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**The image of Paris.
Written rewritten by Maurizio Ameri**

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The image of Paris. Written rewritten by Maurizio Ameri*

Maria Linda Falcidieno

* In the following text, we present an oral contribution by Maurizio Ameri to the course “Theory of Models for Design” at the Faculty of Architecture of Genoa.

There are moments – encounters, events, shared experiences – that make a place something special, something that remains in the mind and becomes a memory, undoubtedly composed of words, sounds, scents, and flavours, but perhaps above all, of images. Images tell a story and allow us to construct our own story, to relive it time and time again. For me, Paris has been precisely this, and the opportunity to think critically about the value and role of visual perception that imprints itself in our minds while visiting and living in a city is accompanied by the desire to make this reflection entirely personal, even if supported by numerous theoretical and methodological studies in this field. Furthermore, Paris is considered as an urban agglomeration, not only of significant dimensions but also as a model for illustrating the main perceptual elements related to urban settlements, and on the other hand, for facilitating an analysis of a debate that can capture, even with simple references to well-known facts, the dialectic between the city center and urban expansion. (To Maurizio, M.L.)

Urban morphology

The characteristic element shaping the urban form of Paris is represented by the Seine, a navigable river around which the entire urban organism is born and develops, at least if it maintains certain dimensions. When Paris, from the city it was, turns into the metropolis it is today, its territorial surroundings paradoxically coincide with the entire national territory (fig. 1). Consequently, it no longer makes sense to say that the form is characterized by the Seine, if only because there is no longer a precise and definite urban form.

The Seine is the foundational axis of Paris: unifying when looking at the urban organism, dividing when we descend to the scale of building fabrics, or when, as we will see, we examine the distribution of major functions.

From the origins to the late-gothic city

In this context, what's of interest about the origins of Paris is that the first urban layout, the ancient Lutetia of the Gauls, was concentrated on the small islet in the center of the Seine (now the Île de la Cité) and, through successive destructions and reconstructions, more or less remained the same until the time of Romanization. During this period, an orthogonal grid layout developed on the left bank, following the typical Roman pattern of colonization and urbanization. This expansion phase was followed by a period of contraction during the Early Middle Ages when the city once again concentrated in the limited area of Île de la Cité. It was only in the 12th century, marking the early rise of Gothic culture in the Île de France (think of cathedrals like Amiens, Beauvais, etc.), characterized by the rapid development of construction techniques resulting in intense building activity, that the city resumed its growth, extending to both riverbanks. The Gothic city was essentially organized into three zones with distinct functions: Île de la Cité as the religious core, the left bank as the commercial area, and the right bank as the cultural and monastic nucleus. This articulation remained largely readable and, in any case, was never completely overturned.

