

Planning for the Future of Paris: Comparing 19th Century Haussmanization to 21st Century Le Grand Paris

Emily Gerger

Senior, BACRP

After participating in CRP's 2011 Urban Design Summer Program in Lisbon, Emily Gerger spent a semester studying in Paris through the CEA International Education Program. This article, an adaptation of her paper for an Architectural History class, is a comparative discussion between the 19th century works for Paris by the powerful Mayor Haussman and President's Sarkozy's Le Grand Paris plan.

The Paris of today has a unique history that has influenced its plans for tomorrow. In 2007, former President Sarkozy announced his project Le Grand Paris, a plan for the future of Paris and its surrounding suburbs. During Sarkozy's speech discussing Le Grand Paris, he reiterated the initial aim of this project and said, "We wanted to rebuild the city on the city, remove the split between Paris and its suburbs, reduce fractures that separate neighborhoods that separate people; we wanted to rebuild unity, continuity, and solidarity." Le Grand Paris is one of the most ambitious urban renewal projects only second to Haussmannization in the 19th century. This article discusses the processes and objectives of both Haussmannization and its modern equivalent, Le Grand Paris.

Paris has been one of the most powerful and influential cities in the world throughout history. Prominent political figures have made its modernization a top priority in order to remain an example. Modernization is not always taken well by the general public, and French presidents aim to leave their mark on Paris, sometimes in a controversial way. Georges Pompidou destroyed the emblematic Les Halles Market and created one of the most contentious buildings in Paris, the National Center of Art and Culture Centre Georges Pompidou, a uniquely modern building that stands out in the otherwise standardized Parisian landscape.

More recently, former President Mitterrand undertook a series of monument projects entitled the Grands Projects, that transformed urbanism in the late 20th century, emphasizing the sense of Paris as a Haussmannian city (Jones, 2004). During the Second Empire, Napoleon III's main concern was modernizing Paris, more so than any other previous regime. In 1853, Napoleon III appointed Baron Eugene Haussmann as Prefect of the Seine. Although Haussmann's plans were not completed until

after the fall of the Second Empire, the citywide revitalization laid the foundation for other projects in Paris to be completed.

The transformation of Paris during the Second Empire is arguably the biggest urban renewal project the world has ever seen. Paris was an overcrowded and unhealthy city during the years leading up to the Second Empire. Haussmann's project was accomplished because of the political power given to him, but it was also widely supported because the Parisian population desperately needed the city to change. Maxime du Camp, a

French writer who lived in Paris, described the city's living conditions in 1848, [Paris] was on the point of becoming uninhabitable. Its population [was] suffocating in the tiny, narrow, putrid, and tangled streets in which it had been dumped. As a result of this state of affairs, everything suffered: hygiene, security, speed of communications and public morality (Jones, 2004).

Napoleon's seizure of Paris and then his declaration of the Empire in November 1851, created a drastic change of power.

Napoleon gave Haussmann the difficult task of modernizing Paris, and with his political strength he was able to make the municipal council, which he appointed himself, uphold Napoleon's requests. In order to create his vision, Haussmann used his power to convince the state treasury to pay ten percent of the costs of the public works projects and then persuaded the municipal authorities for loans to cover the rest (Jones, 2004). All in all, Napoleon's selection of Haussmann, who utilized effective political practices, was key to the projects success.

Paris was anything but a blank slate when Haussmann started developing plans for the important capital city. The program of Haussmannization had three main objectives: regulate and speed up circulation in its arteries, open and enhance the city



Emily Gerger at the Pena Palace Sintra, Portugal.



Figure 2: Corners and grand design resulting from Haussmann's plan.
(Photo by Istvan. http://www.flickr.com/photos/i_csuhai/2769218696)

with light, air, and greenery, and ensure the health of the public by hygienically and effectively disposing waste.

Circulation was a huge change for the new Paris. Instead of small curvy streets of *le vieux Paris* (the old Paris), Haussmann took out entire rows of buildings in order to widen boulevards and create straight, well-lit connections that had distinct destinations, usually a capstone monument. A fundamental aspect in the Haussmannian strategy was defining north-south and east-west connections on both sides of the river. On one bank, the Rue de Rivoli (east-west) and the Boulevard Sebastopol (north-south) were strategically extended. In creating Boulevard Saint-Michel going north to south and Boulevard Saint-Germain, which acted as the Left Bank's Rue de Rivoli, Haussmann successfully created major crossings, or *grande croisees*, for both banks of the river. Along with easing traffic flow Haussmann maximized visual aesthetics by creating viewpoints of major monuments. The best example of this is the star shaped intersection of Place de l'Etoile (now Place Charles-de-Gaulle) in which seven roads share different perspectives of the Arc de Triomphe (Jones, 2004).

