

# **The urban regeneration of Plaine Saint-Denis, Paris region, 1985–2020**

## **Integrated planning in a large ‘Urban Project’**

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# The urban regeneration of Plaine Saint-Denis, Paris region, 1985–2020

## Integrated planning in a large ‘Urban Project’

*Paul Lecroart*

The successful transformation of Plaine Saint-Denis (‘the Plaine’), in the Paris region (see Figure 1), has become a reference of how a long-term development vision can take advantage of the organisation of a major event such as the soccer World Cup (1998). The declining industrial and socially deprived area of the 1990s has become a multi-functional and diverse urban district in which thousands of people work, live, study or have fun. This complex regeneration process, for a long time only fuelled by public investment, is supported now by the private sector—but this does not mean everything is solved, far from it.

However, contrary to dominant trends internationally and unlike other large-scale European regeneration projects,<sup>1</sup> Plaine Saint-Denis has managed to change while keeping many of its local businesses, its residents, and enhancing its existing assets. Therefore the development process has kept and yet renewed much of the identity of the area.



**Figure 1: Plaine Saint Denis in 1999, with the newly A1 covered highway and the 1998 World Cup stadium in the background (credit: Gobry – DREIF)**

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1. To take a few European examples: Barcelona’s *Forum-Besos* project, Rotterdam’s *Kop van Zuid*, Malmö’s *Western Harbour*, London’s *Thames Gateway* are locations that have been studied recently by IAURIF. See Lecroart and Palisse, 2007.

The main reason for this success is probably that the regeneration of this 750 hectare area was not made up of one single large flagship project. It was instead a pragmatic process combining study, multi-level planning, area-based action and good use of unexpected opportunities, but always with the idea of supporting a balanced development of a wider area.

The local elected representatives now believe that the Plaine Saint-Denis area should play its part in a sustainable metropolitan policy that they see as: Maintaining industrial activities and low-income households in the heart of the Paris region, while intensifying urban space to attract new businesses and people around a denser network of transport and social infrastructure. The 'city model' this regeneration process refers to is clearly that of an inclusive mixed-use and pedestrian-oriented city.

But trying to do this on a small level in the context of a large western metropolis of around 11 million people is not an easy task. The results, after over 20 years of combined local and regional efforts, reflect the unavoidable contradiction between being one of the strategic development areas of a global metropolis and answering the needs of local residents. Moreover, the social, economic and construction dynamics of Plaine Saint-Denis are so active that nothing can be said for sure: who knows if the early pioneer residents and activities will still be there in a few years time?

## **Plaine Saint-Denis: Background**

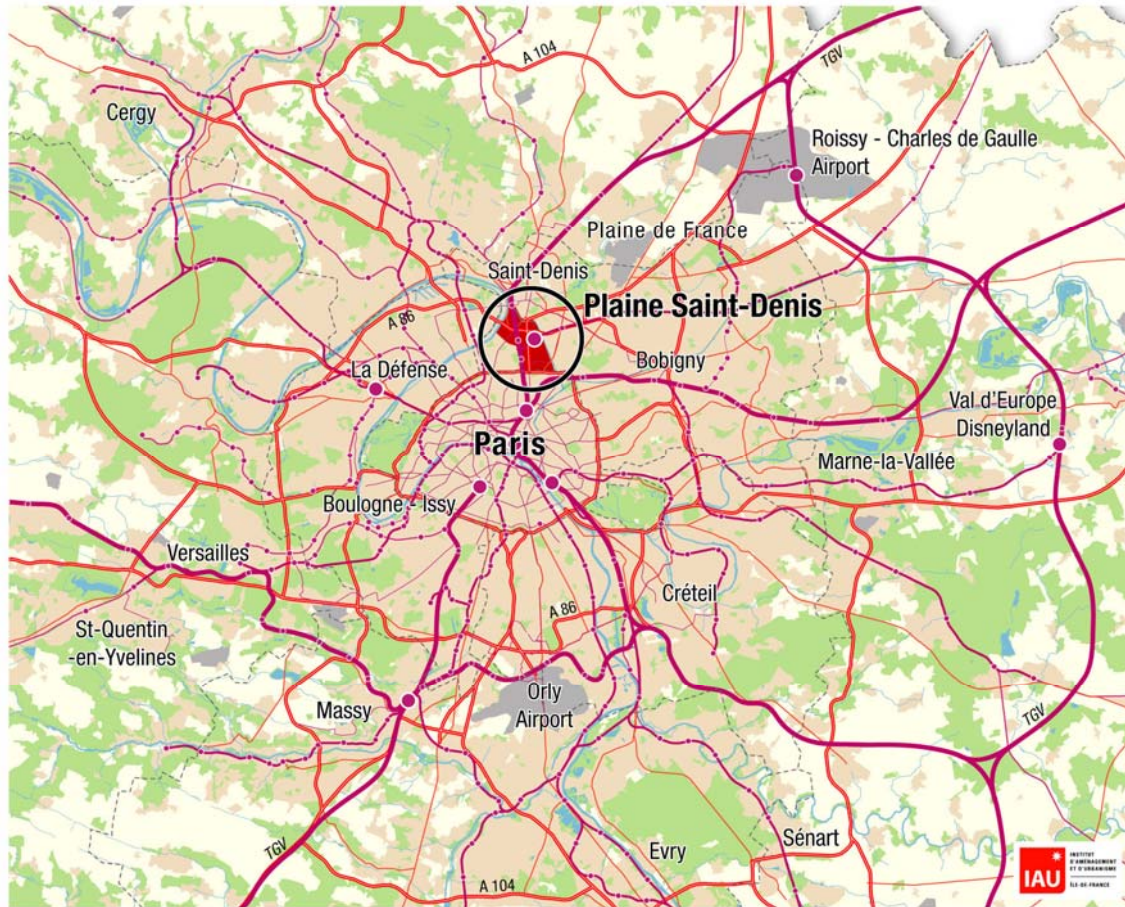
Plaine Saint-Denis is located directly to the north of Paris and to the south of the historic cathedral city of Saint-Denis where the kings of France used to be buried. It lies at a strategic location on the axis linking the metropolitan centre (Central Paris and La Défense CBD) to the Roissy-Charles de Gaulle international airport (A1 Highway, Regional Rapid Transit RER B). It is well connected to the two inner ring highways of the Paris region: the Paris *Périphérique* and the A 86 Orbital (see Figure 2).

