Planning for Nation-States? The French case

by Anna Geppert
Abstract:

The French planning system was designed by and for a unitary, centralized nation-state. However, the French State no longer plays a leading rôle in spatial planning, a competence that has been transferred to regional and local levels by two devolution reforms (1982 and 2003). Althougthere is a coordination between governments of different levels, it results in joint investments rather than in shared spatial visions and/or common objectives. Moreover, the French government seems to have less and less implication in spatial planning, going back to sectoral policies.

The present paper is based on a review of planning policies and discourses from the last three decades. The first chapter investigates the evolution of the planning system and planning concepts against the evolutions of the French nation-state. The second chapter presents its contemporary organization from the local perspective, with an emphasis on the rôle of different stakeholders and their coordination processes. The third chapter addresses the national and regional levels, coined by the withdrawal of the State and the revival of sectoral policies. Concluding remarks address contemporary challenges, marked by the pressure of the economical crisis.

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1. The comparison of planning systems in Europe, and in particular the development of strategic spatial planning.
2. European spatial planning, in particular the urban dimension of the EU cohesion policy.
3. The development of Planning Education at the European level.

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Introduction:

NB. This draft version of the future paper is presenting the “broad picture”. Intentionally, it remains rather descriptive/narrative. It leaves to the final paper the integration of the comparative and/or theoretical debates which will arise at the Dublin the seminar.

The French planning system was designed by and for a unitary, centralized nation-state. However, the French State no longer plays a leading rôle in spatial planning, a competence that has been transferred to regional and local levels by two devolution reforms (1982 and 2003). Altough there is a coordination between governments of different levels, it results in joint investments rather than in shared spatial visions and/or common objectives. Moreover, the French government seems to have less and less implication in spatial planning, going back to sectoral policies.

The present paper is based on a review of planning policies and discourses from the last three decades. The first chapter investigates the evolution of the planning system and planning concepts against the evolutions of the French nation-state. The second chapter presents its contemporary organization from the local perspective, with an emphasis on the rôle of different stakeholders and their coordination processes. The third chapter addresses the national and regional levels, coined by the withdrawal of the State and the revival of sectoral policies. Concluding remarks address contemporary challenges, marked by the pressure of the economical crisis.
The 'French model' facing the changes of the nation-state

The French planning system emerged in the 1960ies, in a period where the political structure was strongly linked to the concept of nation-state that emerged during the French Revolution. Against the power of monarchy, the legislator stated that « The principle of any Sovereignty lies primarily in the Nation. » (Declaration of Human and Civic Rights, 26 August 1789, Art. 3). The Nation is understood as a community of citizens. It is not based on given characters, ethnic or cultural – for instance, in 1789, only 20% of French citizens speak French. Instead, the nation derives from a common history and a collective choice: « Two things, which are really one, constitute this soul and spiritual principle. One is in the past, the other, the present. One is the possession in common of a rich trove of memories; the other is actual consent, the desire to live together, the will to continue to value the undivided, shared heritage... » (Renan, 1882).

Through French history, this argument has been used to pursue nationalistic endeavours. However, this is not the topic of this paper. The point is the relation to territory, understood as a common construct. « Man is not a slave, neither of his race, nor his language, nor his religion, nor of the course of rivers, nor of the direction of mountains. A large aggregation of men (...) creates a moral consciousness called nation. » (Renan, 1882). With this respect, in the French consciousness, the unity of territory appears an integral part of the nation-state. Achieving unity appears more important a goal than taking into account diversity.

During the first years of the French Revolution, a struggle took place between the jacobins, in favour of a strong central power considered the best vector for an equal treatment of all citizens, and the girondins, attached to local freedom and what one might today call territorial diversity, or multiculturalism. The jacobins won and indeed the state organization became unitary and strongly centralized. The départements (counties) established in 1789 are designed with new perimeters, allowing each citizen to reach the chief city (la préfecture) in less than a half-day's horse ride, to make sure that all citizens have equal access to the State administration. The representative of the state, the préfet, holds upon locally elected representatives an authority (la tutelle) legally similar to the one of a father upon a child which has not reached majority. He implements policies defined at the national level.

The planning system that emerged in the 1960ies is firmly grounded in this administrative system. Thirty years after the first devolution reform, actors keep looking for the best balance between local and national power, going back and forth between claims for a stronger autonomy of local governments and regrets of the so-called resignation of the State.

1. A planning system embedded in the French nation-state's administrative structure and conceptual framework

Early French spatial planning is typically jacobin, by it's goals, by it's decision-making and in it's implementation.

French spatial planning (aménagement du territoire) appears to answer the claim expressed by Jean-François Gravier in his famous essay, “Paris and the French desert” (Gravier, Paris et le désert français, 1947). The author points out the dominance of Paris in the national space, considered to hamper the development of other parts of the territory. The discourse is ruralist and related to a
certain “hatred of the city” (Marchand, 2001). Yet, it is also based on the assumption that equality between citizens should also have its territorial translation. Gravier recommends a re-organisation of the spatial structure of the country driven by a re-distribution of economical activities. Consequently, from the 1950ies to the 1980ies, the State implements the policy of “industrial de-centralization”: a firm willing to invest in the Paris region is submitted to a scarcely delivered preliminary authorisation (agrément), while enterprises which relocate to provincial cities benefit of the Prime à l'Aménagement du Territoire (PAT), a state financial grant.  

The discourse about the imbalance of the national space remains present through the next decades, as a key figure of spatial planning. In particular, the well-known Scénario de l'inacceptable builds further on the idea of the the negative impacts of the concentration of wealth and growth in the capital region, showing that the development left to it's natural course will lead to an over-concentration in the capital region, and justifying an intervention of the State in overlooked places in order to re-establish a balance (DATAR, Jérôme Monnod, 1971).