The addition of middle class apartment style housing was fundamental to Haussmann's plan for maximizing urban perspectives in Paris. While the network of streets was being redesigned, a new set of regulations for the apartments that lined these streets were also established. The standardized Haussmannic apartment house was designed to be simple, elegant, and seen as modern during the 19th century. The facades lacked heavy decoration in order to minimize building cost and appeal to many kinds of people. The developers saw it as protection against changes in design trends that devalue property. The homogeneous façade made of limestone and iron highlighted horizontal lines even though Haussmann made the buildings taller. He increased the permitted height of facades by two and a half meters. Now identical apartment houses lined a planned network of streets that led toward a major monument. These essential aspects of Haussmann's plan worked together to create aesthetic viewpoints within the city (Sutcliffe, 1996).

The inclusion of green space was intended to help the city breathe. Bois de Boulogne, northwest of the center of Paris, a previously private but now state owned forest space, was extended and redesigned from 1852-1858. Haussmann also extended Bois de Vincennes, another state owned existing forest to the east of the city, and added lakes, buildings, and a race course (Jones, 2004). Over 100,000 trees were added to create tree-lined roads and boulevards. A series of smaller parks increased the greenery within the city including Parc Montsouris in the south, Buttes Chaumont in the north, and twenty-four garden squares between the boulevards and blocks of houses. The addition of green spaces was a part of Haussmann's major concern to improve public health.

During the Second Empire, Haussmann transformed the previously uninhabitable into the City of Modernity. Although the majority of Haussmann's program was successful with few political problems, he did not consider historical values or poor citizens when destroying buildings. Due to Haussmann's destruction of buildings, almost 350,000 people were displaced from the city center, which created slums around the city limits (Jones, 2004). The culture within the city had completely changed and the city was mostly made up of the middle class and the bourgeoisie. As a result of Haussmannization, new forms of socializing became popular including sitting in cafes and attending the Opera. Parisians had been in need of someone to revamp their rundown city. Haussmann was able to complete his project due to his amount of power and was able to manipulate the 19th century political system to get what he needed.

Haussmannization transformed Paris into what we know it as today. The streets created during his time are still excellent examples of good public space that are landscaped, have well defined functions, and are adaptable. There is no doubt, the future of France's capital city was on the minds of Haussmann and Napoleon the III during the 19th century. In the 21st century, former President Sarkozy made it his project to find better ways to plan for the Paris of tomorrow, however, with a broader appeal to constituents and social issues.

Planning for the future is not new to any city, especially Paris. Paris approved, and has consistently updated, a regional plan written in 1939, outlining a set of codes and goals for the Ile-de-France region. There are also several organizations dedicated to urban planning within the Paris region including the Ile-de-France regional council. In 2008, the Ile-de-France regional council finalized their approval for a new regional plan that finalized steps towards ratification. Even though organizations existed on a local and regional level, Sarkozy still decided to make planning for the greater Paris an issue for the federal government.

Very little has been accomplished since Sarkozy announced Le Grand Paris on September 7, 2007. In his first speech regarding Le Grand Paris, he said that the goal of the project was to "create real towns in our suburbs, with public spaces, services and simply places for sociability." During Sarkozy's speech, delivered only four months into his presidency, he also called for

eight to ten architecture firms to work on prospective urban and landscape plans scoped for the next thirty or forty years. In 2009, Sarkozy created a ministerial position specifically for Le Grand Paris even though a similar position already exists. The regional prefects, similar to what Haussmann was, are responsible for looking after the national government's interests at the regional level. These positions still exist today and Sarkozy's new appointee, Christian Blanc, had responsibilities that appeared somewhat duplicative of the regional prefects'.

Four months later, the selection of ten teams made up of architects, planners, sociologists, and engineers were officially chosen and commissioned to begin their work. As stated earlier, the Ile-de-France regional council had approved their own regional plan and only needed State Council approval in order for it to go into effect. The regional council never completed this step. This prevented the regional plan from superseding the potential plans for Le Grand Paris.