Between 1840 and 1960, Plaine Saint-Denis had gradually become one of Europe's largest industrial zones, providing 50,000 jobs in 1940 on an area covering 750 hectares. Metalwork, chemistry, energy production and consumer goods manufacturing were the main activities. At that time, the area had a strong working-class identity, drawing workers from other regions of France, from Spain and Italy, and later from North-Africa, some of them living in the Plaine, close to the factories.

In the 1970s, the whole area started to suffer from what became a deep economic and social crisis: one after the other manufacturing companies either closed or relocated elsewhere. In 1986 there were about 200 hectares of vacant land; the number of jobs had fallen to 27,000 in 1990. Moreover, the industrial decline was depriving the municipalities of one of their main financial resource: the local business tax.

The economic downturn revealed the drawbacks of the Plaine:

- Poor environment: built in 1960, the 8-lane A1 highway cut through the area, bringing noise and air pollution to the residents. The area has also site contamination problems caused by past industrial activity.
- Low level of infrastructure: very poor street network as the industries were served by an extensive rail network, inadequate public transportation accessibility, poor quality of public spaces, lack of green spaces and education infrastructure.
- Poor housing conditions and social deprivation, with a declining population, low-income households, and an under-skilled workforce mostly of foreign origin.



**Figure 2: The Plaine Saint-Denis area in the regional context. Source: IAURIF (source: IAURIF)**

The 1980s and 1990s also saw the arrival of low added-value economic activities (logistics, textile wholesalers, car-dealers, etc.) attracted by the relatively cheap rents: They were at first regarded quite positively by local authorities, but soon created new problems, such as road congestion and environmental degradation. And no private developer or investor was interested in the Plaine area for new office or housing programmes.

A glimpse of the institutional and political context helps to understand how the regeneration process was conducted. The 750 hectares of Plaine Saint-Denis lies mainly on the territory of three relatively small municipalities (*communes*): Saint-Denis (about 90,000 inhabitants), Aubervilliers (63,000) and, for a small part, Saint-Ouen (50,000), all being part of the *Département* (county) of Seine-Saint-Denis. At the time, all three municipalities—which have important planning powers in the French system—had left wing-led councils with communist mayors whose objectives were to remain working-class cities and to keep their industry.

And unlike other large cities in France, the Paris region (11.6 million inhabitants, 12,000 km<sup>2</sup>, and 1,300 municipalities) has no metropolitan authority. The Ile-de-France Regional Council has an overall spatial development responsibility, the City of Paris (2.2 million inhabitants, 100 km<sup>2</sup>) has strong planning and development powers but only within the narrow limits of its municipal boundaries. The real regional planning powers then lied in the hands of the regional representative of Central Government.

In this context of potential conflicts, the regeneration process of Plaine Saint-Denis is truly a story about building a constructive cooperation not only between different levels of government (central government, region, county, local authorities) but also between the public sector (the French Railways (SNCF), the Ile-de-France Transport Agency (STIF), the public transport company (RATP), public land owners such as the City of Paris or the French Electricity Board (EDF)), the private sector (local businesses, developers, investors) and the local communities (citizens, associations).

It's the story of integrated regeneration (see Box 1 for key dates), where many dimensions (social, economic, transport, housing, public space) are brought holistically at different levels (long-term regional planning, 10-year city planning, and area-based planning and development) using a range of *ad hoc* instruments (non-regulatory plans, multi-level agreements and contracts, public developers, etc.).

### **Box 1: Key dates**

1985: *Plaine Renaissance* created.

1990: White Paper on Paris Region: Plaine Saint-Denis as a strategic area.

1991: *Inter-municipal Development Charter* and *Plaine Saint-Denis Urban Project* approved. *Plaine Développement* created.

1991–2004: open forum “les Assises de la Plaine”.

1992: France chosen to host the World Soccer Cup. *Hippodamos 93* created.

1993: World Cup Stadium decision in Plaine Saint-Denis. *Stade de France* Agreements.

1994: Regional Structure Plan & Joint State-Region Investment Programme 1994–1998/99.

1997: Joint Urban Development Agreements. Stadium and related infrastructure completed.

1998: World Cup, French soccer team wins.

2000: *Plaine Commune* Inter-municipal authority. Joint Investment Programme 2000–2006.

2002: *Plaine de France* Joint Development Agency for a larger territory.

2005: The International Olympic Committee chooses London to host the 2012 Olympics.

2006: Approval of Plaine Commune Masterplan (*Schéma de Coherence Territoriale*).

2007: Joint State-Region Investment Programme 2007–2013 approved.

2012: Delivery of metro M12 extension, and trams T3 and TY. Around 400 hectares of industrial land regenerated.

2020: Plaine Saint-Denis, a major multi-functional centre in the Paris region?

## **Urban Renaissance: The First Steps**

### **The creation of Plaine Renaissance**

The first seeds of regeneration were planted when the local authorities founded *Plaine Renaissance* in 1985 (see Box 2), as a public-public partnership of Saint-Denis, Aubervilliers, Saint-Ouen and the Seine-Saint-Denis county. Its task was to prepare an *Inter-municipal Development Charter*, i.e. a shared local regeneration policy. This *Charter*, finally approved in 1991, was based on:

- A shared assessment of the situation.

- Common strategic goals, such as: improve the accessibility of the Plaine, maintain the industrial potential, diversify the local economy (research & development centres, new fields of activity such as the image-industry, editing, electronics, etc.), develop a further education centre, improve the quality of the environment and of housing, etc.
- New instruments to set up: A global spatial vision, a new public urban development agency, a further education centre coordination committee, a mobility plan.
- The reinforcement of the local social and economic management system—a specific task of Plaine Renaissance—and above all, a participative process with local communities and businesses.

