

SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES AND ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS IN THE GROWTH OF THE PARIS AREA

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The economic and social evolution of the Ile-de-France (the Seine river basin around Paris) cannot be separated either from the deepseated tendencies of urban evolution in the world's greatest metropolitan areas, nor from the voluntarist policies which carry them along, accompany them or combat their effects, according to the degree of confidence and effectiveness one grants to urban planning documents and normative actions. It would be just as illusory to deny the autonomy and thus the decision-making power of the economic and demographic actors – businesses and households – as it would be dangerous to abandon ourselves to a “laissez-faire” attitude, which might, in the long run endanger the main social and political balances of the region and consequently its credibility and its efficiency in international competition. In these mechanisms of constraint, often contradictory, of which the resultant can only be a narrow crest-line, which does not exclude either the ambition of a project or the solidness of its realization, we must show the forces in action in their continuity and their breaks, and the regional and national stakes which underlie the logic of action and intervention in the French capital. But it is just as indispensable to set a clear limit analyses and approaches of the university professor or researcher, who has been promoted to the rank of expert, and the forms of his propositions and convictions which come from his civic commitment, even though illuminated by privileged professional information. For the choices are political before being technical and spatial, and as such, belong, in a democratic regime, to all, whether citizens, associations, political parties or elected officials. At the very most, it is advisable to trace the possible options and alternatives. As long as we do not impose as a prerequisite forms demanded in the name of some so-called scientific rigour or ideological fidelity. Our times are less than ever times of certainties and dogmatic respect for the letter of the law. Furthermore, nothing is ineluctable. But it is when we confuse different spheres that we risk losing everything and falling into the disaster scenarios that we wish to avoid.

I — CONTINUITY AND BREAKS

Our present time, with its intense economic mutations — which are more than a severe passing crisis — brings us to question about the validity of geographical systems born of a conjuncture of continuous regular growth of individual income and collective wealth. Not only have the best established urban theories been unable to resist the test of economic and demographic reversals, but the facts themselves, attested to by decades of continuity give the impression of becoming shaky and being called into question. It is in our mental structures that it is the most difficult to put things in order and loosen rigidity. This is the case for the Geography of activity localization and the evolution of the relationship between the capital and the rest of the country. The whole post-war generation, which had lived according to the image — and the reality — of Paris surrounded by the French desert, was able to bring about the triumph of its decentralization policies, at the very moment in the 1950's and 1960's, when the normal incline of technologies and mentalities was leading to a spread of growth. Nowadays, we still think and live in terms of the dispersion and diffusion of initiatives, consumption and life — styles, at a time when new centralities are in gestation. This contradiction between temporalities and periodicities leads beyond the facts, which are widely known, to an analysis of tendencies in terms of continuity and breaks, and to an attempt to discover in the mass of statistics, the deviant data, that which only reorients the system in place or which augurs more profoundly for a new order of things.

1) Four Fundamental Tendencies

Demographic slow — down

A few outstanding characteristics will be recalled here to enable us to draw a picture of the French capital and its surrounding area, which, though a caricature, resembles it nonetheless. The first of these is unquestionably a demographic slow — down, which can be seen in all the available statistics¹. In the space of 10 years, from January 1st, 1977 to January 1st, 1986, the Ile — de — France gained less than 300000 inhabitants, going from 9912000 residents to 10206000. However, the first results of the 1990 census show a certain acceleration of Paris demographic growth with a net gain of almost 600000 inhabitants between 1982 and 1990.

The lesson of the last two decades has been that a century and a half of unique economic and demographic concentration has resulted in a multipolarisation of French geographical space. The possible reorientation of these structural reversals is less to be found in the simple statistical evolution of numbers (increase in population or in the number of people active) than in the increasing flexibility of the relationship that an area's inhabitants have with their place of residence or their jobs. Localized enumeration is no longer the best indicator of urban space.

1 Tableaux économiques de l'Ile — de — France, édition 1986, Paris, I. N. S. E. E., 1987.

Geographical outward movement

Furthermore, this stagnation in the Paris area at about 1/6 of the national population is accompanied by slow and continuous internal modifications in the localization of people and their activities. Geographical outward movement (from centre to suburbs) is certainly the key term here.