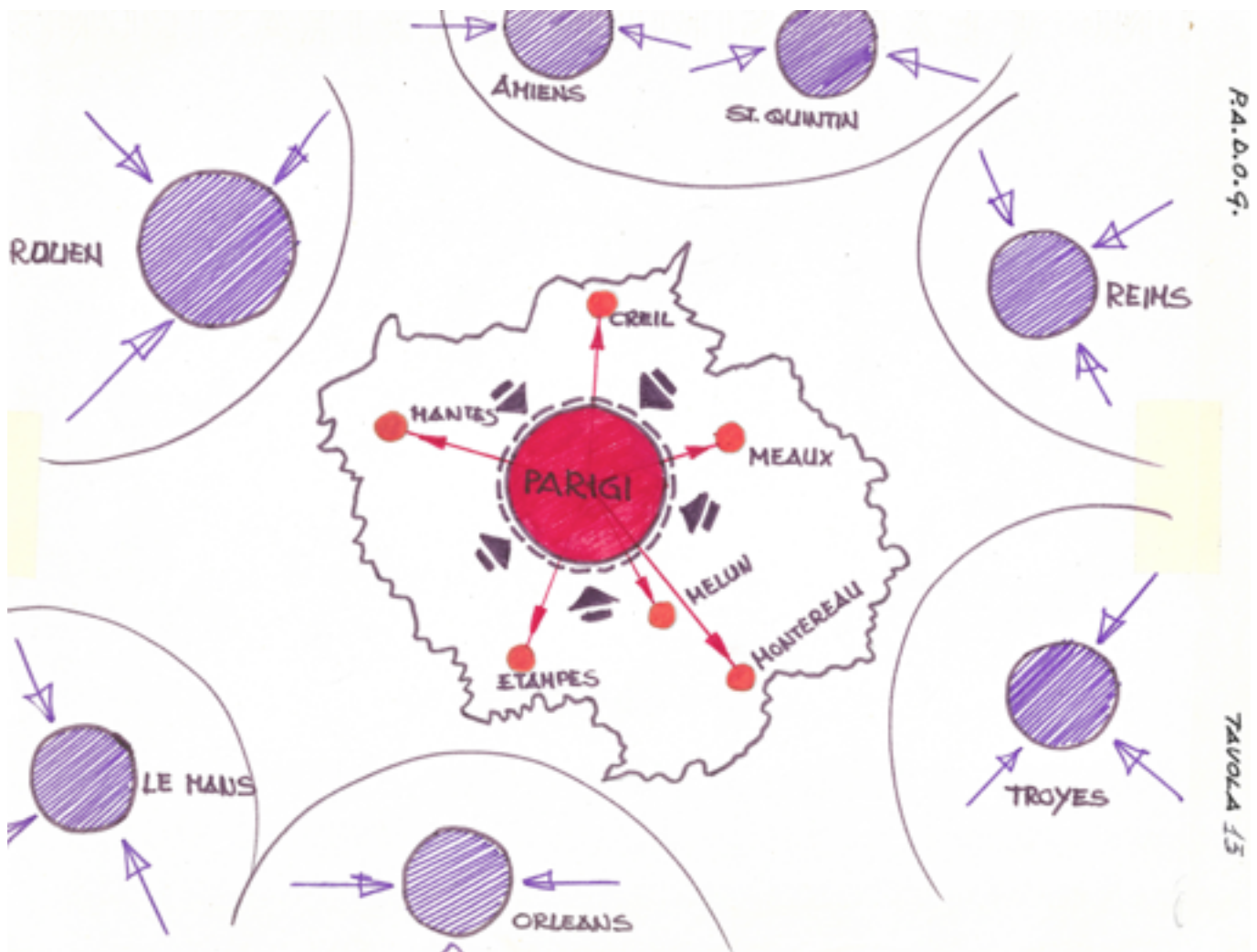
From the late-gothic city to the late-baroque city

Around the 16th century, Paris still retained a decidedly medieval, or more precisely, late-Gothic urban layout, with few squares or open spaces, except for Les Halles and Notre-Dame, which represented its two major focal points. It should be noted that Paris did not immediately embrace the cultural innovations that could be found in Italy during this period, as did the rest of Europe. We are in the Renaissance era, and the new culture, with its early centers in Florence and later in Rome, contributed to radically changing the city's appearance. While the late-Gothic city, despite appearing relatively uniform, had a low level of organicity, meaning a lack of correlation between its parts, and was generally too extensive compared to its capacity

for cohesion, the Renaissance city, with the introduction of one or more poles into the urban fabric, managed to grow significantly while balancing size with a gradual scale as one approached the focal point. As an example, we could consider Rome and trace the phases of transformation that led from the nucleus city of medieval parishes to the polar city of the late 16th century.

Paris's delay was never truly bridged; in fact, when Renaissance culture began to spread in Europe, it did so as a culture of importation, continuously mediating with entrenched traditions and often encountering strong local resistance. In other words, what happened in Europe with the Renaissance was similar to what had happened in Italy with the Gothic. Ultimately, it can be said that a Renaissance Paris never truly existed. In fact, to witness interventions that significantly impacted the late-Gothic form of the city, one must look to the great monarchs of the 17th and 18th centuries when the prevailing mentality was already the Baroque's mentality.

These interventions were numerous, ranging from the initial work on the development of the Champs Élysées (designed by Le Nôtre in 1666) to projects like the improvement of the Cours de Vincennes, the construction of Les Invalides, and the creation of the Palace of Versailles, which subsequently determined a new direction of expansion to the west. Nevertheless, the most significant interventions are represented by the royal squares (Place Dauphine, Place des Vosges, Place Vendôme, Place des Victoires, Place de la Concorde). These squares served as crucial urban focal points designed for celebration, representation, and the exaltation of the polis in its full lexical sense. They were remarkable architectural episodes, more than urbanistic ones, capable, nevertheless, of introducing into the urban fabric those polar elements that Italian Renaissance had introduced as essential for an organically modular urban vision for a couple of centuries.