The second key figure is the control of urbanization. The context is a time of industrialization and urbanisation, the so-called “thirty glorious” years (Fourastié, 1979). Uncontrolled urban growth appears a threat. The rumour has it that in 1961, the General de Gaulle, flying above Paris, was upset about the anarchical development of the suburbs and told Paul Delouvrier, at the time Délegué Général au district de Paris (a quasi ministerial position), to “put some order in the mess”. Be it as it may, the Schéma Directeur d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme de la Région de Paris (or Plan Delouvrier, 1965) launched the construction of the French new towns. This refers to another rôle of the nation-state, very present in the 1960ies and 1970ies : leading the nation into modernity.

The State, indeed, is the main if not the only player on the arena. In 1964 is established the Délégation à l'Aménagement du Territoire et à l'Action Régionale (DATAR), under the direct authority of the Prime Minister. With little staff, the DATAR is a think-tank giving birth to spatial policies. It works in close relation with academics from social sciences, geographers, economists... Conceptually, they are influenced by Christaller's theory of central places (Christaller, 1933) and by the theory of polarisation of Jean-François Perroux (Boudeville, 1968). Studies prepared for the DATAR collect empirical evidence about the French urban grid (Hautreux et Rochefort, 1963 and 1964) and provide forecasts of the evolution of cities and regions.

From the 1960ies, a series of national policies are launched to counteract the spatial imbalances at different scales. At the national level, the policy of Métropoles d'équilibre promotes the second tier of French cities as a counterbalance to Paris. In the capital-region, five new towns (villes nouvelles) are created ex-nihilo to become the secondary poles structuring the greater Paris. At a broader scale, main cities of the Paris Basin (zones d'appui) are supported in order to play a similar role. Many similarities appear between these policies : the conceptual framework ; the objectives (influencing spatial structures through the urban grid and promoting city-systems rather than isolated cities) ; and the policies (developing public equipments such as transportation infrastructures, public services such as higher education or health ; encouraging economical specialization of spaces in certain sectors such as aircraft industries in Toulouse, etc.).

At the local scale, the Loi d'orientation foncière of 1967 creates a 2-level system of regulatory land-

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1 Later, Jacques Delors used the PAT as a model for the European structural funds regulations.
2 Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing; Nancy-Metz; Strasbourg; Lyon-Saint-Etienne; Marseille-Aix; Toulouse; Bordeaux; Nantes-Saint-Nazaire
3 Cergy-Pontoise, Marne-la-Vallée, Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, Evry, Melun-Sénart
4 Zone d'appui Nord Champenoise (Reims, Epernay, Châlons), Zone d'Appui de la Basse Vallée de la Seine, Zone d'appui de la vallée de l'Oise, Zone d'appui ligériane

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use planning. For urban areas composed of several municipalities (communes), the Schéma Directeur d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme (SDAU) sets the overall guidelines for the future development. At the level of each municipality, the Plan d'Occupation des Sols (POS) or Carte communale (CC) for small villages, include all the regulations required to deliver building permits. The municipal document has to be compatible with the guidelines of the SDAU. When elaborating planning documents of both levels local governments have a say, but the final decision belongs to the préfet.

Decisions are taken at the national level and implemented through a top-down approach. At the national level are defined the legislative framework, key objectives and policies. At the local level, the state administration (Direction Départementale de l'Equipement) has a leading rôle in the preparation of statutory plans. Several processes are implemented directly by state structures. The elaboration of plans for the métropoles d'équilibre is also in charge of organisations under stately leadership, the Organisme d'études d'aménagement d'aire matropolitaine (OREAM), likewise the zones d'appui of the Paris basin (Cohen, 2002). Large-scale projects such as the transformation of the region Languedoc-Roussillon are given to Organismes Interministériels d'Aménagement. New towns are made by Etablissements Publics d'Aménagement (EPA), granted with large budgets and large prerogatives, such as expropriation. In all these organisations, the rôle of state civil servants, in particular engineers from Ecole polytechnique and Ecole des Ponts-et-chaussées, is major.

In terms of coordination, the hierarchical organisation of state administration proves efficient in many ways. An illustration is given by the new towns : for secondary reasons, the 1965 plan for the Paris region never entered force of law. Nevertheless, realisations were done according to it's requirements. Of course, all local plans are binding.

In this context, there is no need for a binding national scheme that would give the overall picture and guidelines : the message is often delivered by informal scenarios, such as the Scénario de l'inacceptable. At the ministerial level, sectoral plans summing up future investments are published. The key issue is the coordination between sectoral policies, implemented by ministries sometimes more powerful than the DATAR itself, such as the Ministry of Equipment.

The economical crisis of the mid-seventies generates a strong criticism towards planning. As the foreseen development did not happen, plans and schemes appear disappointing. Planners are criticised as technocrats unable to foresee the future nor to make it happen. The top-down approach and the dominant role of the State are considered disconnected from local reality and the girondins from both sides of the political arena call for a devolution - which fits the interests of the State as well, as public money is scarce. In 1981, the devolution is part of the program of the socialist candidate François Mitterrand, presented as an important change in the French administrative culture.

2. The devolution to regions and cities, a reversal of perspective

In 1982, the devolution reform transfers planning competences to local governments, municipalities (communes), counties (départements) and regions. During the following years planners experience a multi-actor system to which they were little prepared (Geppert, 1997). Issues of vertical and horizontal cooperation, integration of sectoral policies and relations with private stakeholders are on top of the agenda. The question of an overall guideline, or perspective, that would come from the state is a matter of debate. However, the period remains coined by a fragmentation of initiatives.
At the local level, the 36 000 communes are granted a competence in regulatory planning and urban development. Their perimeters, inherited from medieval parishes, remain narrow. They elaborate planning documents. The Schéma directeur (SD), which replaced the SDAU, is elaborated by voluntary groupings of communes (Syndicat Intercommunal d'Etudes et de Programmation, SIEP); the groupings do not reflect city-regions, or functional urban areas, but territorial alliances. Therefore the situation is quite heterogeneous – one third of the SD are close to functional urban areas, while another third hardly reach further than the physical agglomeration. Each commune elaborates its POS. Taking over the planning competence goes well in large municipalities which already had planning agencies (Agence d'Urbanisme), with competent staff. Small, rural communes that do not have the necessary expertise often delegate the task either to the nearest Agence d'urbanisme or to state officials from their département. But in both cases, the préfet has his say but final decisions belong to local representatives – vice-versa to the former situation.