The teams were planning on presenting to Sarkozy and the world what they had been working on for the previous ten months in a public exposition. Meanwhile, separate from what the teams were working on, the minister for Le Grand Paris, Christian Blanc, was working on a transportation plan of his own in addition to a law to permit his transportation plan to be a project of national priority. In March 2009, the planning teams presented their work, and it was a major showcase event for the future of Paris. All ten teams showed transportation plans; including images of what Le Grand Paris could look like with efficiently flowing traffic and public transportation opportunities. They all had the same theme that included densifying, reusing, and repurposing.

Six months after the exposition, Blanc continued working on a draft law for Le Grand Paris which included a new transportation network and would create the Societe du Grand Paris that would lead the project. Blanc had used the plan that he was working on prior to the public exposition. He took nothing from the work of the planning teams. This upset many involved in the teams, especially famous architect Jean Nouvel,

who wrote an opinion piece for the newspaper *Le Monde* on October 2009. He stated, "You do not publish two hundred and fifty pages of writing technocratic thinking and believe that no one will respond!". Nouvel intentionally called Blanc out on his lack of organization and stated, "the Societe du Grand Paris... offers a perfect model to produce chaos." Sarkozy responded to Nouvel's outrage by announcing the creation of the Atelier International du Grand Paris (AIGP), an ongoing branch for the development of Le Grand Paris with a budget that included the leaders of the ten planning teams.

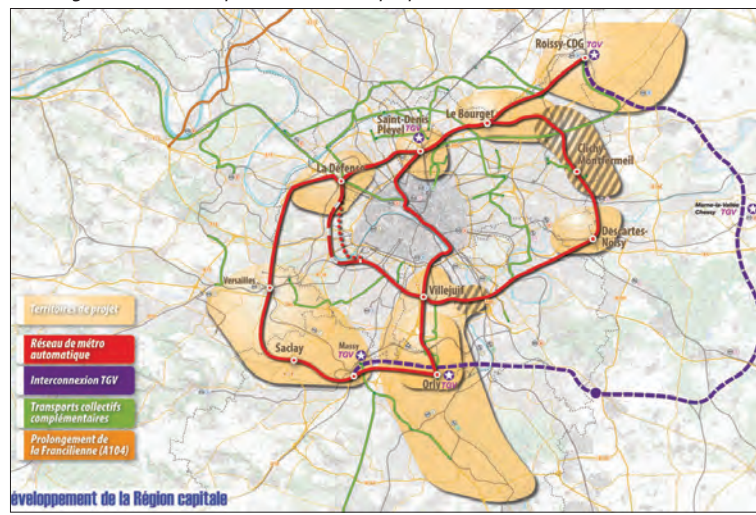
In 2010, almost three years after the beginning of Le Grand Paris, Le Grand Paris Law was voted on by the Senate and Assembly and was approved. This law enabled the production of an updated transportation network to become a national project. One month after the law was approved, Christian Blanc was forced to resign as the Minister of Le Grand Paris after being accused of spending federal money on personal expenses. This marked the end of the Ministry for Le Grand Paris and his responsibilities were transferred to another ministry. With Le Grand Paris law set in place, the State Council discussed the Ile-de-France regional council's regional plan for Paris in October of 2010, two years after it was given to them. It was rejected due to the fact that it was not in line with Le Grand Paris law, which was passed just months before. The federal government clearly controlled the procedural process and halted action on the regional plan in order to pass Grand Paris Law, a federal project. As a result, seven years of work and effort of the regional council was wasted along with the money involved.

As complicated as the process of Le Grand Paris was, 2011 was a proactive year. The national and regional governments announced a new transportation network called Le Grand Paris Express. Originally, Blanc's transportation plan connected areas of the Greater Paris that were not actually developed. They wanted to focus development around these new stations and create a technology and business hub similar to California's Silicon Valley. The regional council did not like the idea of setting up links to places where nothing currently was located; their plan was to make connections from different parts of the city

Figure 3: One of the ten proposals in the exhibition for Le Grand Paris. (photo AFP. http://www.rfi.fr/actuen/articles/115/article_4367.asp)



Figure 4: Main transportation scheme proposed for Le Grand Paris.



to different parts of the suburbs. They compromised and are now planning on working together on Le Grand Paris Express.