Concomittantly and correlatively, there is a constant progression and rejuvenation of developed space in the outlying areas, in spite of the renovation projects in city centres.

The development of the service sector

At the same time, profound changes in the economic apparatus were being made. These can be summed up by the terms "de-industrialization", "development of the service sector" and "decline of labour-based industries". In just the one intercensal period from 1975 to 1982, which is far from covering the most rapid transformations, industry again lost more than 200000 employees in the Ile-de-France, going from 36.2% to 30.6% of the total active population (the national average is 34%), while the service sector gained almost 300000 jobs, exceeding the distribution for France as a whole by more than ten points in 1982 (68% of the total active population in the Ile-de-France as opposed to 57.7% in the country as a whole). This means that here again, the long-range movement for purifying and refining activities to the advantage of administration and economic high command, and to the detriment of production as such was continued and deepened. Obviously one finds effects of this long economic history in the social structuring of this area that is both capital and region. In 1982, executives and members of the intellectual professions represented 15% of those active in the Ile-de-France, that is, nearly five points above the national average, and there were almost twice as many workers in France as a whole (44%) as in the Paris area (24%). In spite of the slow movements of standardization and homogenization of life-styles and social stratifications, the gap between Paris and the rest of France still exists.

Innovation

This apparent contradiction comes from the fact—and this will be the fourth tendency to be distinguished—that the French capital has always had an innovative effect, both social and economic, in the process of evolution in life-styles and systems of production. Of course, it is always difficult to bring together figures on the economic aspects of this phenomenon. But it is easier to show its role as a precursor and the part it plays as a premonition of the mechanisms at work behind the events of civilization. We know that the 1982 census threw a bright light, at least insofar as public opinion was concerned, on "single-parent families". They represent, in fact, nearly one tenth of the total number of families in the city of Paris (9.6%), 7.9% in the Ile-de-France, and only 6.3% in the country as a whole. This is more than a simple demographic curiosity in the evolution of morals. We have here a sign that Paris retains its specificity. In the societies and spaces that the information and transportation revolution daily helps make more standardized and interdependent, the pre-eminence of a few central places continues, by the sudden appearances of something new,

to differentiate between geographical localizations.

2) Provocative Assertions or Impertinent Observations

The recovery of employment

But now, a few recent events have somewhat upset these well worked out schemes. There is, first of all, as seen through the UNEDIC² series, analyzed between 1981 and 1984, an indication of much more dynamic activity and employment in the Ile - de - France region than the overall assessments, which were always negative and therefore portended disaster, would show.

The return of centrality

What is most surprising is that this economic dynamism concerns city centre locations as well as those in the outskirts, even though the balances are still more favourable to the outlying suburbs (table n° 1).

This mass effect continues to be felt therefore, in an impressive way, since the city of Paris, with one fifth of the region's active population, has a concentration of much more than one third of the jobs that have appeared in the newly created establishments in the private sector.

Table n° 1

Assessment of the active personnel
in the establishments created or liquidated
in the private sector from 31 Dec. 1981 to 31 Dec. 1984
(in thousands of jobs).

	Creations	Liquidations	Balances
Paris	183 (37 %)	209 (39 %)	- 26 (56 %)
Inner departements	174 (36 %)	192 (36 %)	- 18 (39 %)
Outlying departments	130 (27 %)	132 (25 %)	- 2 (5 %)
Entire Ile - de - France	487 (100 %)	533 (100 %)	- 45 (100 %)

² Organisation which collect management's contributions.

The preservation of ordinary activities

In any case, the decline of industry in Paris is much more diversified than we are generally led to believe.

The de-industrialization of Paris thus does not seem to be the result of a univocal process, nor can it be subject to a general study.

Mastery of this phenomenon is much more sector-based than geographical; the Ile-de-France region has not been inexorably struck by a generalized decline, nor are its outlying areas any better off in the general misfortune.