In the 1980ies and 1990ies, local planning documents are produced in a context of territorial competition. No longer aiming to organise urbanisation, which has slowed down and expanded to rural areas, many focus on offering location opportunities close to main cities and infrastructure nodes. The example of Reims illustrates this shift. The city gathers 200 000 inhabitants in a scarcely populated rural environment with a few small towns (some 5 000 people) in a distance of 15-20 km to the core. The first SDAU (1975) expected the population to double in twenty years. This growth of people and activities was to be directed towards the small towns, future secondary poles of the urban area. However, fifteen years later, nothing had happened. The 1992 Schéma directeur (Fig.1) concentrates development areas on the fringe of the main city. Some development possibilities are left for the former secondary centres – a bargain with the mayors, now in charge of the decision, who don't accept to give up building rights from the 1975 plan.

![Fig. 1 : Schéma directeur de la Région urbaine de Reims, 1992.](image)
**Source : Agence d'urbanisme et de développement de la région de Reims (AUDRR)**

In the same period, sectoral documents have appeared at the local level. The Plan Local de l'Habitat (PLH), more programmatic, expresses the objectives of the municipality in the field of housing. The Plan de Déplacements Urbains (PDU) expresses it's policy in terms of mobility and it elaborated at a different scale, the scale of the 'Autorité organisatrice du transport urbain' (AOT), the grouping of

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The Agences d'Urbanisme appear in the mid-sixties, acting as advisers for local governments. Most of them implement an interdisciplinary, problem-oriented approach to planning, supported by their common association, the Fédération Nationale des Agences d'Urbanisme (FNAU).

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municipalities in charge of public transportation of the city. Not to mention the local Agendas 21, Environmental charters, projects for urban renewal, etc. Having no regulatory dimension, they have no legal relation with statutory planning documents. However, they do express policies and strategies that are closely related to planning. Being elaborated with different stakeholders and different agendas, they arise the question of coordination and cohesion.

At the regional level, a new tier of local government is established, twenty-six regions. They are expected to bear a leading rôle in regional planning, in particular in matters of transportation and economical investments, while the départements keep a rôle in management of many infrastructures. Their perimeters are broader than the départements, which no longer fit geographical realities. However, the new regions suffer of little geographical consistence and have small budgets. Regional representatives often act as lobbyists for their départements. Staff has more experience in public administration than in dealing with spatial questions. Granted a competence in economic development and regional planning, regions must prepare a regional spatial development perspective, the Schéma régional d'aménagement du territoire (SRAT). Not surprisingly, while the regions appear overall good managers of their small budgets, the first SRAT lack spatial thinking as well as spatial representations – most of them have no maps and the texts sum up lists of foreseen investments.

![Fig. 2. DATAR's vision of a possible national development perspective](image)

Source (DATAR, 1993).
In 1993-94, the French Government performs a national debate on spatial planning, supported by a wide communication (Geppert, 1995b). Aménagement du territoire is presented as a "society-project" grounded in "the very values of the Republic", an implicit reference to the jacobin discourse. An introductory book written by the DATAR (DATAR, 1993) presents a vision of a possible future (Fig 2), reviving the tradition of scenarios of the DATAR in its glorious years. Embedded in the conceptual framework of polarisation, it shows a hierarchy of urban systems of different levels (metropolitan, intermediate and rural) organising city-regions. However, the State's position is limited to an invitation to cities and regions to play this rôle, decisions and actions being left to them. For instance, the key of the map states that links depict inter-city relations, not infrastructures. On the one hand, it may be understood as a cautious position, avoiding the risk of local players coming up with claims for new investments in infrastructures. On the other hand, this is consistent with the State's position - the sketch takes into account the réseaux de villes, inter-city collaborative networks mildly encouraged by the State in the 1990ies (Geppert, 1995a).

The outcome is a reform of the French spatial planning system, through the Loi d'Orientation pour l'Aménagement et le Développement du Territoire, (LOADT, aka Loi Pasqua, 05.02.1995). It provides an attempt to improve policy integration/coordination through a national strategic development perspective, the Schéma National d'Aménagement et de Développement du Territoire (SNADT). This document of national level was intended to bring coherence between planning documents and policies of different levels, as well as to improve the coordination of state policies. According to the law, the document was to be elaborated by the DATAR and voted by the Parliament within 18 months. A first draft was proposed in 1996, quite modest in terms of visioning: in order to be consensual, it included a text with principles only, but no map. Even in this form, facing many critics, the SNADT was never voted, nor even put on the parliamentary agenda. In 1999, coming back to the old system, the would-be SNADT is replaced by a series of sectoral guidelines for national policies, the Schémas de Services Collectifs (Geppert, 2001).

Another key element of the reform is the institution of a new form of collaboration, enlarged to civic stakeholders, the pays. This designates “geographically coherent” spaces of two kinds: urban agglomérations and broader, urban-rural, pays. They are not legal entities nor do they have a budget. Voluntary municipalities may go beyond administrative limits to elaborate common spatial visions and strategies. When this occurs, public participation is sought through a Conseil de Développement where the civil society is represented. The vision is expressed in a charter, which is not a statutory plan but has to be coherent with the SCOT if there is one – and vice versa, if a SCOT is elaborated later, it needs to be compatible with the charter. This enlargement to broader spaces and other stakeholders happened very little in the late 1990ies, being quite far from the national planning culture. Local representatives felt unclear about the purpose of the process, and sometimes worried about the pays possibly being the test for an authoritarian re-delimination of institutional borders to come, showing the still ambivalent relation between the newly autonomous local governments and the uncertain rôle of the new, modest State.