### **Box 2: Plaine Renaissance**

Created in 1985, Plaine Renaissance (*Syndicat Mixte Plaine Renaissance*) was the first formal joint local initiative for the regeneration of the Plaine Saint-Denis industrial area. Gathering first-hand knowledge and expertise on the assets and drawbacks of the *Plaine*, Plaine Renaissance managed to convince public and private stakeholders to invest in a social, environmental and economical project for the future of the area. The organisation prepared the *Inter-municipal Development Charter* (1990–1991) and the *Urban Project* process (1991–1998), and worked as a local development agency until the creation of *Plaine Commune* in 1999.

On this basis, *Plaine Renaissance* organised the first planning and design competition in 1990–1991. But instead of designating one single winner, the local authorities asked the competitors to team up and create one single spatial design organisation: *Hippodamos 93* (see Box) was to advise the authorities through the urban regeneration process.

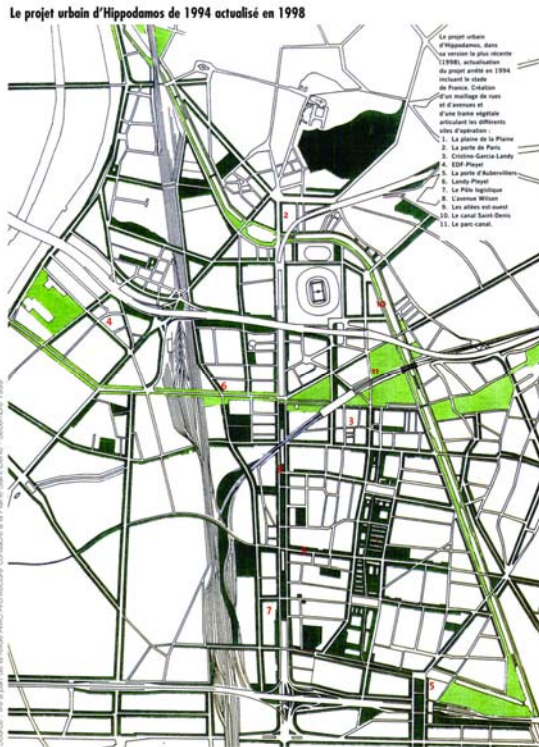
### **Box 3: Hippodamos 93**

The urban designers of the 1991 consultation, architects Yves Lion, Pierre Riboulet, Bernard Reichen, and landscape architect Michel Corajoud, got together to conduct the *Urban Project* planning and design studies and created to this end the GIE *Hippodamos 93* ('Economic Interest Group'). In 1992, they produced the *Urban Project*, a vision and a method for regeneration. In 1993–1994, among other works, they studied the integration of the Stade de France and related infrastructure into the *Project* framework. With the creation of the Urban Planning Department of *Plaine Commune* in the years 1999–2001, *Hippodamos 93* ceased its activity.

### **The Urban Project for the Plaine**

The *Urban Project* for the Plaine Saint Denis developed by *Hippodamos 93* was approved in 1992. This non-statutory project gives a clear ambition and a long term, yet pragmatic, vision for the development of the Plaine.

One of the fundamental ideas of the *Project* was to enhance the existing assets of the Plaine and to create the conditions for change. Creating a grid of generous public spaces almost from scratch was an answer to that. This system opened up the industrial fabric and reconnected the Plaine to Paris and to the neighbouring cities: East-West and North-South 28 metre-wide multi-functional avenues were proposed. Along this new 'green' street system, with the change of image, denser new mixed-use buildings and environments could be developed in time (see Figures 3a, 3b, 3c, and 3d).



**Figure 3a: The Urban Project. 1998 version with Stadium and Canal Park (Credit: Hippodamos 93)**



**Figure 3b: Artist view of a future east-west axis in the 1992 Urban Project (credit: Hippodamos 93)**



**Figures 3c and 3d: The east-west avenue in the Landy-Pleyel development area after demolition of gaz works (right in 1998) and today (left in 2008) (credits: Paul Lecroart – IAURIF)**

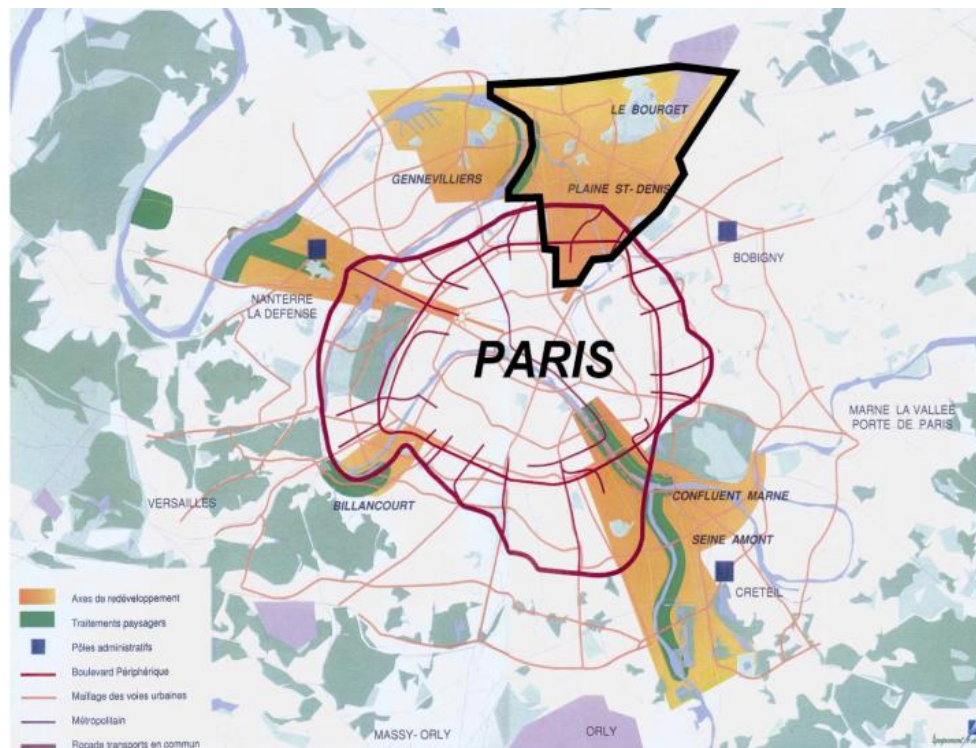


Functional-mix building, social mix, and urban diversity, were at the basis of the *Project*. The idea was not to remove existing productive activities, but to create the conditions for most of them to remain and evolve. Strategic areas were designated, where strong public intervention was needed in the short or medium-term to improve the environment:<sup>2</sup> the main axis (Wilson avenue), the gateways (*Porte de Paris, Porte de la Chapelle, and Porte d'Aubervilliers*), the Canalside and the heart of the *Plaine*. Re-use of industrial buildings was seen as an asset for future development.

