisy-Sur-Oise, Viarmes, Luzarches, Chaumontel, Orry-La-Ville, La Chapelle-En-Serval, Montgeroult, Boissy-L'aillerie, Pontoise-Nord, Auvers-Sur-Oise-Ouest, Auvers-Sur-Oise-Est, Mériel, Nerville, Montsoul-Maffliers, Belloy, Villiers-Le-Sec, Fontenay-En-Parisis, Marly-La-Ville, Villeron, Menucourt, Vauréal, Pontoise-Sud, Saint Ouen-L'aumône, Beauchamp, Taverny, Saint Prix, Domont, Ecouen-Ouest, Ecouen-Est, Goussainville, Louvres, Chennevières-Les-Louvres, Le Mesnil-Amelot, Villeneuve-S.Dammartin, Saint Mard, Triel-Sur-Seine, Chanteloup-Les-Vignes, Conflans-Sainte Honorine, Herblay-Ouest, Herblay-Est, Franconville. Remarque : manque n°46.

Lien vers cette notice :

<https://www.inventerlegrandparis.fr/atlas-des-plans/plan-39-1-48/>

Figure 18. A descriptive sheet prepared for a group of forty-seven 1/10,000 scale maps (out of 192) of the communes of the Paris region, executed in 1938 under the direction of Henri Prost as part of the first regional plan. Source: Atlas of Grand Paris plans/Inventer le Grand Paris 2023.

Providing research paths

Strategically, the atlas' digital matrix combines visual and textual materials. Although the arrangement of images and text underpins the form of representation used by the atlas, the digital dimension increases the power of the medium thanks to its interactivity and ability to handle a large number of documents. To examine the nature of the plan, its contours or its thickness, the interplay between the reduced format of the thumbnail and its expansion in just one or several clicks is therefore essential. Grouping together thumbnails makes it possible to put together series of documents to be analysed as they are or to represent the plan in the form of temporal sequences. Examining long sequences makes it possible to appreciate the influence of a document that considerably outlasts its production. The functionalities of the matrix may therefore be used in various "paths" and "assembly processes" that researchers can deploy to tackle their research questions and hypotheses. Let us present three of these features.

The first concerns intersemiotics. A function is proposed under each image that allows documents to be compared two by two, for comparing two maps of different scales or an image and a text for example. This makes it easy to compare variants— especially cartographic variants. Correspondences captured in a dynamic manner can therefore shed light on bases for action or the terms of negotiation. [Figure 19](#).

The second one concerns intensity. To analyse the temporality of the plan and the intensity of its development, the matrix proposes a temporal cross-section of production for a given year, across the different longitudinal axes. This cross-section points up concomitance and links and paves the way for interpretations that highlight moments of great activity to the detriment of other lower intensity moments, thus characterising the temporalities specific to the plan's production [Figure 20](#).

The third relates to authorship. Analysing the thickness of the plan then makes it possible to restore the importance of those who designed, implemented and defended it. The Atlas of Grand Paris plans lists the actors involved in creating them, the term "actor" designating both individuals and departments. As regards the key people, once the structure of the corpus had been established from the 233 archived documents, the names of approximately 600 people were identified. Seventy-five of these people were surveyed and their biographical information analysed²⁹. The matrix therefore offers two means of accessing the actors: either via an alphabetical list or through the descriptive sheets of the documents which refer to the names of the actors [Figure 21](#).

A number of technical obstacles had to be overcome and the inventiveness of the webmaster was an invaluable resource³⁰. Filtering for example, which automatically displays data series according to year, archive centre and actor/author, proved to be technically complicated because of the large volume of documents. The engineer invented a system for highlighting the relevant documents with a value intensity: the selected documents therefore stand out against a homogeneous and neutral background. Here, the joint process involved in designing the atlas shows how the digital instrument can genuinely make the heterogeneous, dense and massive archive of development plans more visible.

²⁹ Biographical statements were written by art historian Morgane Hamon

³⁰ It is important to stress the close collaboration with Jérémie Bancillon of GoOnWeb, the engineer who designed and developed the website.

