Learning from greater Paris
The metropolis as pedagogical agenda

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Abstract
Following the riots of 2005 that devastated neglected suburbs and the failure of two campaigns for the Olympic Games, Paris has progressively become aware of its lack of metropolitan identity. In order to solve this problem, the French Ministry of Culture has recently set up an international consultation named "Grand Paris" meant to redefine the city's image and envision its future as a metropolis. This paper retraces a three-year experimentation on Paris' metropolitan area, carried out by the postgraduate Master of Regional and Urban Planning AMUR, and marked by the emerging public debate on the creation of a Greater Paris. It focuses on the studio's attempts to develop new means of research and projection, responding to Paris' metropolitan condition.

On February 19th, ten teams of architects, urban planners and researchers commissioned by the French Ministry of Culture unveiled their proposals for the creation of a Greater Paris. Their brief was to come up with a vision encompassing the future of the entire urban region. The proposals were the results of a 9-month research, responding to President Sarkosy's desire to gather the expertise of renowned teams led by such as Jean Nouvel, Winy Maas, Bernado Secchi, Fin Geipel and Christian de Portzamparc. Some teams imagined vastly ambitious projects, which involved prising the city from its historical shell and providing the future metropolis with new powerful symbols. Other teams proposed more theoretical strategies for the urban development of the region. Although the different proposals benefited from wide media coverage, their diversity added to the lack of clear vision and raised the difficulty of defining tools appropriate for the planning of an eleven million inhabitant metropolis. The consultation has thus raised more questions than it has answers. What means does Paris need to enable it to steer clear of its present condition? Does it need a new master-plan, a new catalogue of grand projects, a users' guide, or a manifesto? Does it need new ambitious visions, or just fresh diagnoses? In striving to envisage a new metropolitan future, does it risk creating a new deceptive utopia?

These are some of the questions that inspired the pedagogical agenda of the "atelier métropolitain", a project studio undertaken at the Ecole Nationale des Ponts et Chaussée - ParisTech, as part of the postgraduate Master of Regional and Urban Planning AMUR[1]. We defined this agenda in 2006 when public debates first started to emerge, and the embryonic metropolitan identity of Paris seemed to provide fertile ground to experiment with new conceptual tools capable of bridging the methodological gap between grand projects and strategic approaches. In order to develop these experiments, the studio aimed from the beginning to immerse students in the current debates surrounding the future metropolis. It was conceived as a site for interdisciplinary debate, more than a place for training or rehearsing eventual jobs. Projects themselves were conceived, not as mere exercises, but as opportunities to evolve critical positions regarding the different ideologies under discussion in the media and professional practices. The objective of this paper is to retrace and examine some of the experiments carried out by the studio on the mutating areas of Paris and show how over a period of three years marked by the emerging debate on Greater Paris, these experiments have permitted to develop tools specific to the construction of a Paris metropolitan identity.

Year one: re-programming the Seine River
The choice of the different sites of experimentation was a prerequisite to the studio's approach, each having to address the metropolitan scale and reveal structural disorders that none of the hundreds of municipalities of the urban region could grasp individually. The sites we chose clearly disrupted administrative scales and borders. They asserted a polycentric structure wherein the city of Paris only represented one only of the numerous poles that compose the metropolis. The studio thus started from the fact that the absence of a common government was a major issue,

and that students would have to deal with a context fragmented into a myriad of municipalities scarred by political rivalries, causing major problems concerning the collective needs in transport and housing.

The first of these sites stretches along the Seine River, from the eastern districts of Paris up to the adjacent commune of Ivry. It unfolds as long urban waterfront that takes several configurations as it runs from west to east, crossing the new Massena district, two bridges supporting the peripheral ring-road and the exterior boulevard, and a fragmented territory of commercial and leisure activities, flanked by a wide strip of railway tracks. It has been subject to various transformations, with industries quitting the quays and making space for new constructions and public spaces. Students started their investigation by raising questions concerning the potential of the remaining industrial activities and the role of the site on a metropolitan scale, forming a border between Paris and its immediate suburb. Would the on-going mutation of the waterfront initiate a new linear district, or the fragment of a new territory unfolding on the scale of the Seine valley? Would it slowly erase the border between Paris and its suburb, or on the contrary, induce greater disparity between the two sides? Emerging from these questions, students envisaged different scenarios. The first one consisted in creating a vertical infrastructure dedicated to IT companies, taking the shape of a large building, anchored in Ivry's existing tissue of small companies and artist