The *Urban Project* fixed qualitative and quantitative objectives—the provision of 10,000 housing units by 2015 (in addition to the 4000 existing units), and the provision of 23,000 new jobs (in addition to the 27,000 existing). But the planning guidelines to reach these objectives left a lot of flexibility for negotiations between different partners (local authorities, public developers, private investors, users, local residents, etc.). The *Project* focused on the permanent and fundamental elements of the city (public spaces, major landmarks) to create the conditions for a sustainable transformation of a mono-functional area to a mixed-use district.

### A regional strategic development area

As early as 1990, the Central Government Regional Administration (DREIF), the Urban Planning and Development Agency of the Paris Region (IAURIF) and the Paris Urban Agency (APUR) had published a regional White Paper in which the Plaine Saint-Denis area was identified as a “strategic sector” for the Paris Ile-de-France region (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4: The Plaine Saint-Denis strategic development area in the 1994 Regional Structure Plan (credit: DREIF)**

2. Including: covering up the A1 highway, further education centre at the *Plaine de la Plaine*, and improvement of the highway exchange at *Porte de Paris*.

The ideas contained in the *Urban Project* attracted strong interest from central government and the Regional Council—who could not intervene directly in the area without local support (see Box 4)—as the *Project* converged with their own positions.

#### **Box 4: Early regeneration partners**

- Cities of Saint-Denis and Aubervilliers: initiators of regeneration in the Plaine Saint-Denis, in charge of planning and overall development impulse and control (until 2000 when *Plaine Commune* took over).
- Central Government Regional Administration (*Direction Régionale de l'Équipement* or DREIF): Overall development control (Regional Structure Plan), Strategic area committee co-leader. World Cup infrastructure and project manager.
- Ile-de-France Regional Council: Infrastructure and urban development funding. Now in charge of Regional Structure Plan with the State (DREIF).
- Consortium *Stade de France*: Private 30-year concessionary company of the Stadium in charge of financing part of the facility and operating the venue.
- City of Paris: Former land owner of stadium area and of Saint-Denis canal. A partnership agreement with *Plaine Commune* was approved in 2008.
- EMGP, now Icade EMGP: private developer and investor of about 70 hectares south of the Plaine Saint-Denis including the *Parc des Portes de Paris* (business park).
- Other large 'private' land owners in the Plaine Saint-Denis playing a part in development: Electricité de France, Gaz de France, Saint-Gobain.

In the early 1990s, the central government set up a local agency to study and discuss with local authorities and thus prepare the Regional Structure Plan:<sup>3</sup> the *Mission Plaine Saint-Denis Le Bourget*. The approved 1994 Regional Structure Plan<sup>4</sup> designated Plaine Saint-Denis as an 'urban redevelopment centre' (see Figure 4). So there was really cross-breeding between the local approach and the regional approach.

This allowed the area to become a priority area for investment in infrastructure within the State-Region Joint Investment Programmes (CPER)<sup>5</sup> for the 1994–1998 (extended to 1999) and 2000–2006 periods. New transport infrastructures, such as a new Orbital metro, extensions of an existing line (M12) and a new North-South tram link across the Plaine, were planned to support the redevelopment.

### **The World Cup 1998: an Unexpected Driver of Change**

During the same period, another element turned up quite unexpectedly. Since the end of the 1980s, the Paris region was in need of a new large stadium in order to bid for the World Cup 1998 and to support a future Olympic bid. Many sites were studied (some by IAURIF) and the choice was between two different concepts: a suburban stadium in the new town of Sénart (35 km from Central Paris)—which would only be used a few days a year—or an urban stadium in a more central location such as Plaine Saint-Denis.

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3. *Schéma directeur régional d'Ile-de-France*, or SDRIF.

4. Local (i.e. municipal) urban plans (*Plan Local d'Urbanisme*) need to conform to the Regional Structure Plan, but in this case it was not an issue as both levels agreed in broad terms, except on housing figures: the local authorities did not, at first, want the area to remain a predominantly business and industrial area.

5. *Contrat de Plan Etat-Region* or CPER.

After negotiations with the municipality of Saint-Denis, the decision was made in 1993 to locate the *Stade de France*<sup>6</sup> in the Plaine. The existence of an ambitious *Urban Project* supported by local authorities was a key factor in that decision. The conditions the City of Saint-Denis negotiated in the so-called ‘*Stade de France Agreements*’ were:

- Physical integration of the stadium in a mixed-use urban district (with housing, offices and leisure).
- Capacity to accelerate the implementation of the *Urban Project* particularly through the improvement of public transport in order to limit car access<sup>7</sup> and the building of large new pedestrian public spaces (see Figure 5), including the covering up of the A1 motorway and the creation of public gardens on top.
- Local priority for jobs for the building of the stadium (a PPP project) and related infrastructure.

In order to prepare the area to host the event, new development agreements<sup>8</sup> between the municipalities of Saint-Denis and Aubervilliers were discussed and finally approved in January 1997. This allowed the area to get extra money, on top of *Stade de France Agreements* and the CPER, to help finance land acquisition, public space improvements and the structural budget deficit of most public-led urban developments areas<sup>9</sup> (see Box 5). A joint steering committee, with central government, the Regional Council and the municipalities was set up to coordinate the regeneration process.