1. Paris and the satellite cities (sketch by Maurizio Ameri).

Nevertheless, the Enlightenment had laid the groundwork for Paris to regain its role as a leading city in Europe compared to others. The French Revolution, along with the Napoleonic adventure, firmly placed Paris in this position of leadership. At the beginning of the 19th century, Paris already had around 500,000 inhabitants and continued to grow. However, urban planning was understood differently from how we perceive it today. One of the most significant interventions was carried out by Percier and Fontaine for Rue de Rivoli, which was nearly contemporary with Nash's work on Regent's Street in London. These were representative and grandiose achievements that quickly became paradigmatic. From the perspective of urban changes though, little altered until Napoleon III, in 1855, appointed Haussmann as the Prefect of Paris to oversee the city's redevelopment.

At that time, the population had risen to about 1,200,000, and the need for comprehensive restructuring was driven by the substantial demographic growth, as well as the political government's requirements. This government had to respond to the specific wishes of the bourgeoisie to prevent the recurrence of revolutionary uprisings, such as those in 1830 and 1848.

Haussmann's plan became a paradigm for subsequent urban choices, as seen in the formulation of the "19th-century" city of Genoa, which had a different territorial, typological, and social structure. Nevertheless, it is worth noting a peculiarity of this plan, echoing Benevolo's observation that, for the first time, we witness "an example of an urban program extended to an entire city and completed in a relatively short time" (Benevolo, 1963). Moreover, it was a program keenly articulated across four levels of intervention, which included: construction-related works (cutting new arteries and building new neighbourhoods), works for public parks (Bois de Boulogne, Bois de Vincennes), works for the renewal of urban services (water supply, etc.), and finally, administrative reorganization.

It is clear that there is an important consideration to be made: Haussmann was the first to interpret urban planning as a political-administrative tool. Thus, he was the first interpreter of modern urban planning, and his significance, apart from the new face given to Paris, is derived from this aspect as well.

In other words, with the interpretation given by Haussmann, urban planning effectively becomes the tool used by the predominant social class not only to guide the form of the city (more precisely, to guide its development) but especially to influence the other social classes. This concept of urban planning, therefore, becomes an expression of the establishment and, for this reason, it cannot but have a counterpart represented by utopian urban planning, linked to opposition political ideologies, and consequently aimed at the empowerment of the dominated classes.

To illustrate, during Haussmann's time, the counterpart was represented by the urban planning of Saint-Simon and Fourier, a socialist-inspired urban planning. From Haussmann onwards, this dichotomy between "state" urban planning and "opposition" urban planning, which also includes the purely visionary urban planning of the architect-researcher or architect-intellectual, not always directly involved in political battles, became a common practice. In fact, in the ongoing debate, official urban planning, despite facing repeated moments of wear and tear, has always drawn elements, whether real or fictitious, for its rejuvenation from the visionary urban planning that opposed it, deriving motivation and *raison d'être* from the failures of the former. This is somewhat the interplay between official culture and counterculture.

This does not necessarily imply a value judgment, either positive or negative, on one or the other. On the contrary, it implies a willingness to historicize the events of the transformation of the city of Paris, as an illustration of the indispensable role of the two forms of urban planning and design: one that prepares and implements specific programs, and the importance of the other that critiques precisely these programs and their implementations. If there must be a judgment, it can only be a historical judgment, which is inherently positive whenever there is freedom of debate and the possibility of comparison, criticism, and the proposition of new choices.

In this regard, "The Commune of Paris 1871" is remembered through the exhibition held at the University Library of Genoa in March 2023. More information can be found here: <https://urlz.fr/peEF>.

La Commune was an entirely unprecedented political form, suitable to serve as the framework for social emancipation. It established a government primarily composed of workers, based on the principles of electability, recallability, and accountability to the people for all of its political, judicial, and administrative bodies, all of whom received worker salaries. La Commune was not a parliamentary body but an executive and legislative body of labour simultaneously. It decreed the expropriation of large capitalist properties, replaced the standing army with an armed populace, declared the separation of Church and state, and established secular education. It ensured the most complete freedom of speech, writing, assembly, and association.