3. Unsolved issues

The first two decades experiencing devolution of planning competences in the French context showed some limits and difficulties in the process.

A first limit lies in the definition of the rôles of institutional stakeholders themselves, not clear enough. In the trend of giving more freedom to local governments, the law defined obligations for
different levels of local governments, but did not want to “specialize” them in specific areas. For instance educational matters are given to the communes (primary school), départements (gymnasium), regions (high-schools), the state keeping higher education. Infrastructures may be under the care of municipalités, départements, régions, state. Planning competences are shared as well, municipalités and regions having both some competences in economical development, for instance. At the same time, there is no hierarchy between local governments, and no limitation of their competences (any local government has the right to act on its territory of courses in the limits of national law). This situation resulted in a multiplication of complex common investments (financements croisés), but also in overlapping and/or divergent actions. Coordination mechanisms exist while elaborating planning documents, but with a low constraint – local governments of higher levels are invited to express their say, but with a purely consultative voice. Also, the coordination remains often too light. At the local level, the need for a stronger horizontal coordination between sectoral documents and policies is clear.

Another dead-end lies in the position of the State. From omnipresent, it became too modest. The lack of national spatial vision puts territorial cohesion in difficulty when the local players are young regions, starting with little experience and budgets, and cities. At the same time, the State did not make use of instruments that were instituted to develop it's role as “warrant”, in cases where major issues came beyond the reach of local stakeholders, e.g. environmental matters. For instance, the loi Pasqua instituted a specific instrument, the Directives Territoriales d'Aménagement (DTA) that would have the rank of overarching planning documents in situations where main ecological or social issues required it, but implementation did not follow. National policies were implemented through pedagogical instruments – calls for initiatives, granted with little financial support – while local governments are looking for more substantial support and probably more clear signals. The very consensual approach developed by the State representatives in the national and local debates generates little contest, but also little impulse.
The planning system at the local level

The latest major reform of the French spatial planning system occurs in 1999 and 2000 and brings the French planning system to its contemporary shape. As a whole, the planning system is close to its legacy from the previous evolutions. Yet, coordination is strengthened, in particular through the central rôle of the Schéma de Cohérence Territoriale (SCoT) that has replaced the SCOT. Consequently, the regulatory planning system appears more coherent. Still, gaps between statutory planning and reality remain.

1. A coherent system of statutory planning documents

At the local level, the legislative reform reorganized the planning system to make it more coherent.

A preliminary step is the reorganisation of municipal groupings, the Etablissements Publics de Coopération Intercommunale (EPCI). As municipalities are too fragmented, they may create groupings and transfer to these groupings certain competences, in order to manage together an urban area or to support common projects. Such groupings exist since the end of the XIXth century and have developed in various forms. At the end of the XXth century, the landscape was quite complex, with many types of groupings, sometimes overlapping, holding different competences. The overall picture remained fragmented, with small units usually lacking financial and political integration. The Loi Chevènement (12.07.1999) reduced it to three types: communauté urbaine for cities above 500 000 inhabitants, communauté d'agglomération for cities above 50 000 inhabitants, and communauté de communes for smaller groupings. The larger the EPCI, the stronger is its financial and political integration. A new possibility has been added in 2010 for “groups of groupings” of more than 300 000 inhabitants, the pôle métropolitain.

In the field of regulatory planning, the Loi Solidarité et Renouvellement Urbains (aka Loi SRU, 13.12.2000), completed by the Loi Urbanisme et Habitat du 2 juillet 2003, renovates planning documents in order to make them more strategic. The Plan Local d'Urbanisme (PLU) replaces the POS and the Schéma de Cohésion Territoriale (SCOT) replaces the SD. To diminish the gap between land-use regulations and development strategies, both SCOT and PLU integrate a policy statement, the Projet d'Aménagement et de Développement Durable (PADD). This “political” part of the document is not binding, while compulsory measures are gathered in the regulatory part of PLU and the Document d'Orientation Générale (DOG) of the SCOT. Multi-actors and multi-sectors cooperation is enhanced (Motte 2006, Geppert 2008) The process of elaboration of the documents becomes more participatory and monitoring of the documents is mandatory.

The SCOT becomes the core document, coordinating plans and policies. In particular, the must be a coherence with the sectoral plans, such as the Plan de Déplacements Urbains (PDU), intended to reduce car traffic and promote low-carbon mobility, or the Programme Local de l'Habitat (PLH), a document sketching the municipal strategy for housing, and in particular support to public housing. So far, there was no obligation of compatibility between these documents, elaborated by different stakeholders in different time frames, and the SCOT. The SRU Act creates this obligation and the SCOT becomes an instrument of horizontal coordination of public policies across sectors and jurisdictions.

In a “soft spatial planning” approach (Waterhout, 2010), the Loi d’Orientation pour l’aménagement et le développement durable du territoire (LOADDT, aka Loi Voynet, 25.06.1999), extends the new form of collaboration created by the Loi Pasqua, the territoires de projet. This designates
“geographically relevant” spaces, in two possible contexts. Urban *agglomérations* usually have the same limits as the municipal grouping (EPCI). Broader *pays* correspond to urban areas and answer the need for urban-rural coordination; usually they are comprised of several municipal groupings and municipalities. They are not legal entities nor do they have a budget. Voluntary municipalities may go beyond administrative limits to elaborate common spatial visions and strategies. When this occurs, public participation is assured through a *Conseil de Développement* where the civil society is represented. The vision is expressed in a charter, which is not a statutory plan but has to be coherent with the SCOT if there is one – and vice versa, if a SCOT is elaborated later, it needs to be compatible with the charter. Policies derived from these visions and strategies are then implemented by the institutional stakeholders, municipalities and groupings.