#### **Box 5: Urban development instruments**

- *Stade de France Agreements* (1993): State – Saint-Denis City – Paris City: infrastructure and improvements related to the World Cup.
- Stadium Building Contract: public-private partnership for design, building, management of the facility (1994).
- State – Regional Council *Contrat de Plan* (CPER in French, i.e. *Regional 5-year Investment Programmes*).
- Joint Urban Development Agreement (1997) between Central Government, the Regional Council, and the cities of Aubervilliers and Saint-Denis (*Contrat de Développement Urbain an Contrat de Développement Régional*).
- State-Plaine Commune Housing-Office Balance Agreement 2005 (*Convention d’équilibre bureaux-logements*) for 1 sq m of offices, Plaine Commune builds 1.12 m<sup>2</sup> of housing (60 per cent private, 40 per cent social).

The new stadium and the quality of new infrastructure built in time for the World Cup—the largest development in the Plaine for years—radically changed the internal and external image of the Plaine Saint-Denis. The large and joyful participation of the people in the event itself contributed to the emergence of a multi-cultural identity, giving pride to the local communities. All this was of course helped by the victory of the French football team in 1998! (see Figure 6).

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6. The name of the stadium, chosen after an open competition, does not refer to France as a nation, but to the area north of Paris, itself named after the first kingdom of the kings of France.

7. Through renewal of metro M13 station and building of two new rapid transit stations, RER D & B.

8. *Contrat de Développement Urbain and Contrat d’Aménagement Régional*, or CDU-CAR).

9. Each *Zone d’Aménagement Concerté* needs to be financially balanced.



**Figure 5: The rapid transit station (RER B) and the North-South alleys to the *Stade de France* which will host the future tram of the Plaine. Since the picture was taken in 1998, many of the industrial sites seen here have been redeveloped for offices, housing, and facilities (*credits: Gobry-DREIF*)**



**Figure 6: The *Stade de France* during the 1998 World Cup seen from one of the rapid transit stations (*credits: Gauthier - DREIF*)**

## After the World Cup: Rapid Change at Different Levels

### Large-scale urban development

The World Cup effect led to a very quick development from 1999 onwards: the private developers got interested in the area and many public-led development areas which had been somewhat dormant became active again. The strong demand for office space in the Plaine was also related to the shortage of sites in other more central locations in the Paris region (see Figure 7).

Many businesses wanted to locate near the ‘magic stadium’, so the first developments to come out were the Stadium district (a 25 hectares mixed-use development led by *SANEM*, a State-owned public developer) and the Landy France area (26 hectares office-led mixed-use development, by *Plaine Développement*, the main local public developer, see Box 6). These were followed by many other development projects including Pleyel (public-private redevelopments on a 20 hectares area), Nozal-Chaudron (a 17 hectare mainly residential redevelopment) and Cristino Garcia Landy (a 22 hectare housing district regeneration).

#### Box 6: Plaine Commune Développement

Created in 1991 to implement the Urban Project for the Plaine Saint-Denis, Plaine Commune Développement is a joint public urban development company (*société d'économie mixte* or SEM) between local authorities (Aubervilliers & Saint-Denis at first, now Plaine Commune) with a minority participation of central government. It has merged after the World Cup with the State-led development agency set up to conduct the Stadium facility development and the Stadium quarter: the SANEM Stade de France. It currently conducts developments such Landy-France or Nozal-Chaudron (Diderot Quarter). It also contributes to partnership projects such as Porte d'Aubervilliers-Canal with Icade and studies such as the Proudhon Gardinoux development.

But it is only recently that some developments areas such as the Porte d'Aubervilliers-Canal (retail, leisure and residential) and the Porte de Paris (highway interchange restructuring with office and hotels) have reached approval state. In the Eastern part of the Plaine, poorly served by public transport,<sup>10</sup> change is still very slow to come.

### Olympic bids

One of the effects of the success of the 1998 World Cup was the confidence it gave to many decision-makers in central, regional and local government, in the capacity of Plaine Saint-Denis to host large events. Alongside Paris, the Plaine successfully held the 2003 World Athletics and the 2007 Rugby World Cup but wasn't so lucky with its joint bidding with the City of Paris for the 2008 and 2012 Olympic Games (which went to Beijing and London respectively).

The 2012 Olympic bid attracted more attention to the development potential of the Plaine and boosted the ambitions for the Paris North East development project on the southern rim of the area. The Olympic Nautical Stadium which will soon be built in the Plaine is also among the legacies of the bid.

And the Stade de France remains a very successful 270-day a year multi-use large event regional facility—not only hosting sport events, but a whole range of activities, including large shows, concerts, operas, summer beach, corporate conventions, etc. (see Figure 8).

10. The extension on metro M12 has been postponed many times. It is now planned for completion in 2012.



**Figure 7: Office development around the stadium in 2008. Paris (Montmartre) in the background (credits: Paul Lecroart – IAURIF)**



**Figure 8: The stadium in its urban environment (credits: Gobry – DREIF)**

### **New institutions and strategic planning**

The dynamics created by the success of the World Cup led ten municipalities located in the immediate sphere of influence the Plaine Saint-Denis area to sign a new Development Charter<sup>11</sup> in 1999. The idea behind this was to ensure that the new economic growth of Plaine Saint-Denis helps the development of a much wider area.