On the whole, it is true that the Ile-de-France region is continuing its de-industrialization, but especially, as in all the world's capitals, a dual society is emerging which provides not only "high-tech" jobs, but also service jobs which require little or no qualification. In Paris, as in New York, there are more and more industrial activities which one might tend to consider as being part of a peri-industrialization which is maintained or reestablished in the central zones of the urban area (table n° 2).

Table n° 2
Assessment of the active personnel
in the industrial establishments
of the private sector from 31 Dec. 1981 to 31 Dec. 1984
(increases and decreases in personnel,
creations and liquidations of establishments)
(in thousands of jobs)

	Equipement industries		Standard consumer goods industries	
Paris	- 7.5	(17 %)	- 6.5	(50 %)
Inner departments	- 27.0	(61 %)	- 6.5	(50 %)
Outlying departments	- 9.5	(22 %)	0	
Entire Ile - de - France	- 44.0	(100 %)	- 13.0	(100 %)

The large and the small

Finally, if we continue down the path of iconoclasm, we will also have to go back over the interest politicians and observers bring to bear, after the experience of the United States, on activity units, if not businesses, of small size. "Small is beautiful"; in another words, a reduction to the smallest component part as well as dispersion may be the real way out of the present crisis, just as concentration was the corollary of growth. The observations made show that we must at least soften our enthusiasm (table n° 3)

Table n° 3

“Apparent balances” of active personnel in the establishments of the private sector from 31 Dec. 1981 to 31 Dec. 1984 according to the size of the establishment.
(increases and decreases in personnel, creation and liquidations of establishments)
(in thousands of jobs)

	Establishments with less than 10 salaried employees	Establishments with more than 200 salaried employees
Paris	- 38	+ 11
Inner departments	- 26	- 7
Outlying departments	- 9	...
Entire Ile - de - France	- 73	+ 4

II — QUESTIONS AND CONSEQUENCIES.

The problem of the importance of these deviant characteristics in modifying the overall significance of Paris space still remains, as does that of their specificity in appreciating the differential evolution of Paris in relation to the whole of France.

1) The different levels in the city

Centre and outskirts

The first hypothesis is the return of centrality thanks to the current crisis. The years of growth were synonymous and concomitant, everywhere and at all levels, with the diffusion and dispersion of economic initiative, of consumption and income, and finally of the lifestyles in an urban and industrial society. A deep-seated logic and voluntarist policies in the matter of national and regional development were objectively allied in these effects of homogenization of space and people. When you have all the jam you want, it's easy to spread it over the whole piece of bread. Going from an economy of satisfying needs to an economy of competition — competition between the developed countries and their capitals, competition between regions, competition between cities, and competition between towns in the urban area — we once again give meaning to the differentiation between places, to the inequality of their images, to their capacity for focusing information, communications and decisions, in short, to the power to create and profit from centrality.

This new historical mutation of economies and societies makes the formulas for conversion or success (what is good for one is not necessarily good for another, at the risk of losing one's own competitiveness) difficult to apply and renders obsolete the prediction of futurologists who previously foretold the generalized dilution of urban centralities into a tele-computerized civilization. What has happened is quite the opposite³. In Paris, as well as in New York, the

acceleration of technological and cultural transformations is reinforcing the importance of the world's metropolitan areas, and inside each of them, a few nodal points, whether they be traditional (such as the Champs - Elysées), recent parallel developments (like La Défense) or creations in the outlying areas (the new towns to the west of Paris, and first of all, Saint - Quentin - en - Yvelines).

The result of all this is that there can no longer be any national or regional development which can be called redistributive. The problem is no longer the opposition between Paris and the provinces - Paris and the French desert - if one considers the national level, nor is it that of creating metropolitan areas which counterbalance Paris. The problem is to learn whether we will have in France, after all, areas which are likely to attract sufficient power for the accumulation of wealth. And it is for this reason that, on all levels, the spatial and functional stakes have radically changed. Henceforth, the question is less one of redistributing the wealth, but of being able to preserve it and to continue to accumulate it.

The Local Level and the Worldwide Level

Thus the transformations of urban centrality lead to a paradoxical conception of the evolution of western cities - at least of very large cities - in terms of an ambiguous materiality. On the one hand, built - up space is increasing in surface and in height ; on the other, the weight of demography and even economic functionality remains stable.