residences. This industrial flagship hosting local companies, new education facilities and tributary programmes commensurate with the activity of the district, meant to echo the large existing infrastructures of the waterfront, namely the National Library, the indoor stadium of Bercy and the Ministry of Finances. A second scenario envisaged the reprogramming of the quays through the development of a linear district mixing leisure and industry, grafted onto a new logistical platform connecting river, road and train railway. In contrast to current trends, it envisioned the re-industrialisation of the quays, transforming the Seine River into a new logistical boulevard. A third scenario proposed a "soft" re-programming of the new Rive-Gauche district built above railway tacks, with a series of micro-installations stimulating public spaces. Leading on from the possible expansion of the existing Chinese district, it suggested that the informal Asian network would work as a means to encourage the social appropriation of streets, train platforms, parks and waterfront.

Year two: new infrastructural centrality
During its second year, the studio concentrated on a site named "Croix de Berny", characterised by the overlapping of five major infrastructures of transportation in the southern quadrant of Paris: the A86 motorway, a super-ring road encircling Paris, a new tram line, the route nationale 186, the B line of the suburban train linking the centre of Paris to Orly airport and 10 bus lines. The site was surrounded by a heterogeneous suburban fabric, a large student housing complex built in the

1950s, a renowned engineering school and the Parc de Sceaux, a historical green park dating from the 18th century. Students started by foreseeing the potential of creating a new suburban centrality. They posed the question whether the on-going urbanisation of the region would tend to absorb the area and integrate it into a larger whole, or whether on the contrary, it would exacerbate differences, and force the area to specialise. Based on these questions, they imagined four possible scenarios. The first one redefined the Parc de Sceaux as a new regional infrastructure, characterised by a sustainable, yet reversible programme mixing education, leisure and culture. The historical Parc was to be transformed into both a campus linking the student complex to the engineering school and a leisure park hosting large popular events such as concerts and festivals. By combining several parks into one, this scenario opened the potential for a more intense, all year round programming of the area. Another scenario proposed to develop a green matrix encompassing the park and the existing green corridor, which follows the nearby TGV railway line, forming a strategic means to negotiate with inhabitants of a higher built density. It meant to demonstrate that more green spaces could also allow a greater density. A third scenario envisaged the creation of a "supermetro", a local network of public transportation complementing the existing underground network. This theoretical network was used as a tool to reconfigure the entire southern region and reprogram a number of complementary regional polarities,

including the airport, the scientific cluster of Saclay and several zones of industrial activity. A fourth scenario proposed to relate existing education facilities to a recent, small office district. The site was re-formulated as a link between these two polarities. It was conceived as a new interface taking the form of a "slow lane" replacing the green cover of the soon-to-be buried motorway, including an open-air multimodal station, a chamber of commerce and public services shared both by business and educational activities. These different scenarios were discussed during a workshop organised by the Region Ile-de-France, where four schools of architecture, urban planning and landscape design proposed means for the densification the urban region. The different scenarios were presented as a collective research, thus affirming the necessity to conceive the development of the region as a series of coexisting futures.

Year three: a suburb to suburb corridor
For its third year, the studio investigated a suburb to suburb tramline running east-west in the northern quadrant of Paris. This tangential line, still in the planning stage, was designed to run on an existing railway track crossing a series of communes marked by diverse urban contexts. Starting out from the technical planning of the line, including noise barriers and underpasses, students selected five stations whose juxtaposition carried the potential to create a new urban corridor, providing each municipality with opportunities to develop more ambitious urban projects (2). In Villetaneuse, for example, a city blighted by the failure of modernist