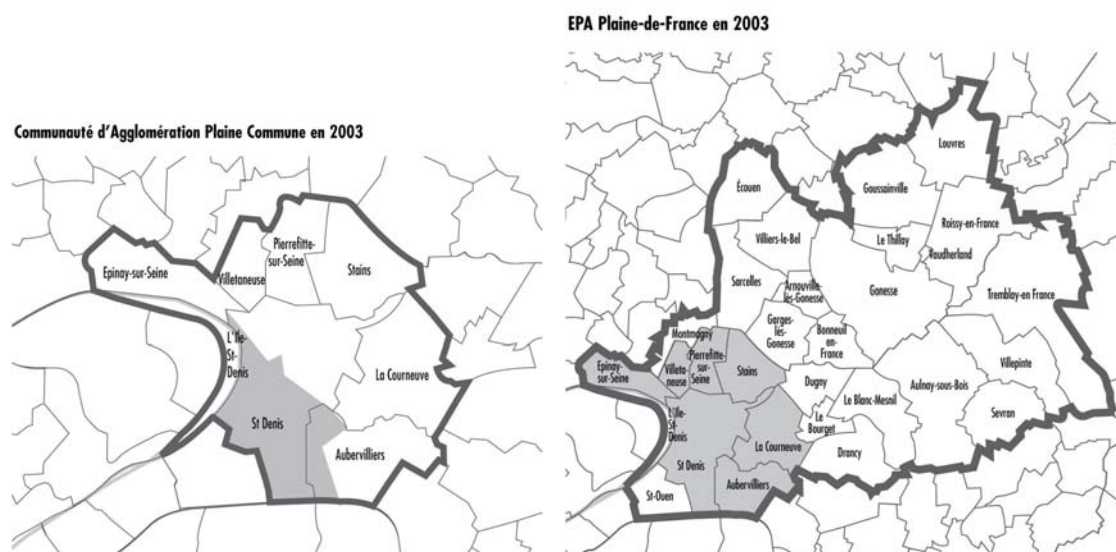
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11. The *Charte de développement de la Plaine élargie*.

At the end 1999, five of these municipalities decided to join forces and form what is now *Plaine Commune*, the local inter-municipal authority with delegated planning and development powers, and financial solidarity. Today, *Plaine Commune* involves eight municipalities (see Box 7, and Figures 9a and 9b).

### Box 7: Plaine Commune

This inter-municipal association is an ‘urban community’ uniting 8 municipalities of the northern suburbs of Paris around a common development project. *Plaine Commune* has a 42 km<sup>2</sup> territory with 330,000 inhabitants, 135,000 jobs, and 47,000 students. It has its own ‘Urban Community Council’ its own tax resources and budget. It has delegated powers from the municipalities such as planning and development, environment, housing and social policies, and tourism policy.



**Figures 9a and 9b: Plaine Saint-Denis (grey shaded area left) within the 8-municipalities of Plaine Commune (black contour). Plaine Commune (grey shaded area right) within the Plaine de France area of 2003 (black contour) (credits: IAURIF)**

Since the first years of the development boom (1999–2001), the Plaine Saint-Denis *Project* has become a series of individual area-based developments conducted by different public or private developers. When *Hippodamos 93* ceased its activity, the overall urban design coordination tasks was not fully taken over by the urban planning department of *Plaine Commune*.

In 2004 however, *Plaine Commune* started studying a spatial strategy framework for its territory (42 km<sup>2</sup>): The *Plaine Commune Masterplan*<sup>12</sup> which was approved in 2006, has the ambition of converting Plaine Commune into a major centre for the northern suburbs of Paris, with a goal of 380,000 inhabitants (which implies a 10 per cent increase from 1999) and 180,000 jobs (a 20 per cent increase) by 2020.

At the sub-regional level, the whole area located between Paris and the Roissy-Charles de Gaulle international airport<sup>13</sup> has been designated as a strategic development area. A Joint

12. The *Schéma de cohérence territoriale* (SCOT), a 20-year strategic and spatial plan for a wide area.

13. The 2<sup>nd</sup> largest airport in Europe.

Public Development Agency<sup>14</sup> was set up in 2002 (see Box 8). Its 2005 Strategic Plan<sup>15</sup> sets vast ambitions of growth and regeneration for this high-potential but socially-deprived area, with new small and large urban projects to deliver. However, the implementation of the Plan suffers from a lack of funds and political will (see Figure 10).

### Box 8 : EPA Plaine de France

Since its creation in 2000, the *Etablissement Public d'Aménagement de la Plaine de France* is in charge of urban planning and regeneration, economical and social development of the area. The EPA's is a joint development agency with a board of directors made up of representatives of the State, the Ile-de-France Regional Council, the two *départements* of Seine-Saint-Denis and Val-d'Oise, and 40 municipalities (and their inter-municipal associations). Its task is to conduct studies, coordinate projects, provide technical and financial assistance to the local authorities, and develop directly larger, complex or strategic sites.