![Diagram of Coordination in the French spatial planning system](image)

**Institutions** | **Planning documents** | **Policies**
--- | --- | ---
EU | *ESDP, Territorial Agenda, Leipzig charter* | 
State | SSC | 
Region | DTA | SRADDT | CPER
EPCI | Territoire de projet *(1)* | | Charter | Action program | 
AOTU *(2)* | PDU | 
Commune | PLU / CC | PLH

**Horizonal cooperation**

**Compatibility** (the document is legally biding)

**Coordination** (no legal obligation)

*(1)* Territoire de projet: Pays, agglomération gather several EPCI but have no legal existence as such.

*(2)* Transportation Organizing Authority is a group of communes.

*(3)* Since the Loi Grenelle 2 (10.07.2010), they become DTADD and SCOT will no longer have to be compatible.

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Fig. 3. Coordination in the French spatial planning system.
The system derived from the reform appears coherent. Each institutional level keeps its competences, yet regulative planning and broader, more strategic visions are expected to meet, thanks to compatibility requirements on the one hand and policy coordination on the other hand. Other stakeholders are present through the participatory mechanisms, such as the Development Councils. However, the implementation did not match the expectations.

2. Implementation gaps

The intention of the reform was that spontaneously a coherent system would appear. The *pays* and *agglomérations* would become an incubator of spatial visions and territorial strategies, translated into regulatory planning by the SCoT, and implemented by the renewed municipal groupings that would naturally broaden their perimeters and increase their financial and decisional integration. The result did not match these expectations.

![Fig. 4 EPCI and SCoT in the East of the Paris Basin](source Geppert, 2008, p. 60)
For the reform of municipal groupings, numbers seem satisfactory. Today, almost 90% of French municipalities belong to an EPCI, while only 45% of them did in 1999. However, their integration remains below expectations. While the perimeters of new groupings usually are broader, the limits of the former ones were seldom enlarged in their transformation process. For instance in the North-East of the Paris Basin (Fig. 4), larger cities are surrounded by constellations of small “defensive” EPCI created to counterbalance the political weight of the core city (see for instance Metz, Nancy, Reims).

Moreover, their functional integration (shared competences and budgets) remains minimalistic and the EPCI seldom show a common vision of their development. In particular, many charters are conservative agreements aiming to protect what municipalities considered their own interest. (Cour des Comptes, 2005). One of the identified reasons is the reluctance of local representatives (Assemblée Nationale, 2005. Sénat, 2006). For instance, in the early 2000s, many large cities chose a status designed for smaller ones, giving up some funding possibilities to avoid a stronger integration: Nice (900 000 inhabitants) remained a simple “communauté d'agglomération” for 10 years, Reims (200 000) which opted for the “communauté de communes”. Yet, after a few years of existence, these EPCI tend to upgrade. Learning processes are at work but the rhythm is slow.

In 2010 a new law 6 launched a re-actualisation of these perimeters, giving a larger rôle to the state representative and ensuring that no grouping would count less than 5000 inhabitants. Again, the process was slow and strongly criticised, so that a new law passed in 2012 postponed the deadlines and softened the method, giving more powers to local representatives 7. From first informations, the implementation shall lead to a modest enlargement of existing perimeters, but most groupings will remain under the size of urban areas.

The SCoT seldom reach the broad perimeters suggested by the law. Urban sprawl is a good demonstration of the effects of this narrowness, and of the games ongoing between players representing different interests. Urban sprawl tends to reach communes out of the limit of the SD/SCoT, which consider that they benefit from the demographic dynamics without having the constraint of elaborating the plans together. To counteract this, the SRU Act instituted a “15 km-rule”: municipalities within a distance of 15 kilometres from the outer limit of an urban agglomeration of 50 000 inhabitants 8 loose the right to deliver building permits if they are not covered by a SCOT. However, the distance proved too short and a second ring of villages located in a distance of 15-30 km benefits of a spill-over of the urbanization contained in the first belt. Within the 15-km area, some communes decided to create “rural ScoTs”, unions of peripheries elaborating their document in order to keep control of their own decisions.

The north-east of the Paris basin gives a good example (Fig. 5). Likewise in the national distribution, only one third of the SCOT do cover functional urban areas. Another third cover built agglomerations only, a reminiscence of the free-rider logic (see Troyes, Meaux, Saint-Quentin, Soissons or Laon). Around Laon and Soissons, there is a belt of new SCOT under elaboration. These areas have no city of over 10 000 inhabitants 9, also they had no schéma directeur. After the loi SRU, they could no longer urbanize without a SCOT. But rather than joining the SCOT of the core city, communes decided to establish their own SCOT. However, around Laon, this map is no

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6 Loi du 16 décembre 2010 portant réforme des collectivités territoriales aka loi RCT
7 Loi du 29 février 2012 visant à assouplir les règles relatives à la refonte de la carte intercommunale, aka Loi Pelissard-Sueur. The bill was an initiative of the Parliament, presented by a right wing MP (Jacques Pelissard, UMP), who took inspiration in proposals presented by left-wing MP in november 2011 (Jean-Pierre Sueur, PS).
8 In the loi SRU (2000), the obligation was for the peripheries of agglomerations of over 15000 inhabitants. In 2003, facing critics from local representatives, the threshold has been changed by the Loi urbanisme et Habitat.
9 Establishing a Schéma Directeur, and today a SCOT, is mandatory for cities above 10 000 inhabitants.
longer right. During the elaboration of the master-plan, neighbouring localities decided to join the core-cities endeavour, very much thanks to the fact that they had common projects in a larger “territoire de projet”, the Pays du Grand Laonnois. As a result of these negotiations, many SCoT adopted low profiles, with a large gap between wishful political statements included in the PADD and very liberal guidelines in the DOG.

**Fig. 5. SCoT and functional urban areas in the East of the Paris Basin.**
Source Geppert, 2008, p. 121.

In 2010, again, a new legislation has amended the rules. The loi Grenelle 2\(^{10}\) extends the “15 km rule” to agglomerations above 15 000 inhabitants (effective in 2013). From 2017, all French communes should have a SCoT or freeze their urbanisation. It also provides new guidelines for the documents themselves, which should be more oriented towards implementation (the binding part is renamed DOO for document d'orientation et d'objectifs), including for instance precise numbers for land consumption.