planning, students imagined an academic city, based on a series of "shared infrastructures" serving both the city and its university. The scenario envisaged programs such as a "unitary restaurant" shared by students and local employees, a tram station including a shared library accessible to both public and academic users, and new student housing conceived as a typological evolution of suburban houses. A second scenario taking place in the city of Stains-Ceriseraie suggested a "garden territory", contemporary reinterpretation of Howard's garden cities. This garden territory sought to re-orientate the patchwork development of the city, towards contemporary life-styles, with a particular concern for the social use of the land, encouraging further development of existing practices such as urban agriculture. In this scenario, the station took the form of a layered building whose platforms allowed not only to access trains, but also provided a window to the cultivated territory and a new entrance to the nearby park of La Courneuve. Another scenario focussing on the city of Le Bourget, hosting an important business airport, envisioned a new technopolis taking root in the remains of the existing industrial site. This research and development district was projected to form a link between the airport and an exhibition park. The station was to be re-positioned at the intersection of the tangential line and a national road leading to Charles de Gaulle airport, so as to work as starting point for developing a new axis between the two airports, combining housing, research and business activities.

Scenario planning
This sample of scenarios developed during the last three years illustrates the studio's orientation towards urban programming. Unlike morphological practices of urban planning still prevalent in France, the studio's approach consists in defining the strategic development of large-scale urban figures, by basing itself on the study of local traces and territorial idiosyncrasies. This programmatic research was informed by continuous discussions with local and political figures, and constituted an opportunity to experiment with methodological means sensitive to Paris' fragmented metropolitan condition. The "multiple scenarios" approach is one of such means. The scenarios elaborated during the studio were not viewed simply as projects, but possible futures, seeking to define alternative ways of programming, or re-programming a site. They were not approached as an end in themselves (as projects usually are), but as tools of analysis allowing a continuous diagnosis of the sites. They were not results of the research, but the means of this research. The specificity of this "multiple scenarios" approach is to engage students in a both narrative and incremental way of projecting the future. Unlike projects that are usually tied to a fixed projection, in a fixed future, such as Paris 2100 or Helsinki 2030, scenarios call for an incremental construction and a strategic debate between the different teams of students, as well as between local people and figures being interviewed, or invited to conferences and juries. They do not reduce the development of a city or a district to a linear and irreversible future, a choice

between one or another project, but define it as a network of parallel futures intersecting and echoing each other.

Most students being young professionals, acquainted to objective analyses in the fields of geography, law, sociology and xisting conditions and the identification of problems, to the projection of possible futures. This shift is addressed during a crucial session of the semester where students define collectively the different scenarios they are going to develop. The process that leads to the definition of scenarios can be summarised in seven steps. The first step consists in identifying the main problem or the question that will have a long-term influence in the fortunes of the site. The second step consists in identifying keys forces that will influence the main problem, as well as the driving trends lying behind these forces, such as the evolution of public opinions, cultural or demographical changes, urban expansions or shrinkages. The third step consists in ranking these trends and forces according to their degree of certainty or uncertainty. The point is to determine those that are certain and bound to appear in all scenarios, and those that are uncertain, causing scenarios to differ. This ranking results in a series of questions that are translated graphically in the form of "axes of uncertainty" crossing each other. The definition of the scenarios themselves comes as fourth step, possible futures starting to emerge between the axes. The fifth step consists in fleshing out the scenarios and turning them into a narrative form.

The final step consists in crossing the scenarios. This attempt to make a sort of cross section through the different possible futures in order to see where they may eventually meet, is formally organised during one or two sessions, named "cross sessions". These sessions work as collective moments during which students confront and debate their scenarios, juxtaposing and superimposing each other's projects, in order to unearth complementary programs and matching intentions. The crossing of the scenarios continues more informally during the end of the semester, through collective presentations and studio work. The diagnosis of the site that came as an introduction at the beginning of the semester, remains as a continuous background task during the whole process, gaining in precision and focus as the scenarios progress.

During this process, the scenario technique works as a pedagogical tool, meant to stimulate multi-disciplinary-work and introduce students coming from hard and soft sciences to the notion of project. Its initial purpose remains yet strategic, as it is meant in professional fields to develop long-term strategies capable of integrating uncertain futures, without falling into the trap of absolute relativism and "laisser-faire" attitudes. The approach consisting in making a cross-section through different possible futures evolves in response to the uncertainty that municipalities, urban developers, architects, urban planners and companies experience each time they are faced with volatile urban conditions. It has been widely used in professional fields dealing with hectic market fluctuations, but has only recently been introduced in the field of urban planning. It suggests that large-scale projects cannot just consist in providing ready-made answers to pre-established programs, but necessitate strategies taking account of simultaneous times and scales. In the context of the studio, it has worked as a speculative framework, allowing students to reveal new sites, to envisage their potential role within the metropolis, to develop possible programs, to assess these programs through critical discussions and to ultimately envisage new ways of tying local governments around such common futures.