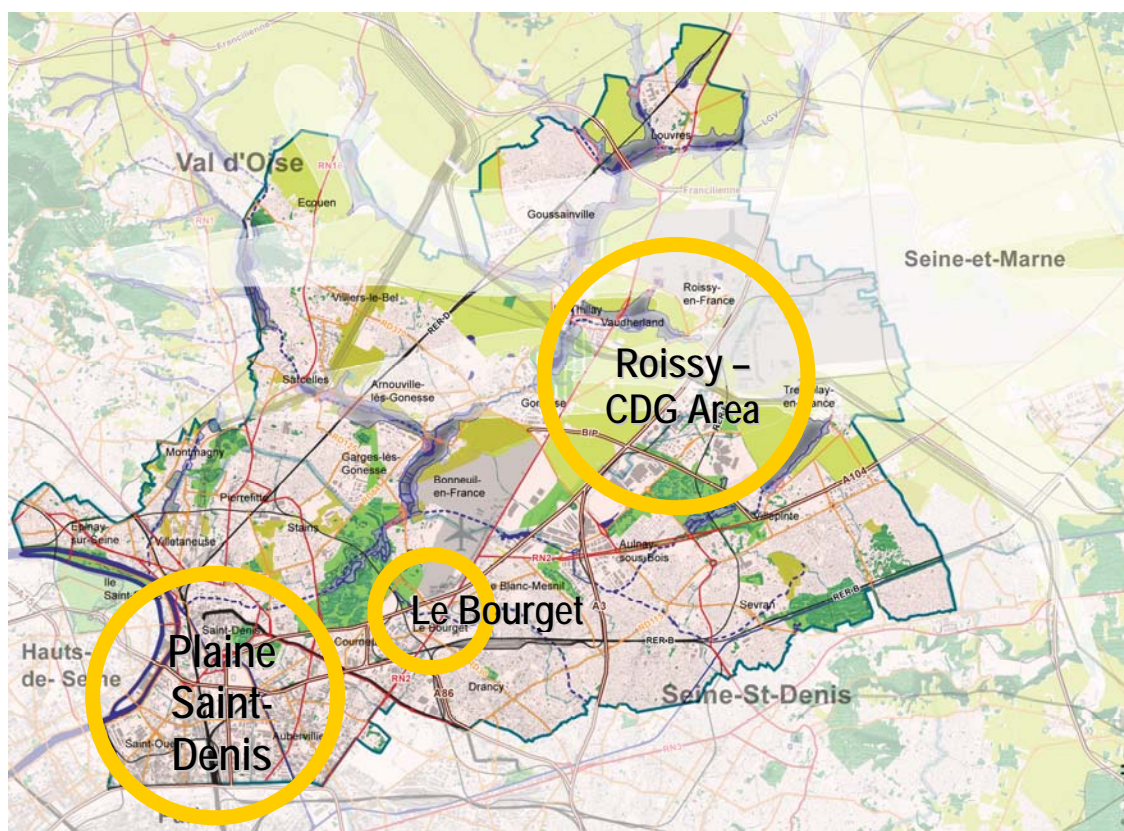


Figure 10: 2005 Strategic Plan of the Plaine de France area (credit: EPA Plaine de France)

*Plaine Saint-Denis* is also a key driver for the 'sustainable' development of a wider area. This includes the Paris North East Project to the south (1.1 million m<sup>2</sup> of redevelopment on a 200 hectare infrastructure area with plans for 25,000 jobs and 10,000 new residents; see Figure 11) and the Saint-Ouen Docks Project (a 100 hectare brownfield regeneration with plans for 770,000 m<sup>2</sup> of new development). These projects have led to new discussions on the need for

14. The *Etablissement Public d'Aménagement de la Plaine de France*.

15. The *Document stratégique de référence*.



a new coordination structure for the core area of the Paris region, including the *Paris Metropole* proposal of the Mayor of Paris.

Furthermore the 2007 Draft Regional Structure Plan<sup>16</sup> currently under examination, also recognises the role of the area as a new economic and social hub to counter-balance the traditional South Western growth trend of the Paris region.



**Figure 11: Paris North East project and plans for the South part of the Plaine (Plaine Commune, Paris boundary in blue) (credits: Dusapin – Leclercq)**

## Plaine Saint-Denis, Today and Tomorrow

### Achievements and projects

The regeneration process of Plaine Saint-Denis is now well underway:

- Over 400 hectares of public or private redevelopments are ongoing or planned in about a dozen projects, such as the European Movie City in a former electric power station, the new Convention centre in *Landy France*, the future retail-led development at *Porte d'Aubervilliers*, the *Confluence-Saint-Denis* station redevelopment, etc. (see Figure 12).
- Over 800,000 m<sup>2</sup> of office space have been developed since the year 2000, turning this area into the third largest service centre in the Ile-de-France (Pleyel-Stadium axis and Icade-EMGP Business Campus). More than 900,000m<sup>2</sup> are still to be completed in the next few years.
- Around 25,000 jobs have already been created in or have relocated to the Plaine—exceeding the initial target of 23,000. This has been accompanied by a deep change in the nature of jobs (most are white collar).

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16. Unlike the 1994 (State-led) Regional Structure Plan, the 2007 Plan elaboration is a Regional Council initiative. When approved, it will become the spatial framework of regional development for up to 2030.



**Figure 12: Ongoing developments and projects in the Plaine Saint-Denis 1998–2007 (working document). Residential are in blue, office in orange, facilities in red (credit: Plaine Commune)**

- About 5000 new housing units of different kinds (flats and terrace houses, rented and owner occupier) been built since 2000—of which 35 per cent is social housing—allowing local people to move and newcomers to settle in the Plaine. The newcomers include a wide range of different social groups. However many of them are young couples arriving from more central areas, with or without children and with lower to medium incomes. Half way from 2015, the initial targets will be met, with 7000 more dwellings still to be developed, also with the same a social-private mix.
- An education and training centre in the heart of the Plaine area is emerging; it will be developed in the next years with a new university campus devoted to human and social sciences.
- New public spaces, avenues, streets, squares, canal-side promenade, and new school and social facilities, creating together new life units in the Diderot, Montjoie, Landy, and Stadium quarters.
- A new identity has been created for the Plaine, partly derived from the diversity of architectures and local *ambiances* (see Figures 13 to 17).

The Plaine is now recognised as an important location in the Paris region for the image, multi-media and digital industries; for some research activities (new energy, new materials); for the textile and fashion industry; and for large-scale events. Moreover, it still hosts hundreds of small and medium businesses in different fields of activities.



**Figure 13: Night view of the Landy-France development area with the future convention centre and hotel complex (top, towers opposite the Stade de France), and the film production studios (credits: Lipsky and Rollet Architects)**



**Figures 14 and 15. Saint-Gobain old warehouses today occupied by R&D activity (left). (credits: P. Lecroart – IAURIF). Future high environmental quality offices (right) (credit: Chaix & Morel Architects)**



**Figures 16 and 17: New development in an old warehouse district south of La Plaine by Icade (left). New social rented housing around a square in the Montjoie area (right) (credits: P. Lecroart – IAURIF)**

### **Difficulties and challenges**

The success of the urban regeneration is not uniform, some areas of the Plaine—such as the eastern and northern parts, the canal side and Seine waterfront—have been left out. One reason is the delay in realising the transport infrastructure such as the north-south tramway, the extension of the M12 metro line, and also the Orbital metro network which was planned in 1994 but for which no decision has yet been taken.

Some sub-standard housing has not yet been renovated despite the efforts of Plaine Commune. The environment has not improved in some areas, with a lack of large green spaces<sup>17</sup>—and major highway interchanges still scar the landscape.<sup>18</sup>

17. The Canal-Park Project studied by IAURIF with *Hippodamos 93* has seen little implementation to this day.

18. The redesigning schemes for the Porte de la Chapelle (*Périphérique* interchange south of the Plaine) and Porte de Paris (A1 interchange north) have been approved, but not the one for the Pleyel junction (A86 motorway).