In 2011, Sarkozy gave a speech summarizing the status of Le Grand Paris four years after it was first announced. In this speech he explained that there was funding for the new transportation master plan including funds for a high-speed urban transit network. Sarkozy continued to work on a plan for ten “developmental poles” including Saclay, which he planned on making a global center for technology and science. He explained that with Le Grand Paris Law, a target of 70,000 homes per year was set to support the existing needs and the development for Ile-de-France. Acknowledging Paris as a tourist and cultural capital of the world, he explained a number of projects had been launched to maintain Paris as an influential global city.

The French saw many of these plans as empty promises, and in addition to a variety of factors, President Sarkozy was not re-elected in 2012. Current President François Hollande explained that the country will continue with Le Grand Paris project, however, he aims to support the plan with more secure financing. In response to the Association of Majors he explained, “The necessary finances to complete the project remain to be found because the government that proposed the creation of a new Grand Paris transport network did not match the vision with the means necessary to achieve the final objective.”

Sarkozy’s attempt to revitalize the suburbs of Paris lacked communication between local governments and the national government. Time and money were jeopardized because of this lack of communication. Multiple people were working on the same project with no communication or concern for the other’s ideas. The main accomplishment over the four years of this project was the ratification of Le Grand Paris Law, which included the regional transportation plan and its subsequent funding. Although former President Sarkozy could have completed one of the world’s largest urban renewal projects, the political process of today limited his ability to do so. The next stage of Le Grand Paris will be determined by the actions of newly elected President François Hollande.

The projects initiated by Sarkozy in the 21st century and those under the Second Empire in the 19th century ultimately established the same goals. Haussmann and those working on Le Grand Paris both strived to create a Modern City. Both of their main objectives were to improve circulation and transportation, increase housing, and create livable spaces for Parisians. Boulevards were widened and main-crossings were created under the Second Empire, and today the plan of Le Grand Paris Express is to create better connectivity to all areas and suburbs of Paris. Haussmannic style apartment houses increased the density in the city in the mid 1800s, and Sarkozy aimed to build 70,000 new homes a year. Haussmann created livable spaces by increasing the green spaces within the city, and Sarkozy’s goal was to create spaces for sociability within the suburbs. Haussmann and Napoleon manipulated the political process

during their time in power in order to modernize Paris. Sarkozy’s ambitions mirror those of Napoleon III’s, however, more than one hundred and fifty years later the methods of modernization have drastically changed. With a modern democratic system, Sarkozy had restrictions on his power. Napoleon had none. Haussmann had nearly unlimited resources and accomplished his project without worrying about funding. Unfortunately for Le Grand Paris, Sarkozy had limited resources and funding. He had to answer to the public’s concerns with hopes of reelection. Haussmann displaced hundreds of thousands of people without apprehension. Since the initiation of Le Grand Paris, Sarkozy’s plan for the future of Paris has fallen short of expectations. However, the vision behind the plan, and the attempt to further modernize the city, remains a key part of the development of Paris.

Bibliography

- Jones, Colin. 2004. *Paris - The Biography of a City*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Kirkland, Stephane. 2011. “Le Grand Paris.” Stephane Kirkland. <<http://stephanekirkland.com/>>; retrieved 11/20/2011.
- Lichfield, John. 2009. “Sarko’s €35billion rail plan for a Greater Paris.” *The Independent* 29. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/sarkos-euro35bn-rail-plan-for-a-greater-paris-1676196.html>>; retrieved 11/20/2011.
- Nouvel, Jean. 2010. “Mais enfin Monsieur Blanc!” In *Le Monde* (5/15/2010). <http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2010/05/19/mais-enfin-monsieur-blanc-par-jean-nouvel_1353626_3232.html>; retrieved 11/4/2011.
- Sarkozy, Nicholas. 2007. “Inauguration de la Cité de l’Architecture et du Patrimoine.” <http://www.elysee.fr/president/les-actualites/discours/2007/inauguration-de-la-cite-de-l-architecture-et-du.8289.html?search=DISCOURS&xtmc=discours_2007_cite_architecture&xcr=2>; retrieved 11/20/2011.
- Elysee - Presidence de la Republique. 2011. “Le Grand Paris, 4 ans après.” <<http://www.elysee.fr/president/les-actualites/-discours/2011/-le-grand-paris-4-ans-apres.12201.html>>; retrieved 11/20/2011.
- Sutcliffe, Anthony. 1996. *Paris-An Architectural History*. New Haven: Yale University Press.