But these revolutions are only possible because those who play the non - institutional roles in the city - inhabitants and businesses - transform their scale of valorizations of the area themselves. Our contemporary societies seem torn between privileged attachments to things both local and distant. Everything is done as though the intermediate levels between one's dwelling and the neighborhood, on the one hand, and the nation and the world on the other, had simply been rubbed out. The towns, especially if they are large or included in an urban development, the whole urban area itself and the region, lose their power to attract in the collective imagination. Thus the discontinuities of space already noticed on the plane of economic polarization are confirmed on the level of public consciousness.

This double adherence to both what is local and what is distant, which is felt and acted upon by social and economic players, explains why urban competition is played and won, both on the concrete ground of prestige urbanistic realizations, which associate cultural and leisure activities and the media with architectural aspects (cf. the "Arche de La Défense"), and on the continuous itinerant representation of the interests and the image of the city. A city's form and the organization of society and economy are more than ever interdependent sides of the same whole.

3. cf. Guy Burgel : "L'informatique, nouvel ordre spatial ou nouvelle information géographique, Saga, n ° 2, 1989. (Computer science, a new spatial order or new geographical information)

2) Spaces and Societies

New social stratifications

These new dimensions in the geography of Paris are more social than truly spatial, insofar as it is much more transformed social stratifications which are developing, owing to a crisis or to mutations, which, for the sake of convenience, are called economic. Growth, here again, had consolidated "new urban social levels", from employees to top executives, in a constant numerical progression, divided by income but united by the same respect for diplomas and merit and the wish to aspire to, if not attain all of the consumer possibilities of an industrial society. On the contrary, recent years have seen a fragmenting of this unity into at least two types of segmentation. On the one hand, those I will call the "mobile elite" (top management executives in both the public and private sectors, providers of information and top intellectuals) are bringing back urban centrality. On the other hand, the "technicians", whether they be in production or in distribution, who are capable of understanding and applying these innovations, to draw profit from them in their professional or personal lives, contrast with those who submit to them, fear them or suffer from them. This break is progressively replacing the traditional opposition between the secondary sector and the tertiary sector, and between workers and employees. At least as an exploratory field, the Ile-de-France provides a good ground for an advance study of these evolutions.

New mobilities

There is something else that is new. We have to live in contradictory urban spaces, in which the static and statistical immobility of the city, which no longer has anything to do with the rhythms of wild growth of the years from 1955 to 1970, coincides with internal and interurban mobility which tends to stay the same, or even increase, whatever may be the principal place of residence of urban families. It is therefore a delusion, even more so in 1990 than in 1965, to think that one can convincingly bring closer together, in a lasting as well as a functional way, places of employment and places of residence.

Activities and employment

Finally, if the French capital has been able to get back a certain economic vigour and reaffirm its competitiveness, unemployment has progressed, here as everywhere else in the 80's, even though its rise was almost stabilized in 1987. This deterioration is not only due to the structural consequences of the increase in the potential active population by the entry of more young people into the labour market. What connections of causality are there in modern societies between competitiveness, economic efficiency and underemployment? Or if we were to ask the question more bluntly, is what is good for activity necessarily good for employment? The answer we give to that question might explain the present difficulty in combining the resumption of growth with the maintenance of stringency and even of unemployment for the most impoverished, or of allowing in the same places the coexistence of the most prestigious capitals, the most advanced technology, the most securely established

wealth and the most abject despair. Here again, the evolution of employment in Paris would be a good introduction to serious thought on the whole question of the indispensable effort to be made for solidarity and the necessary imagination in the areas of professional and cultural training for citizens. Isn't this the only way to remain competitive and profit equitably from growth?

III — THE OPTIONS FOR ACTION

Once the facts have been established and questions outlined, the debate, we must remember, remains a political one, before being a choice of spatial options or opposing master plans. It is political on two accounts. First of all, because it is a social problem. What can we do once wealth has been accumulated, to permit us to share it as equitably as possible among all the social strata of the population. The question is also political because these decisions imply an interaction between institutional actors — from the towns to the state — with its own rules of functioning. But it would be useful to recall the terms of the debate and the possible means of action open.