10 Loi du 12 juillet 2010 portant engagement national pour l'environnement aka loi Grenelle 2
Territoires de projet were quite new in the French culture, much oriented towards institutional action. Between 1995 and 1999, few pays appeared on the map – and only in territories where earlier collaborations existed. The reluctance of mayors was much related to the fear that these strange objects were a “draft” before some authoritative re-design of administrative boundaries. After 2000, the opportunity of benefiting of substantial state subsidies initiated a dynamic of creation of pays and agglomérations which today cover almost all the French territory. A positive element is that their extension, much broader than the still fragmented EPCI, does match geographical reality (Fig.6).

Fig. 6. SCoT and pays.
Source Geppert 2008, p. 117

The consistence of these broader arenas with the EPCI and even the SCoT, is still missing. SCoT tend to remain smaller (Saint-Quentin, Vitry-le-François, Epernay, Châlons-en-Champagne, Soissons...). Most pays and agglomérations avoid debating on topics related to physical planning (e.g. land-use) and prefer more consensual issues (e.g. tourism, culture, territorial marketing). On the positive side, many territoires de projet address issues of territorial identity which, in the long
run, helps to develop shared visions and to overcome territorial rivalries. Also, new SCoT match better the perimeter of the pays: the region located south of Sedan, the “pays des Trois Cantons”, could be the ideal-type. Another example of the learning process could be Laon, which finally united in a common SCoT.

As the continuous flow of reforms shows, at the local level, the planning system has not yet found its optimal shape, not least due to the difficulties in adjusting to a decentralized governance.
The Planning system from a regional and national perspective

1. The lack of a national steering

At the next level, planning issues are addressed by the départements and the regions. The first exist since the French Revolution; they have substantial budgets and experienced staff. Formally, they have no competence in spatial planning, but they are in charge of important matters such as roads. They appear a strong player, capable of large investments, like for instance the creation of the international airport of Paris-Vatry. Their action is to a certain extent redundant, and rival, of the regions, competent for spatial planning and economical development. Regions elaborate a regional development perspective, the Schéma Régional d'Aménagement et de Développement Durable du Territoire (SRADDT). Formally, the SCoT should be compatible with the SRADDT. However, it is never an issue, as the scale is different enough to leave room for interpretation. In their first generation, these documents, in contradiction with the name, seldom provided a spatial perspective, being rather limited to an economical approach. Progressively, as the regions gain experience, the “spatial quality” of the documents is improving and public consultations are held during the elaboration of the documents.

To most observers, between these two tiers, there is one level too much. The national debate of 1994 about spatial planning discussed the issue, but no change was done. The law RCT adopted in 2010 institutes a compromise: after the 2014 elections, one single representative – the Conseiller territorial – shall sit in both Territorial Assemblies. It opens new possibilities of evolution. Départements and regions may decide to merge. Another possibility, in territories of more than 500 000 inhabitants, is to create a “métropole”, replacing all tiers of local governments, communes, municipal groupings and département. By now, none of these possibilities has been used.

In the post-devolution distribution of rôles, the State has been trying to define it's place, in a posture of modern state, modest state (Michel Crozier). No longer the first actor, it has to delimit how and why it would intervene, not the least in spatial planning. Of course, it retains the “competence of competences”, the possibility to change the rules of the game through legislative action. Yet, when it comes to implementation or policy making, the State's implication appears low, partly to avoid to look jacobin, partly because of scarce public resource.

One example is the State's attitude towards municipal groupings. During the implementation of the loi Chevènement, préfets had the possibility to refuse the constitution of groupings not relevant in terms of perimeter such as very small EPCI, or EPCI covering only a part of an urban agglomeration: they made very little use of it. One reason was that they did not want to decide for local governments, considering that their rôle was rather to act as a facilitator. Again, in the reorganisation initiated by the loi RCT, political consensus was often preferred to spatial coherence.

Another case is the Directive Territoriale d'Aménagement (DTA) instituted by the LOADT (Fig.3). Established for broad areas and targeting issues of national interest, DTA are regulatory. They also serve as instrument for policy coordination. They address large natural areas submitted to high environmental pressure (Alpes Maritimes, Bouches du Rhône, Seine estuary, Loire estuary) but also highly populated areas where social issues are at stake (Lyon metropolitan area, North Lorraine mining belt). Preparing making these documents took ten years – when asked for the reason, the préfets invoke the duration of consultations with local stakeholders, while local actors see it as a reluctance of the State to commit to spatial planning. Withdrawal of the State is confirmed by the
Loi portant engagement national pour l'environnement, aka Grenelle 2 (12.07.2010), which modified the status of the DTA: the new ones, called Directive Territoriale d'Aménagement et de Développement Durable (DTADD), will no longer have regulatory effect.

In terms of policy-making, the State has adopted two rôles. On the one hand, it does “management through discourse”, promoting visions in the tradition of the DATAR's scenarios. One the other hand, it acts through incentives to the local and regional governments.

Forecasts and visioning are in the DATAR's tradition. After the publication of the ESDP, DATAR integrated a European perspective into its forecasts (DATAR, 2000). The “plea for polycentricity” is grounded on four scenarios. In a “neo-liberal scattered archipelago”, development is limited to a few areas driven by competitive metropolises, with winners and losers. A “locally differentiated” scenario expresses the result of locally driven policies, with the risk of loosing the cohesion of the national space, a threat quite linked to the nation-states vision of a unified territory. A “renewed centralisation” scenario suggests that the country might again be exclusively dominated by Paris and other regions be overlooked. Finally, the “polycentric scenario” (Fig.7) shows a web of multiple poles, supposed to distribute development across the entire national territory. However, unlike the debate of 1994, the question of urban hierarchy has been left aside and content of the map is limited. The polycentric scenario has been accepted by all stakeholders and entered the planning discourse. However, the State's discourse did not initiate a national policy. Since then, forecast activities keep ongoing in the DATAR and disseminated through it's publications, they are endorsed by individual researchers or research groups, but not by the institution.