La Commune declared that its flag is that of the Universal Republic and thus granted foreigners citizenship on an equal basis. It enabled women to participate in clubs and sections of the International, often presiding over sessions. It promoted gender pay equality, female education, the establishment of childcare centers, equal treatment of natural and legitimate children, and equal rights within and outside of marriage. It also introduced measures ensuring that culture should not be a commodity for the elite but available to all. It advocated for regulations on functional public services like free public healthcare.

Urban planning policy for Paris in the 20th Century

In the search for references on which to base an informed critique and propose new paradigms for the “design” of the city, let’s summarize the urban planning history of Paris in the past century, according to a brief timeline of interventions:

1919-1924: Requirement for growing municipalities to develop “projets communaux d’embellissement et d’extension des villes” (municipal projects for beautification and expansion of cities).

1925: Demolition of the Thiers fortification wall, resulting in the union of Paris and its suburbs.

1932-1935: Development of the first “Plan d’aménagement de la région parisienne” (Plan for the development of the Paris region), created to coordinate municipal projects.

1939: Approval of the first master plan for Paris, known as the Prost plan, which was hindered by the outbreak of World War II. Nevertheless, the plan proposed natural expansion tendencies.

1946: First “Plan d’ensemble de modernisation et d’équipement économique de la métropole et des territoires d’outre-mer” (overall plan for modernization and economic development of the metropolis and overseas territories).

1954-1957: Second “Plan de modernisation et d’équipement” (plan for modernization and equipment).

1956: “Projet directeur de la région parisienne” (Director’s project for the Paris region).

1960: Approval of the P.A.D.O.G. (“Plan d’aménagement et d’organisation générale de la région parisienne” – plan for development and general organization of the Paris region), elaborated by the S.A.R.P. (“Service d’aménagement de la région parisienne” – Service for the development of the Paris region) under the direction of the two commissioners who succeeded each other during the study phase: Sudreau and Diebolt.

1961: Establishment of the I.A.U.R.P. (“Institut d’aménagement et d’urbanisme de la région parisienne” – Institute for the development and urban planning of the Paris region), which officially replaced the commission responsible for “Plan d’aménagement”.

1965: Approval of the “Schéma directeur d’aménagement et d’urbanisme de la région parisienne” (Master plan for development and urban planning of the Paris region), elaborated by the I.A.U.R.P. and known as the Delouvrier plan.