CONFRONTER DES DOCUMENTS



1958
Plan d'aménagement et
d'organisation générale de la
région parisienne approuvé par
le décret n° 60.857 du 6 août
1960

✕ Retirer



4 plans directeurs (Partie
centrale). Projet d'aménagement
de la région parisienne

✕ Retirer

Confronter les documents

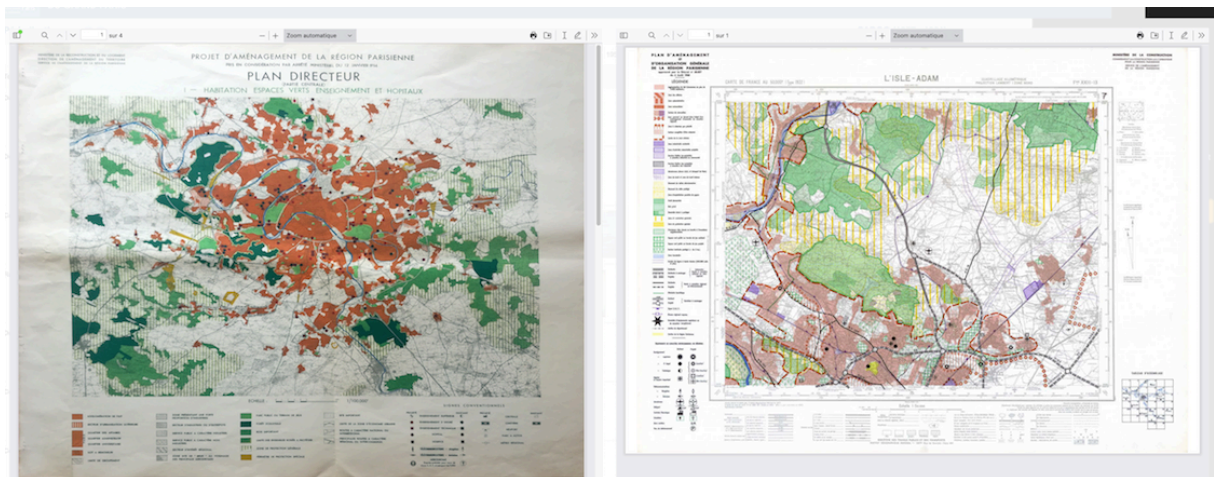


Figure 19. The digital functionality for comparing two documents side by side, with the window displaying a comparison of two maps. Source: Atlas of Grand Paris plans/Inventer le Grand Paris 2023.