1) Economic accumulation and imbalance

The first point bears on the method and the nature of capitalist accumulation. There is no point in closing our eyes to the problem. The end of this century gives constant confirmation of the fact that you have to accumulate wealth before you can redistribute it, and for accumulating, there is as yet nothing better than our liberal system. But we have known for a long time now, since de XIXth century in fact, that this accumulation cannot be accomplished without paying the price in two basic areas, those of spatial imbalance and social inequality.

In applying this analysis to the Paris area, we all agree on two objectives: on the one hand, social levels, income, equipment and transport must be better balanced and better distributed; on the other, we must be economically efficient. And without trying to fix positions rigidly on irreducible bases, two courses appear open:

- * that of those who state strongly, with tenacity and precision, that we must first bring the region into balance, this is a condition necessary for social justice.

- * that of those who maintain that we must first be economically efficient if we are to have anything to distribute, that we must accumulate so that we can endeavour to be just to the highest degree possible.

2) The two disaster scenarios

Beyond the choice of methods for achieving the best economic and social results possible for Paris, we can always elaborate the two disaster scenarios that must be avoided at all cost. Neither is spatial, for when it comes down to it, geographers do not really trust the explanation based on space, whether it be positive or negative.

The first scenario would be the penalization scenario. It would be a mistake to penalize Paris in favour of the provinces, on the pretext that there are more people in the provinces than in Paris, for this would be penalizing Paris to the detriment of France.

The second disaster scenario would be to give free rein to the natural consequences of a liberal system of growth, or to let double-level urban societies and double-level spaces be set up, with their disparities in wealth, in consumer goods and services, and mentalities.

Between these two disaster scenarios, there is a narrow but essential path. It is of no use to lay it out with an old-fashioned voluntarism, of which all the experiments—in the East as in the West—during periods of growth, crisis or recovery—have been seen to fail when they struck fundamental tendencies head on. It would be much better, in the name of a political objective—social equity, or, why not, democratic control of power—to act with determination, imagination and realism.

3) Interdependence and a mixed economy

From this point on the reflection suggested could be brought to bear on the double notion of interdependence and a mixed economy. The key ideas in this process should be 1—not to penalize accumulation and 2—to redistribute, thus becoming more interdependent. This may seem like wishful thinking, but if there is very little likelihood of Paris becoming another Beirut, or even another New York, it is just possible that social and ethnic tensions and the difficulty in having a decent life might intensify and become intolerable, first of all, for the most impoverished, but also for the greatest number. Here again, the cure might prove to be worse than the disease, if serious thinking about the relationship between spaces and societies were insufficient or based on a rigid interventionism. One does not act on space by space, but on the mechanisms which govern it, develop it or correct it.

We can take up again a quick analysis of the main questions which apply to the Ile-de-France. The presence of poles of economic wealth and pockets of poverty in investments and initiative does not depend only, nor doubtless even mainly, on the setting up of zones of activity or even differential fiscal taxation of which the univocal effects have always been uncertain. It is often easy to dissuade, or even prohibit a decision to proceed with the creation of something, but it is more difficult to impose a positive localization for it.

In the same way, if all the experiments carried out over the last decade (cf. the Harlequin project in Grenoble) show that social integration cannot be legislated any more than ethnic mixing can, we have known for a long time the virtues of public education, improving the appearance of towns, and access to the full rights of citizenship, which generate social fluidity and residential mobility, and we must find our way back to all of these things.

They touch, by a spirit of imagination and experimentation, on all the consequences of a mixed society and economy in which France is engaged on a long-term basis. To illustrate this point by example of the university, the localization of a future Paris XIV or XV is of less importance—on condition that there be a close collaboration with the area as a whole—than knowing whether these new institutions will be given innovating structures, which would allow the combination of the public university's traditions of humanism and basic ideas

with the flexibility of management and adaptation of private universities.

We must have the courage in these uncertain times, to make audacious wages. Voluntarism and authoritarian spatial planification, under cover of rigour, take us back half a century. If we hope to win the fight against political, social and economic egoism, the time has come for creative imagination.