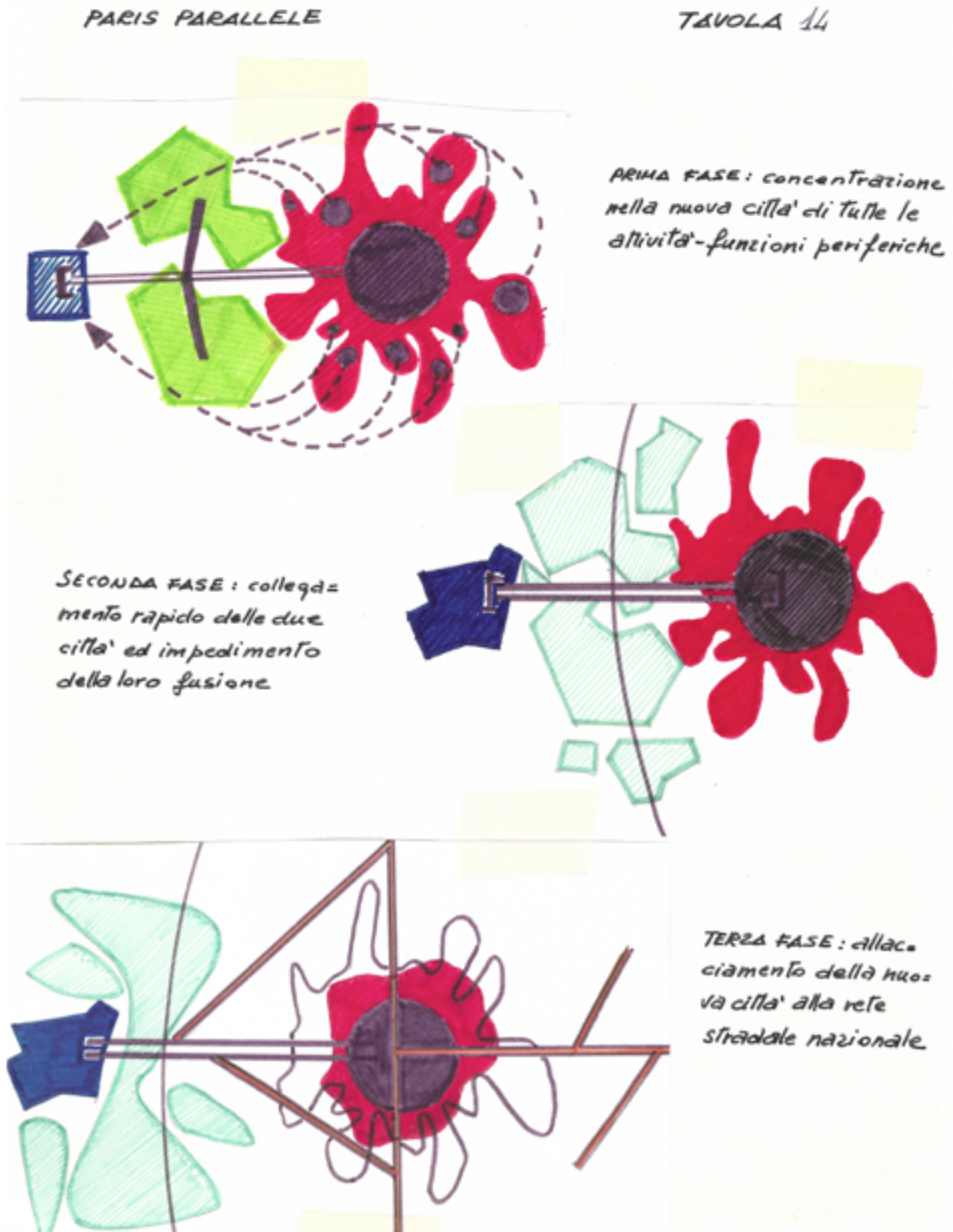
Of all these interventions, we are primarily interested in this context in the P.A.D.O.G. and the “Schéma directeur”, which are undoubtedly the two most significant moments. However, before examining them, in order not to lose sight of the considerations made about the dialectic between official urban planning and counter-urban planning, we must remember figures such as Sorya y Mata with his studies on the linear city, pursued from 1882, or figures like Howard, who developed his garden city scheme between 1898 and 1902.

Similarly, we should recall episodes such as the realization of Parker and Unwin's plan for Letchworth Garden City in 1902 and the creation of Welwyn Garden City in 1919, led by De Doinous.

Furthermore, we have "Cité industrielle" by Tony Garnier (1901-1904), Le Corbusier's "Plan Voisin"

(1925), Le Corbusier's project for "une ville contemporaine" (1922), the aforementioned project for Broadacre City by Wright (1934), the Athens Charter (1934), and so on.

The proposal of the P.A.D.O.G. (fig. 2) is articulated on two levels, one national and the other regional.



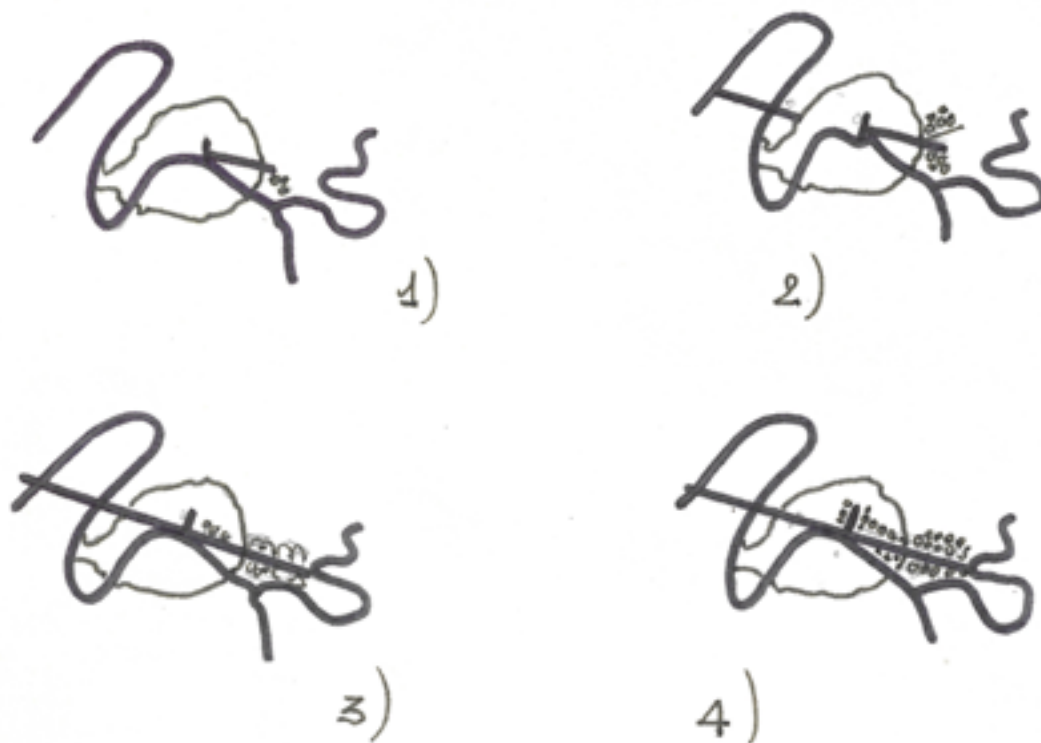
2. Plan d'aménagement et d'organisation générale de la région parisienne (P.A.D.O.G) (sketch by Maurizio Ameri).