## Public investment

The total public money invested by the central government and the Regional Council, with contributions from local authorities, in the Plaine for land acquisition, major transport and other infrastructure is estimated at M€740 for the 1994–1999 period (including the public part of the stadium, M€190), and approximately M€450 for the 2000–2006 period. However, the needs of Plaine Saint Denis are probably at least twice as high. In the future (2007–2013), State and Regional spending will go mostly to other areas of the *Plaine de France* where needs are even greater.

Moreover, new difficulties have appeared, such as the persistent unemployment related to the mismatch between local skills and new jobs, and the sometimes uneasy cohabitation between new and old residents. These new challenges are currently being addressed by the *Plaine Commune*.

## Learning From the Plaine Saint-Denis Regeneration

Plaine Saint-Denis has been undergoing a profound physical and economical transformation over the last 10 to 15 years. Its image has changed completely, in a positive way. This is in itself a great success. The regeneration process has, by some aspects, been quite exemplary, but there are also weaker points about the way things were and continue to be done. Two questions will be briefly discussed.

### Planning, flexibility and urban management

Strong points:

- The location, design and management of the Stadium were good strategic decisions, well prepared locally by the range of studies and proposals coming from *Plaine Renaissance* and *Hippodamos 93*.
- The ‘World Cup effect’ was successfully used, with key-investments sparking off the regeneration dynamic, changing the image, and building trust in the whole process.
- The concept of the area regeneration as a multi-functional, mixed-use, and innovative urban area, not a CBD. The flexibility of the *Urban Project* meant that it was possible to fit the Stadium into the plan and also to keep productive activities and existing structures and buildings as long as possible.
- There has been good coordination and consistency between the 1991 *Urban Project* approach, the area-based development, and the statutory plans: the 1994 Regional Structure Plan, the revised local plans, and the recent *Plaine Commune* Master Plan.
- These plans have been closely related with sector-based plans and policies of *Plaine Commune*, such as the Economic Strategy, the Housing Plan, the Social Regeneration Policies, the Retail Structure Plan, the Environment Plan, etc.
- A rare result: Re-development without gentrification. There are more jobs and people by 2020 than ever before, without the gentrification process which large projects often imply, thanks to public land acquisition policies and public housing policies.

Weaker points

- The area was not really planned as a regional urban centre, only as a local regeneration: It lacks a real ‘city feeling’, a real heart, with vibrant urban intensity. Many urban functions (ie: shops, leisure and cultural facilities) are spread out in the large area or cater mainly for local needs.

- As in many large-scale projects, there is still a mismatch between new job opportunities and local skills. This is now been tackled through agreements signed between businesses, training institutions and local authorities.
- There is still lack of medium- and high-income families, and also of old people. A more balanced social and generation mix is still to come. On the other hand, low-income residents and businesses are increasingly threatened by rising land prices and rents.
- There is a need to improve and reinforce the quality and maintenance of the public realm, as well as architectural and urban design, and environmental standards: *Plaine Commune* is currently working of these topics.

## **Governance, time and money**

### Strong points

- The whole project is a story of consensus-building through open debate at different levels: neighbourhood consultative councils, municipal councils, local authorities. Very few developments have been opposed by citizens.
- Stakeholder involvement and public participation has accompanied the first part of the regeneration process, in particular within the ‘Open Forums’ of the Plaine and the ongoing ‘Community Approach’ district management.<sup>19</sup>
- All this has contributed to build trust between public authorities and private parties: developers, investors and final users are now being involved upstream in the different development schemes, which was not the case before.

### Weaker points

- The overall process has been relatively slow. It took almost 15 years from the creation of *Plaine Renaissance* to the growth boom of the very late 1990s.
- This is related to the fact the existing governance structure is not at the right level. After 1999, the joint strategic project committee ceased to function, with the result that strategic regional issues have often come second to local issues. The sheer number of players with different interests requires more coordination.
- The overall ambition and spatial vision can sometimes get lost in area-based development procedures and short-term logic. After 2000, the *Urban Project* was not updated and the previous role of *Hippodamos 93* has not been fully taken over by Plaine Commune.
- Government and regional investments are not sufficient to address the needs. As a result, infrastructure improvements have been postponed many times: Extension of the M12 metro line, North-South Plaine tramway, Orbital metro, restructuring of major interchanges, new road links above the canal and railway tracks, Canal-Park, some educational and training facilities, etc.

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19. From 1991 to 2004, the *Assises de la Plaine* was a yearly open forum where decision-makers, businesses, local trade-unions, urban planners and residents could debate about the implementation of the *Urban Project* and the future of the Plaine. The ‘*Démarche Quartiers*’ is a ongoing community and district management approach dealing with everyday problems and projects at a local level.

## Conclusions

Urban decline can be a rapid phenomenon, but regeneration is slow at first, then—once trust is back—things can go very quickly, as if life had to catch up. The Plaine Saint-Denis area took off after the 1998 World Cup—5 years after the wise decision to locate there the *Stade de France* (1993) and over 10 years after the start of the regeneration process. The strength of Plaine Saint-Denis regeneration approach is that it is not a single flagship project, but a coherent spatial vision and strategy. However, with the market-forces now supporting the process, initial ambitions and government support have weakened. This could in turn weaken the consistency and quality of the final result.

The combination of flexible physical planning, public direct intervention, support of private investments and making use of opportunities, has worked fairly well in the Plaine Saint-Denis regeneration process. Community involvement in the process by the local residents and businesses has been successful. But at wider levels, for instance at the level of the Paris region or internationally, Plaine Saint-Denis needs to build up a stronger image. The area lacks a real centre and cultural landmarks—with the exception of the stadium. The regeneration is mainly a local project supported by higher-level players, and not a metropolitan project supported by local communities.

However, in many aspects, the Plaine Saint-Denis regeneration process stands out among other large-scale urban projects as trying out an original and interesting path to sustainable development. Halfway from the initial time-frame (2015), a lot has been achieved, probably more remains to be done. Unlike some ‘turn-key redevelopments’, the future of Plaine Saint-Denis remains very open.

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