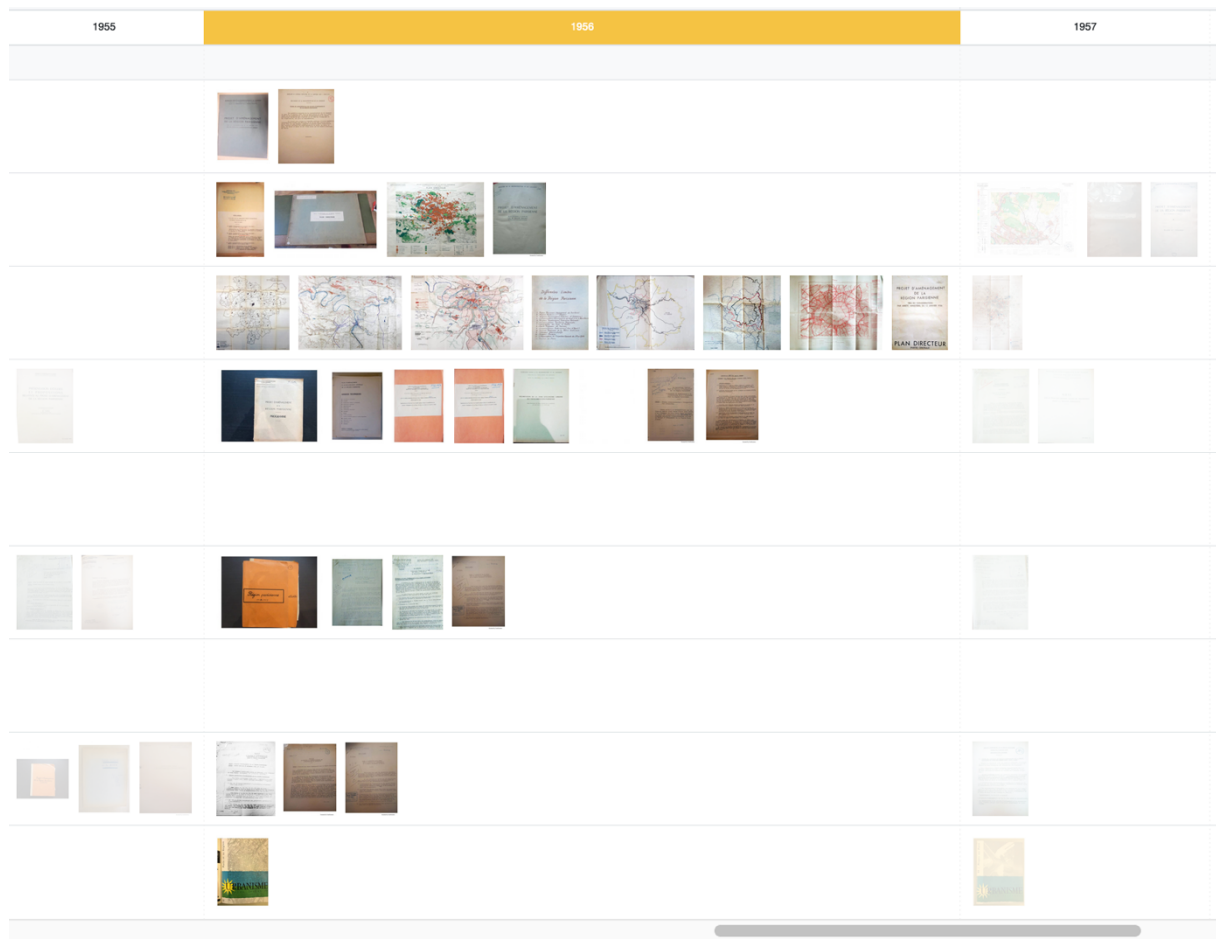



Figure 20. The digital functionality displaying a cross-section of the documents available for 1956. Source: Atlas of Grand Paris plans/Inventer le Grand Paris 2023.

Conclusion

By aggregating sources, demonstrating the multiplicity of documents, broadening the spectrum of actors covered, the atlas makes it possible to constitute the regional plan as a research object. It invites researchers who are willing to explore into an in-depth reading of its history in a variety of different ways. Thanks to the digital humanities, the atlas highlights the “thickness” of the plans, unfolds their temporalities, proposes paths that decipher their meaning and value and combines remote and close reading, which is a challenge for researchers today³¹. Remote reading of primary sources changes the perspective on planning, allowing for a full-scale, life-size approach, the correlation of detail and information as a whole, the manner in which the existing and the projected are associated within the same map. However, the resources provided by the atlas also make it possible to perform a close read, which allows the historian to engage in a detailed analysis of strategic documents that gives full rein to a scholarly reading. Hence, different points of view can be highlighted according to the plans and periods, changing frameworks that are not only due to the question of enlargement but also to the identification of specific issues, themes and sectors to be developed by the plan.

³¹ Cf. Clavert, Daniel, Fleckinger, Grandjean, Idmhand, « Histoire et humanités numériques : nouveaux terrains de dialogue entre les archives et la recherche ».

Projet d'aménagement de la région parisienne et annexes



Confronter Confronter Confronter

Année : 1955

Fonds d'archives : Archives Nationales

Cote : 19770784_1_3

Acteur(s) : Alfred Sauvy , André Defert , André Prothin , Émile Bosano , Eugène Beau douin , Georges Sebillé , Georges Villamae , Henry Puget , Jacqueline Sialelli , Léon Daum , Louis Caudrelier-Benac , Louis Desvignes , Maurice-François Rouge , Ministère de la Reconstruction et du Logement , Pierre Lavedan , Pierre Randet , Robert Camelot

Description : [2 documents scannés] :

1/ *Projet d'aménagement de la région parisienne pris en considération le 12 janvier 1956 par M. Roger Duchet, ministre de la Reconstruction et du Logement, ouvrage imprimé de 90 pages.*

En sommaire :

- Présentation
- Programme
- Plan routier
- Plan des besoins de transports
- Réserves de terrains pour services publics

Suivi d'un document tapuscrit de 8 pages, avec annotations manuscrites en marge :

L'aménagement de la région parisienne dans le cadre de l'aménagement du territoire

En sommaire :

- I- L'habitation
- II- L'industrie
- III- Établissements scientifiques, techniques et culturels
- IV- Transports et communications

Problème de la délimitation de la région parisienne

2/ Annexes de 111 pages scannées regroupant :

Annexe I – Plan routier (1. Rapport justificatif – 2. Plan)

Annexe II – Plan des besoins de transports (1. Rapport justificatif – Notice et plan)

Annexe III – Réserves de terrains pour services publics (1. Rapport justificatif – 2. Liste des affectations de terrains pour services publics) services publicson parisienne

Suivies pêle-mêle de :

- Objet et champ d'application, 1 feuille volante tapuscrite.
- Séance du lundi 7 novembre 1955 de la commission plénière du conseil général de Seine-et-Oise, procès-verbal de 45 pages.*
- Comité national d'urbanisme, séance plénière du mercredi 16 mars 1955, procès-verbal de 19 pages.*

Lien vers cette notice : <https://www.inventerlegrandparis.fr/atlas-des-plans/projet-damenagement-de-la-region-parisienne-3/>

André Prothin

Éléments biographiques

Est ingénieur à la Direction générale des travaux de Paris. Est ingénieur en chef à la Direction des travaux de la préfecture de la Seine en 1931. Participe aux travaux du C.S.A.O.R.P et aide à élaborer les décrets-lois de 1935 aux côtés de Raoul Dautry. Est le premier directeur de la Direction l'urbanisme et de la construction immobilière (DUCI) au sein de la DGEN en 1943. Co-rédacteur de la loi d'urbanisme de 1943. Dirige la Direction générale de l'urbanisme, de l'habitation et de la construction de 1945 jusqu'en 1949 (réorganisation de l'administration centrale par Claudius-Petit). De 1949 à 1958, est à la tête de Direction de l'aménagement du territoire : a en charge le Plan d'aménagement national et celui de la région parisienne, les plans d'urbanisme et les questions foncières. De 1958 à 1968, dirige l'établissement public de la Défense.