On a national level, it advocates for a policy that promotes the development of jobs and social facilities in the provinces, to retain a population that would otherwise have migrated to Paris. It specifically identifies certain cities on the outskirts of the Paris region, such as Orléans, Troyes, Reims, Amiens, Rouen, Le Mans, etc.

On a regional level, the operations to be carried out include decentralizing tertiary activities, renewing run-down or aging neighbourhoods, restructuring and containing the peripheral area, revitalizing the rural zone by enhancing cities like Meaux, Étampes, etc., to create satellite cities of Paris. Finally, it encourages a new land policy. In essence, the fundamental idea of the plan is to curb the growth of Paris by redeveloping its old center and creating new attraction points at 50-100 kilometers from the city, as well as smaller satellite cities. In other words, the P.A.D.O.G. proposal is centered on decentralization, resulting in decongestion.

It is interesting to look at what influenced the P.A.D.O.G.: on one hand, there is the example of London, which successfully decongested its center by expanding beyond the so-called green belt and implemented the two Abercrombie plans of 1943 and 1944. On the other hand, there is the Dutch experience of the “cluster city” and its theoretical foundation. The theory of the cluster city originates from the concept of the “refinery cluster” developed by Riboud. According to this theory, for a working refinery, once a certain capacity is reached, further expansion leads to questionable efficiency. There is an optimal scale that should not be compromised by expansions. Instead, it is more advantageous to create new refineries separate from the existing one but connected to it through a single large pipeline. The same concept can be applied to cities, with the caveat of replacing the term “pipeline” with “road network”. This theory shifts from the idea of a concentrated city to that of a distributed city.