Fig. 7. The consensual scenario of polycentric development for “France in 2020”
Source DATAR, 2001, p. 67
Promoting planning goals of national importance, the State invites local governments to participate to national policies. It has improved its rôle from a mere catalyst, in the 1990ies, to a “critical friend” to regional and local endeavours, in the 2000s.

In 1990, the DATAR launched a call inviting French cities to establish voluntary collaborative networks: the réseaux de villes. To elected collaborative networks, the State provided a label, easily delivered by the DATAR, and a very modest financial support. Some twenty réseaux de villes were established, bringing together cities of all sizes in quite heterogeneous groups. Few engaged a lasting collaboration and the elaboration of a common spatial vision – not to mention a strategic plan – never reached the agendas (Geppert, 1996).

In 2003, the French Government issued a new call (appel à coopérations métropolitaines). Voluntary groups of cities able to demonstrate a population of at least 500 000 inhabitants and one agglomeration above 200 000 were invited to establish a common strategy to foster their international dimension (DATAR, 2004). The call elicited a considerable response. In total 23 groups responded, including all French cities above 500 000 inhabitants and also two-thirds of the cities above 100 000. However, their spatial configuration varied considerably (Fig. 3). Some tally with city-regions in the sense of Scott (2002). They may be polarized by a single city (Nice, Toulon, Toulouse) or present multi-nuclear structures (Lille, Aix-Marseille, Côte d'Opale). However, other groupings could not be seen as city-regions, even potential. Their functional urban areas (light grey in the background of the map) are separated by large rural spaces and they do not have close economical relations (Loire-Bretagne).

**Fig. 8. The laureates of the “call for metropolitan cooperation”**
Source DATAR, 2005
Out of 23 applicants, 15 were elected. The selection committee accepted all applications with a cross-border dimension and was flexible with regard to territorial relevance, giving priority to the issue of governance. An important asset was the support promised by various partners, communes (municipalities), municipal groupings, region and the State, as well as private organisations. Applicants were asked to describe the governance pattern foreseen for their future collaboration. The proposals were usually built on a three-fold organisational form, inspired of the territoires de projet, with a political body (local representatives), a technical team (civil servants from the municipalities and experts), a development council (other public partners, representatives of the inhabitants, the economical milieux, etc.).

In 2005-2006, the winners were invited to elaborate strategic projects (projets métropolitains). Putting to one side the comprehensive metropolitan masterplans and heavy investments of the 1960s, they were required to focus on five topics considered as “drivers” of metropolitanization, economic development, strategic employment, international accessibility, research and higher education, arts and culture. Actually, the projects proved more comprehensive, adding more issues, such as public health or environment. Last but not least, some groups, building on a long-lasting standing collaboration, have addressed the field of land-use planning (Motte, 2005, 2007). Some have decided to elaborate a masterplan (Schéma de Cohérence Territoriale, SCOT) covering the whole of the metropolitan area. Today, the masterplan of Strasbourg (SCOTERS) is completed, while the masterplan of Toulon is still under works. Larger city-regions, such as Aix-Marseille, Lyon and Toulouse have engaged a coordination and common monitoring of their masterplans (Inter-SCOT).

The implementation was to take place through the “Contrats de Projets Etat-Régions 2007-2013 ” (CPER). It soon became clear that the State would not provide important investment, as the country's deficit was above the Maastricht criteria and as other policies had a great priority. Although sometimes these were relevant to the metropolitan projects, but were awarded through an independent process (e.g. the cluster policy). After the State withdrew, investment programmes contracted and the policy lost its visibility. Some networks became dormant, and one, the Métropole Normande, even shut down the non-profit association which was its supporting structure after a conflict between the newly elected mayors.

Despite the delays, collaborations continue. Transborder networks are establishing European Groups of Territorial Cooperation (EGCT), such as the the EGCT Eurodistrict of Strasbourg-Ortenau or the EGCT Côte d'Opale - Flandre Occidentale. The Lille area is two-folded. Its core (Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai) is the historically first EGCT in Europe, while the larger perimeter of the metropolitan cooperation itself leans back on a non-profit association. Several networks have been revived, in particular for territorial lobbying. Long-lasting collaborations prove dynamic: in 2011, the Sillon lorrain (Nancy-Metz-Thionville-Epinal) became the first municipal grouping in France to adopt the new status of pôle métropolitain.

The low-profile of the State in steering national spatial policies may be understood as an effect of the change in the planning culture, going from a unitary vision of the nation towards a recognition both of the rôle of local governments and of the territorial diversity. It may also be seen as an effect of the shortening in public means. However, another aspect of the answer is the growing importance of sectoral policies performed under the umbrella of spatial planning.
2. Sectoral policies under the umbrella of spatial planning, planning issues spread in sectoral policies

The “failure of planning” in the 1980ies resulted in a distrust towards planning ideas and concepts traditional to the French model: concepts derived from Christaller’s central places (1933), or Perroux and Boudeville's polarisation (1968), or the functionalism inherited from the Charter of Athens, met with scepticism. Instead, a quest for economical development/investment, supported by pragmatic, flexible approaches appeared. While planning issues seemed to loose importance at the national level, an increase of sectoral interventions partly related to planning occurs, with a risk of loosing the territorial dimension of public interventions.