Organisation directe ou indirecte en lien avec l'urbanisme parisien, et particulièrement le plan PROST (Service, administration, etc.)

Le plan d'aménagement de la région parisienne a été élaboré sous la direction du Comité supérieur de l'aménagement et de l'organisation générale de la région parisienne : La coordination avec les services techniques départementaux et la préparation des dossiers d'enquête et des détails au 1/10 000e ont été assurées par les services de la préfecture de la Seine sous la direction de MM. Fontaine et Prothin, ingénieurs en chef des Ponts et Chaussées En 1941, création de la DGEN (23 février) qui comprend une Direction de l'urbanisme et de la construction immobilière (DUCI) dont A. Prothin a la charge. En 1943, loi dite « Prothin » (15 juin) créant auprès de la DGEN, associé au CARP, un Service de l'aménagement de la région parisienne (SARP) auquel était confié l'établissement des projets, à qui s'ajoutaient des prescriptions techniques qui font de cette loi une véritable charte de l'urbanisme qui restera en vigueur jusqu'au seuil de la Ve République.

Sources

« la notion de plan régional » in *Urbanisme*, n°41, décembre-janvier 1935-1936, p. 12. Pouvreau, Benoît. « La politique d'aménagement du territoire d'Eugène Claudius-Petit », *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, vol. no 79, no. 3, 2003, pp. 43-52. Archives des Ministères chargés des Travaux publics, de l'Urbanisme et l'Équipement, document Établi par Th. Guilpin, chargé d'études documentaires, Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, 2016. Valade, Bernard. « Variations sur l'urbanisme d'état en région parisienne. (1919-1969) », *L'Année sociologique*, vol. 58, no. 1, 2006, pp. 121-142.

Figure 21. The digital functionality displaying the names of authors on a descriptive sheet of documents with an example of biographical information for each author. Source: Atlas of Grand Paris plans/Inventer le Grand Paris 2023.

Rather than just than a synthesis, the atlas is ultimately an unfinished and unlimited collection, reflecting the density of the planning sources for Greater Paris. The documentary campaigns made it possible to produce an initial draft of the atlas, designed as an “open system” to be rounded out by the addition of other segments. For example, the segment going from the creation of new towns in 1965 to the *SDAURIF* Greater Paris regional planning blueprint published in 1976, or the one that followed it, underpinned by the 1982-1983 decentralisation laws with the publication in 1994 of the *SDRIF* planning blueprint for the region which would be revised several times through 2013, when the plan currently in force was approved. In addition, the decision to begin the atlas in 1928 in order to study the creation of the first Paris region development plan is also a subject for discussion and would justify including the debates and reflections around the Cornudet law of 1919 within the scope of the study³². This law,

³² This hypothesis is put forward by Corinne Jaquand in her unpublished HDR thesis: « *La théorie du Grand Paris dans l'entre-deux-guerres : Le plan d'aménagement de la Région parisienne (1919-1941)* », defended at Paris Belleville School of Architecture on March 17, 2022.

enacted in the aftermath of the First World War, required towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants to produce a development plan.

Boundaries are therefore expected to evolve. Similarly, the scope of the documents to be studied is not set in stone and should be capable of including both new archives discovered in the course of the campaigns and studies that would be carried out subsequently. The accumulative and collaborative atlas matrix also makes it possible to host archives of all kinds and work from several angles (we could of course extend the archive material to include sound and film), to constitute bodies of material that will drive future research and produce new subjects.

At the juncture between the history of planning, the visual history and the digital humanities, by drawing up an inventory of the historical sources that have contributed to the regional plans for Grand Paris, the atlas finally poses new questions for grasping the “reality” of Greater Paris. The methodological issues that arose during the design of the atlas thus lead on to epistemological issues capable of advancing research into planning. They show how a thorough understanding of the plans shifts the focus and opens up new perspectives, helping research to nuance and clarify the complex metropolitan dynamics of Greater Paris.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Since 2017, Nathalie Roseau and Frédéric Pousin are responsible for the research programme *Inventer le Grand Paris. Histoire croisée des métropoles* (<http://www.inventerlegrandparis.fr/>) under the aegis of Labex Futurs Urbains (Université Paris Est).

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