TAVOLA 15



STUDI di LE CORBUSIER PER PARIGI

Le quattro Tappe di attuazione

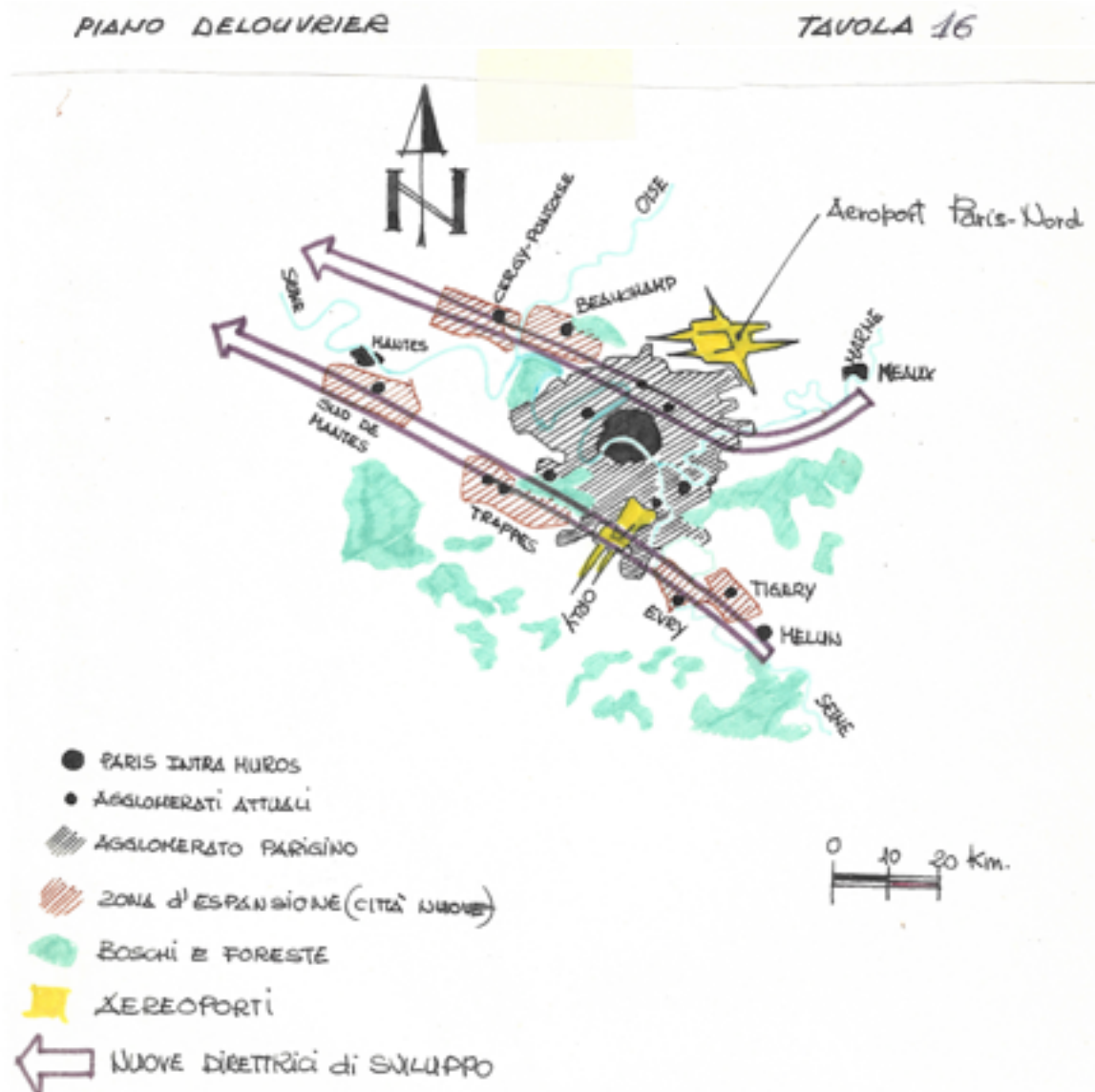
3. Paris Parallèle. First phase: concentration of all peripheral activities-functions in the new city; second phase: rapid connection of the two cities and prevention of their merger; third phase: integration of the new city into the national road network (sketch by Maurizio Ameri).

In practice, there are several systems of cluster cities, even if not planned, such as Dallas and Fort Worth, approximately 30 miles apart and connected by a highway. Additionally, examples include Cologne and Bonn (28 km), Marseille and Aix-en-Provence, and numerous cases of cities that, while maintaining their independence, revolve around a metropolis, as is the case with Pavia, Como, Varese, etc., in relation to Milan. However, the most interesting example of a cluster city, partly planned, is the Dutch one, previously mentioned, consisting of four major cities (The Hague, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht) and several smaller centers, all interconnected by highways and electric trains. This example was certainly on the minds of the authors of the P.A.D.O.G., who, like many in the late 1950s and early 1960s, were not considering the energy crisis.

For the P.A.D.O.G., there was also a counterpart represented by the proposal of “Paris parallèle”

(fig. 3), which was part of the exhibition “Demain Paris”. This proposal was not only critical of the P.A.D.O.G. but also of Le Corbusier and his “Paris sur Paris” plan. The project involved the construction of a city for 1,000,000 inhabitants at 20-30 km from the center of Paris, creating a sort of alternative Paris. The creators explained: “The proposal essentially consists of creating a parallel city that would not oppose Paris but complement it. This city would be located in close proximity to the capital, so that the connection between the two parts of this ensemble could be ensured in less than thirty minutes by individual or collective means.”