The metropolis as pedagogical agenda
Debates occurring around the future of Paris have deeply influenced the ideological as well as the pedagogical agenda of the studio. Students have spontaneously integrated the political dimension of the metropolis into their scenarios. This also revealed how difficult it remains today to break from the conventional image of Paris, trapped in its own time-warped identity, conceived too often as a hyperactive centre, encircled by a sleepy suburb. The city of Paris has hitherto grown by expanding through concentric circles, absorbing incrementally its surrounding communes. Having now reached critical mass and morphed into a diffuse and polycentric entity, it finds itself stuck in a failing core-periphery model, unable to integrate the complex reality of contemporary metropolitan conditions, which have moved way beyond the strict relations existing between Paris and its suburbs. The question raised in most debates is: how can the municipalities of the urban region form new a coherent

whole, now that they seem too numerous to be absorbed by a newer expansion? How can a disjointed urban region be transformed into real metropolis?

For decades, the idea of a "Greater Paris" has only been informally discussed, but has always remained a political taboo, the urban region being too politically fragmented to consider turning into a new entity. The positive aspect of the recent international consultation has been to shift this long expected debate into the public arena. Recent debates have shown that several political positions were now crystallising. The city of Paris, for example, has long sustained its capacity to pursue its peripheral expansion; whereas municipalities have continued to fiercely defend their autonomies, thus reinforcing the current multiplicity of local governments coexisting in a patchwork-like organisation. The region of Ile-de-France has advocated its role as a political entity already governing the metropolis, despite its much larger territory; whereas the French government has suggested creating a new administrative entity for the urbanised region, thus adding a new layer to the already complex French system of governance. Thanks to the on-going debate, these different positions continue to evolve. Municipalities, having fought to maintain their autonomies, seem now ready to accept an eventual new form of governance. A less positive aspect of the consultation lies in the fact that it has failed to define pragmatic devices capable of turning this debate into a collective vision. As we mentioned earlier in this paper, the consulted teams have either proposed

theoretical agendas too remote from citizens' concerns to be discussed, or catalogues of grand projects, equivalent to the presidential projects launched by François Mitterrand for Paris in former times. This latter approach entails the risk of reducing the metropolis to a pin-map of grand projects pompously labelled "Grand Paris". For in the end, a metropolis is not just a large city. It is a complex urban condition that requires means of projection capable of projecting the larger metropolitan scale even into the smallest projects, making space for the fertile encounter of expertises, as well as more flexible ways of dealing with uncertainty. These are the kind of means that the studio has tried to develop, by revealing strategic sites still absent from the metropolitan map, or attempting to let the creative logics of architecture and design percolate into the fields of urban planning. By doing so, it has questioned the usual distinction between technocratic planning and creative projection, and favoured instead an approach wherein various scenarios can co-exist as singular trajectories leading towards a collective future. ▣

NOTES

(1) The studio has been coordinated since 2006 by Gilles Delalex, with Lise Mesliand, Françoise Fromonot and Marie Jorio. It takes part in the post-graduate Master of regional and urban planning AMUR, directed by Nathalie Roseau since 2005, addressing students and young professionals from the fields of geography, law, sociology, enginery, and architecture.

(2) The images illustrating this paper are samples from two scenarios developed for the future tangential tramline running east-west, from suburb to suburb, in the northern quadrant of Paris. The first scenario envisages a series of "shared infrastructures" in the city of Villetaneuse, serving as an interface between the city and its university. It has been developed by Tigrane Boccara, Fanny Doat, Charlotte Jacquot, Anna Levy, and Elsa Paillard. The second scenario envisages the development of Stains-Cerisaie as a "garden territory". It proposes to re-orientate the patchwork condition of the city, towards contemporary life-styles, with a particular concern for the social use of the land, encouraging existing practices such as urban agriculture. This scenario has been developed by Bertrand Bonnecarrere, Florelle Ceze, Fanny Marchand, Yuria Orellana Negrin and Cécilia Petitprez.