The goal of territorial competitiveness / attractiveness entered spatial planning before the financial crisis. In 2006, the DATAR (Délégation à l’Aménagement du Territoire et à l’Action Régionale) was renamed DIACT (Délégation à l’Aménagement et à la Compétitivité des Territoires). The change of name came together with a new function, as the Delegation merged with the Agence Française pour les Investissements Internationaux (AFII) which promotes France to foreign investors. The replacement of the word “territory” by the plural form is emblematic of a shift from a jacobin unitary nation-space to a more girondine vision of diverse, singular places. It carries a change of paradigm in French spatial planning. The aim is no longer to bring republican equality to all places, but to make the best out of territorial diversity and help every place to make the best of it's assets (Geppert, 2009). The concept of equity (fair treatment) has replaced equality (equal, i.e. similar treatment). Concepts such as territorial capital are now emphasized. In December 2009, after a persistent lobbying of it's staff, DATAR recovered it's historical acronym. However, it now stands for “Délégation Interministérielle à l'Aménagement du Territoire et à l'Attractivité Régionale”.

In terms of economical development, an emphasis is put on the development of the knowledge-economy imported from the European discourse. Since 2004, an important endeavour is a cluster-policy (pôles de compétitivité) inspired by the works of Porter (Porter, 1999). The “French model” of cluster is considered rooted in space, the central pillar of the triangle territory-industry-research. For this reason, the DATAR is in charge of the policy (Darmon and Jacquet, 2005). However, since the beginning, the policy has the ambition to support French industries (DATAR, 2005) and some authors argue that it is not as much spatial planning as an industrial policy under a territorial disguise. Indeed, the 1.5 billion euros spent in 2009-2011 are mainly dedicated to research projects and R&D platforms.

Sustainability, in French développement durable, became prominent in the wording since the late 1990ies. It's double-d is now present in most planning acronyms (PADD, DTADD, LOADDT...). The concept, though, remained somewhat fuzzy. Since it's first version of 2003, the French National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSSD) claims a holistic approach. Consistent with the European Sustainable Development Strategy (EUSDS), it addresses economic issues (sustainable consumption and production, knowledge society, governance), environmental and social thematic issues (energy and climate, transport, resources management, risks and health, social cohesion) and international matters (sustainable development, global poverty). At the difference of some other European countries (Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Switzerland, United Kingdom), is does not refer to city planning and housing. However, among the indicators for monitoring the NSSD, one refers to artificial land, directly linked with urban sprawl. The process is under the custody of a Interministerial Committee for Sustainable Development.

In 2007, the President Nicolas Sarkozy launched a wide public consultation called “Grenelle de l'Environnement”, in reference to the historical Grenelle agreement that settled the conflict of May
1968 and established new basis for the French society. Since then, sustainability appears more linked to the environmental pillar. Effects can be seen on planning with the new requirements addressed to statutory plans since the law Grenelle 2, the obligation of providing quantitative objectives of land consumption (urban sprawl), and the integration of “green-and-blue threads” (biodiversity). The development of new requirements for construction is supported by a financial support to green housing, as well as to eco-neighbourhoods, much useful to the construction sector in the period of crisis.

The revitalisation of deprived neighbourhoods (politique de la ville) is a national priority. Riots such as in Lyon-Minguettes in 1981 or in the suburbs of Paris in fall 2005 have attracted public attention to the issue of urban fragmentation (Bassand, 2004). Mixité sociale became a goal for urban planning, with the hope of preventing the creation of urban enclaves concentrating social difficulties. Since the SRU Act, all communes must have at least 20% of social housing – a threshold that is likely to be increased to 25% according to a bill introduced in September 2012. Since 2006, a programme of large-scale physical interventions started, supported by specific funds delivered by two national agencies. The Agence Nationale pour la Rénovation Urbaine (ANRU) deals with physical interventions and the Agence pour la Cohésion Sociale et l'Égalité des chances (ACSÉ) deals with social aspects.

The 2008 crisis fostered this movement by encouraging investments expected to generate a fast return on the economy. In 2009, a wide investment program has been launched to soften the effects of the economical crisis. Granted with 35 billion euros, it supports investment in higher education, research, industries, sustainable development and new technologies. Housing and transportation are addressed through parts of this program and influence planning, putting emphasis on chosen investments. The process is under the custody of a specific directorate, the Commissariat général à l’investissement, under the direct authority of the Prime Minister.

The multiplication of directorates and agencies managing these different programs rises again the question of their coordination in time and space. At the end of the day, it seems that national policies have lost the spatial dimension.
Concluding remarks

The French planning system has undergone a deep transformation, going from the jacobin tradition where it was established, to a girondin approach coined by the recognition of territorial diversity. At the same time, this evolution of spatial planning might be related to the apogee and decline of the welfare state.

While the statutory planning system as such seems to have gained coherence, the re-distribution of rôles between the institutional stakeholders remains partly unsettled, generating difficulties in the implementation of spatial strategies, including at the local scale. At the same time, the national vision is weak, facing competition both from the local level and the overarching framework of the European Union's sectoral policies rather than it's spatial visions.

The 2008 economical crisis fostered a movement towards sectoral policies. The shortage of public funds affects long-term endeavours characteristic of spatial planning, born in a period of economic growth. The emergency leads to draw back to sectoral policies supporting chosen economical sectors. The multiplication of new players, agencies and ministerial directorates pursuing different sectoral objectives with specific movement orders, makes coordination more difficult.

The Grand Paris project illustrates this shift. In 2008, an international competition involving teams of architects and urban planners produced ten visions of possible futures for the capital region. In 2010, a permanent structure, the Atelier International du Grand Paris (AIGP), has been established to continue to animate reflections and debates about the future of the capital. In the summer 2011, the project of a “Grand Paris Express” (175 km of automatic metro that will circle around the capital-region) became the major public investment program of the Grand Paris (32,4 billion euro). Prepared by a new public entity, the Société du Grand Paris (SGP), it will comprise 72 stations (out of which 57 are new). In 17 locations clusters will be developed with the financial support of State in the framework of Contrats de Développement Territorial. The project is ambitious and the infrastructure itself much needed. However, other aspects of the Grand Paris project are slowing down and the amount of the investment does not leave much means for policies addressing other aspects of the project... nor other parts of the country. Somehow, the national arena for discussing, deciding, and coordinating spatial issues and policies is missing.
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