The Delouvrier plan (fig. 4), even more so than the P.A.D.O.G., seems to confirm what we have said about urban planning and the habit of envisioning as real situations that are only conceived. The plan is sized based on the assumption that by the year 2000, Paris will have approximately 14,000,000 inhabitants, more precisely: Paris *intra muros* will



4. Delouvrier Plan (scheme drawn up by Maurizio Ameri).

retain the number of inhabitants it had at the time of the plan, around 2,500,000. The suburbs, with improved infrastructure, will increase from 4,700,000 in 1965 to approximately 7,000,000 inhabitants. The new cities will have about 3,000,000 inhabitants, while smaller towns will host around 1,500,000 people. The contrast with the P.A.D.O.G., which aimed to curb the growth of Paris, is evident. More importantly, it raises questions about the purpose and validity of urban planning as conceived in this manner.

Urban planning as discipline

To conclude, some considerations that present the case of Paris as a useful exemplification to propose a vision of the changing urban image not due to technicalities or management-administrative-political will, but rather a vision of change directly and closely connected to the nature of the place, its material, technological, and established usage characteristics. In short, transformations that consider the continuous and ongoing process, not determined by predetermined jumps and choices. The post-Haussmann era is recent history, characterized by the gradual establishment of urban planning as a codified discipline. It is worth making some critical considerations about urban planning,

exposing some underlying misconceptions that it has carried from its origins and that are widely known and shared today.

The first misconception is the need to rely on pre-determined operational tools (from simple building regulations to the general urban plan), which require accepting as objective situations that are only proposed, if not generic forecasts made on the drawing board with mechanical data statistical processing. This misconception, which consists of assuming a predetermined instrumental process as valid, inevitably leads to the paradox of opposing the actual reality to a reality only imagined, triggering potential imbalances that depend on the usually present discrepancies between one reality and the other.

The second misconception, which stems because of the first, consists instead of generalizing the instrumental approach, prevalent not only among administrators and operators but also among the users and thinkers-researchers themselves. This leads to subjective interpretations in the application and interpretation of the tools themselves, as well as cultural and ideological subjectivism (in the etymological sense of the term), as seen in the projects of Wright for Broadacre City and Le Corbusier for the Ville Radieuse (see also the studies for Paris, *fig. 5*).

TAVOLA 17



PARIGI E LE SUE CITTA' SATELLITE

5. Le Corbusier's studies for Paris : the four implementation stages (sketch by Maurizio Ameri).

These brief considerations lead us to consider urban planning as a necessary but not sufficient documentary apparatus for design: building regulations, master plans, etc., and even statistics, if taken as operational tools, have their validity, within the awareness of their limitations. But, in practice, it is not possible to truly consider them as mere means because, taken individually or in their entirety, they express and reflect the tendencies and intentions of those who have prepared and manage that apparatus. As a result, it is illusory to conceive urban planning as a strictly deterministic mechanism, i.e., as a purely mechanical complex of causes and effects, inevitably oriented and therefore inclined to certain impulses while denying others.

This means that, in terms of the implicit logic in its very nature, urban planning has done nothing but prevent, albeit unintentionally, the initiation of any organic process that could introduce qualitative rather than quantitative selective systems aimed at understanding precisely those organic processes that constitute the actual and not virtual engine of reality at different scales, from the architectural to the territorial.

To support the reflection proposed here is the contemporary consideration of the vital and active organic processes in any city. Land use planning and landscape architecture are precisely the search for the overcoming of “technical” urban planning. However, even in these disciplines, rules, technicalities, economic requirements, and ethical considerations (primarily seen as management issues) often coexist with difficulty.

Conclusion

The case of Paris, chosen for reasons directly related to the research theme that characterized the Italian-French collaboration between the schools of Versailles and Genoa mentioned in this context, has provided a valuable opportunity for personal reflection on what was addressed earlier regarding the role played by the methods and tools of the formative disciplines in shaping the city. While urban planning is typically associated with this, here a path related to the transformation of the urban image is proposed, which arises from the continuous changes in the urban organism.

The reference is to the historical-processual typology, which is based on the critical reading of the territory and the environment in which the built

nucleus settles, grows, and changes with changing surrounding conditions. Representation, in all its various meanings, is an essential protagonist in this process because it allows one to grasp the key elements that help identify the “active constants” of a place to update and present them in a contemporary context. Materials, techniques, structures, and ultimately forms come to life and become first designs and then realizations. This leads to an expansion of the possibilities of representation as a driving force for the renewal and revitalization of degraded and/or abandoned spaces, supplementing the role of visual perception with that of the actual construction.

Key-words

Visual perception, image, historical-procedural typology, urban organism.

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